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BPP Pro Bono Centre Update

**By Kara Irwin,
Director,
BPP Pro Bono Centre**

We've had a tremendously busy spring in the Pro Bono Centre. Our students have undertaken an amazing variety of pro bono work, including conducting Streetlaw presentations at homeless shelters, Pentonville Prison, the Millwall Football Club Youth Group, and schools around the country; helping to advise individual clients in our own Legal Advice Clinics (which have collectively advised over 200 clients this academic year) as well as in CABx and law centres; assisting litigants-in-person at the Royal Courts of

Justice and family court; drafting legal advice to queries emailed through Liberty (on civil rights) and Own-It (on intellectual property); and helping parties to mediation in the Residential Property Services Tribunal and Lambeth Community Mediation Centre.

The Centre also hosted a wide range of events, from a star-studded panel discussion on environmental regulatory controls to the Human Rights Unit's No Compromise fundraising ball, BPP alumna Cherry Roberts' insights on her internship at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, our annual Liberty human rights talk by Shami Chakrabarti, and speakers from a

number of firms discussing their pro bono projects.

As usual, the Centre will go a bit quieter in the summer as most students are first in exams, then away or working for the summer. We'll continue to post out emails to those of you who are signed up for the various projects whenever we've got something on.

Finally, the Pro Bono Centre Awards Party took place in May - congratulations to those who won one of our awards (see box on page 2)! But the party was also an end-of-the-year bash for all of you who have done so much work with us this year - we thank you for your efforts and hope you will continue your pro bono work throughout your careers.

Streetlaw Homeless Project, London

**By Gaurav Sharma,
Streetlaw Homeless Student Director, LPC
FT London 05/06**

After much talk and preparation, the Streetlaw Homeless workshops got underway in earnest in February at Salters Foyer in Smithfield Market. Salters Foyer is a facility managed by the charity Centrepoint, that provides housing and comprehensive support to young homeless people. Through our project, undertaken in conjunction with Herbert Smith solicitors, BPP students visit Centrepoint's foyers and get the young people there to think about their legal rights and responsibilities as they seek to make the move to a more independent way of living.

Teams of BPP students, who are future trainees at Herbert

Smith, and solicitors from the firm concentrated the two pilot sessions on issues relating to police stop and search powers and avoidance of debt.

After being introduced to the topics and discussing relevant personal experiences, the foyer's residents next considered how they would respond in a variety of situations. Following criticism of the heavy-handed police tactics employed when he was stopped one evening and taken to be identified from the scene of a crime he hadn't committed, one resident was asked what, in his opinion, the police ought to have done. "I would've done the same thing - I looked well dodgy!" was the enlightening answer.

During the debt workshop, it became apparent that virtually everyone present had some experience with debt, from bank loans, mobile phone and utility bills to borrowing small amounts of money from friends.

The group considered that debt in some form is almost inevitable, but steps like reading the small print and working out how long it would take to pay off those finance deals helps to keep debt under control. Some members of the group were more interested in knowing what powers bailiffs have and what they are allowed to take, whilst others explained how and why they tried to keep debt to an absolute minimum.

Following the success of these initial workshops, and the enthusiasm and hard work of all those BPP students who carried out extensive research and planning, we are now taking the project further by repeating the workshops at other Centrepoint foyers. We hope to add further topics, including rights and obligations in employment relations and to involve more organisations and more BPP students.

Pro Bono Awards, London 2006

These awards were given at the Pro Bono Centre Awards party on May 16th 2006.

Student Directors of the Year:
Claire Richards & Hamza Drabu

Student Legal Advisers of the Year:
Hannah Kinch & Maddy Griffiths

Innovative Project Award:
Joanne Sutherland-Smith

Technological Contribution of the Year:
Christian Spletter & Dee Keys

External Supervisors of the Year:
Jason Hunter & Ailsa Murdoch

BPP Supervisors of the Year:
Mike Lerner & Dave Ball

Longterm Support Award:
Kate Prasad & Simon Cockshutt

Honourable Mentions:

Tamsin Coulthard – Streetlaw Youth Group

Mags Walker – Enviro

Denis Slobodian – Hackney

Hugh Rosenvinge – Streetlaw and intranet registration

Breda Connolly – BLAC and Brent CAB

Guarav Sharma – Streetlaw Homeless

Saufung Ma – Hackney

Liz Bailey – Hackney and Own It

Jane Singer – Streetlaw Primary

Gingerbread Project – Leeds Cares

**By Lucy Carlile, LPC FT
Leeds 05/06**

When I heard about the volunteer day at the Gingerbread Project, I thought "Go on then, I will have a go. Painting can't be that hard and it should be fun". And it was fun, but it was also so much harder than I was expecting!

Gingerbread is a place where single mothers and fathers can get together and take their children to play – it gives such families a place to go and meet other people in the same situation.

On arrival at the Gingerbread Project we entered a dirty, unkempt entrance hall, which was our target for the day's work. I knew that the room was supposed to be in a poor condition but I didn't expect what we found. There were holes in the dirty off-white walls and a couple of dirty rugs covering up an even dirtier carpet.

We wanted to make the entrance hall an inviting place for parents and children, so we decided to brighten it up with a lick of bright blue paint on the walls, white gloss on the woodwork and a good clean! Trying to do all this in a day was an almost impossible task but the six of us got to work and I'm really proud of what we managed to achieve.

Seven hours later, after much hard work, we had transformed the entrance hall into a clean bright room, put up a shelf and magazine rack, and accessorized with a chair, magazines and plants. In the inner entrance hall, we cleaned the room and painted gingerbread men at random all over the walls and hopefully made the experience of going to Gingerbread much more inviting for everyone.

But it wasn't all work - we had loads of fun too.

Susannah Sellars and I got lost in Harehills trying to find somewhere to buy lunch and got quite scared – we had a laugh; I'm not sure if the girls we left doing work at Gingerbread had quite so much fun whilst we were gone! Throughout the day we also made a few mistakes and got quite a lot of paint on ourselves so we took several guilty face photos as evidence. We also ate lots of chocolate thanks to several kind donations to the chocolate cause! All in all I had a great day and am looking forward to doing it all again!

If you haven't got involved yet you should do. It's worth getting tired and dirty for the sense of achievement. You feel really good when you complete a project and know that you have made a difference to other people's lives.

Pro Bono at Manchester - Focus on Streetlaw

**By Chris McAvoy, Manchester
Streetlaw Student Director, LPC FT
Manchester 05/06**

What's it all about?

Streetlaw is an international organisation which aims to promote legal literacy outside the legal profession. This is done through interactive presentations undertaken by groups of volunteers on areas of the law that are of particular relevance to the audience; for example: presentations on pensions at elderly people's homes, presentations on criminal law or employment to secondary school children and presentations on democracy and reasons for having a legal system to primary school children.

Streetlaw was set up in BPP Manchester in October 2005. So far, we have undertaken presentations in Trinity High School and Manchester Academy High School on issues including:

- Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOS);
- Under-age Drinking;
- Drug use;
- Assault;
- Theft Offences, including Burglary, Robbery and Handling Stolen Goods; and
- Happy Slapping.

Who is involved?

There is a mixture of LPC and GDL students currently involved. We are also building links with Manchester University and interested law firms with the aim of creating a recognised North West project.

How to get involved in BPP Pro Bono projects:

If you are a BPP student, please see the Pro Bono student intranet.

If you are a practitioner interested in supervising a project, please email Kara Irwin, Director, BPP Pro Bono Centre. karairwin@bpp.com

Students interested in finding internships in the UK and abroad should visit the Internship page of the student intranet, accessible via the Careers site.

BPP Pro Bono in The Gambia

**Steve Broach,
GDL FT London 04/05**

During my GDL studies last year, I realised that I wanted to get some more legal experience in another country before starting the BVC at BPP. A quick Google search brought up the internship offered by the Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA – www.africaninstitute.org). IHRDA is a pan-African NGO set up to support and promote the work of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, a body of the African Union. Bizarrely, The Gambia, a tiny sliver of a country in West Africa, plays host to both the Commission and all the NGOs working alongside it, including IHRDA. IHRDA expects non-African

interns to pay \$250 a month into a fund used to support African interns. They also offer accommodation for a further \$200 a month. With the flight and living costs, I worked out that spending three months with IHRDA would cost me around £1,500 – which seemed worth paying.

Was I right? In lots of ways, yes – except the house, which was terrible. I arrived in The Gambia at the beginning of the 38th session of the Commission, and was plunged straight into a totally new human rights system. I met some incredible lawyers, including a former Ethiopian supreme court judge and the former Principal Magistrate of Banjul, The Gambia's capital. I also made some great friends, both Gambians and fellow interns / expats from Africa and all over the world.

Yes, what I did and what I learnt will give me something different to talk about at pupillage interviews. But regardless of any practical benefits, I will always be glad I took the chance to live in a country with a completely different set of cultures and traditions to my own. I'm not sure that I'd want to pay for the privilege of working anywhere again – but there are other funded internships elsewhere in the world, and I've seen first hand some of the amazing opportunities available to qualified lawyers who want to do something different to the corporate norm. So before or after qualification, I'd definitely recommend a trip to The Gambia or anywhere else in the world that gives you a chance to see the job of a lawyer from a different perspective.

Pro Bono Human Rights Group, Manchester

**David Wood, Student
Director Human Rights
Unit Manchester, GDL
FT 05/06**

The Human Rights Unit in Manchester has had a very encouraging first few months. 90 of the school's students in Manchester are on our distribution list, and three projects in particular have given us considerable hope that, as the school becomes established, the Unit will be able to make a real positive impact on human rights issues.

The Letters for Liberty scheme, in which students draft responses to queries sent to BPP by the civil rights group Liberty, has been extended to Manchester and has been highly successful – the demand to take on this work has been far greater than supply so far, which has enabled a quick turnaround on queries when

they come in.

We have now held two notable events in connection with Amicus, a charity which assists those accused (and convicted) of capital crimes in the United States. In January we hosted a day's training on the capital justice system in the U.S., presented by Mark George of Garden Court North chambers and Dave Keefe of the University of Central England, with a view to enabling students to take part in research activities on behalf of Amicus, as well as generating interest in their internship programme.

More recently, the school hosted a speaker event at which former inmate Juan Melendez talked about his experience of spending 17 years on Florida's death row before finally being acquitted. Juan's talk was inspiring and hugely popular, drawing not just BPP students but those from several

universities in the North West as well as legal professionals.

We have also initiated a new research project with Refugee Action. Refugee Action is a national charity that promotes the rights and assists with the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. Changes to the legal aid funding system for asylum cases mean that legal aid providers can now only claim for 5 hours work at first instance; BPP students are collecting data from solicitors, barristers, Law Centres and the Legal Services Commission in Greater Manchester which will then be used to highlight the negative effects that these changes have made on both the availability and the quality of representation for a highly vulnerable group.

Many thanks to all the students who have worked so hard on these projects!

**National Pro
Bono Week
2006
is
5th – 9th June!**

**For more
information,
click on the
link at
ProBonoUk.net**

In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is King

**Joanne Sutherland-Smith
Streetlaw Prisons
Student Director, BVC
PT London 04/06**

I suppose I may seem something of a strange specimen when compared with my colleagues on the part-time BVC course - my background is "diverse," to put it mildly. Prior to the course, I had worked for the Prison Service for almost eight years and in that time dealt with some of Britain's most notorious and sometimes most vulnerable (strangely the two groups are not always exclusive to one another) prison inmates.

Prisons are complex places, quite unlike the rather two dimensional representations one sees depicted on popular television dramas. As you collect your keys from the gate lodge and walk onto the prison wing, you soon realise that you are commencing a journey into something of a parallel universe, a distorted microcosm of the outside world and society in general.

Contrary to some of the more pejorative labels attached to convicted persons by the tabloid press, prisoners are of course sentient beings and as such suffer from that most debilitating ailment, the human condition. Often (but not always), they come from some of the poorest and most deprived socio-economic areas of society. They often share values that are derived from the experience of their environment and reinforced within their peer group and, most damagingly, by the rest of society.

It is not uncommon to find that some of the most disruptive prisoners suffer from an extreme lack of self-worth, which can easily escalate into self-loathing and suicidal tendencies. The problem with such poor self-analysis is that often it leads to a

situation whereby self-esteem is perversely obtained by trying to ensure that your peers are in a worse situation than yourself. Social integration becomes almost impossible. After all, how can someone show respect for their fellow human, when they have no respect for themselves?

When one considers this damaging situation, it becomes clear why recidivism is such a problem within the prison population. Perversely, rather than acting as a deterrent, prison may provide the sense of belonging and security that many inmates crave and fail to find in the outside world.

BPP Streetlaw

When I started BPP, I knew I wanted to use the law I was studying to try and address some of the problems I had witnessed in prison. Fortunately, the Law School had just opened the Pro Bono Centre under the directorship of Kara Irwin.

Kara encouraged and supported me to begin a series of complex negotiations with Her Majesty's Prison Service, recruit students and develop training packages which could be delivered to prisoners.

We developed the project through the Centre's Streetlaw initiative, a programme designed to impart legal knowledge to disenfranchised and/or minority members of the community, in order that they better understand their rights and responsibilities, thereby promoting fuller social integration.

The rest, as they say, is history.

Today, BPP students deliver weekly interactive presentations on discrimination and legal disclosure to inmates due for release from Pentonville Prison in London. The project is unique to BPP and has attracted attention and applications from university students across the UK, though only current BPP students can be enrolled onto the project.

Of course, the project's greatest assets are its student volunteers, a group of courageous and professional individuals who come from all of the courses offered at BPP. I say courageous not because students risk any form of physical danger but because it takes courage and strength of character to stand before a group of adult prisoners and educate them in an engaging and non-patronising fashion. Our students do this brilliantly and on a regular basis. They have won the respect of prison management and prisoners alike. Most importantly, they have developed skills that will serve them well in their future careers.

As the founding Student Director of Streetlaw Prisons, I have the privilege of being involved with something that makes a real difference to people's lives. I would like to thank Kara Irwin and all of the students involved with the project and would urge interested students to join this exciting initiative!

Joanne was awarded the BPP Pro Bono Centre "Innovative Project Award" at the Centre's Awards Party in May 2006. Congratulations Joanne!