

NATIONAL PRO BONO RESOURCE CENTRE

Pro Bono News 5/2003

Welcome to the fifth edition of the eNewsletter of the National Pro Bono Resource Centre. The National Pro Bono Resource Centre is affiliated with the Faculty of Law at the University of New South Wales and funded by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department.

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1 Second national pro bono conference - report

Transforming Access to Justice **Sydney, 20-21 October 2003**

The 2nd National Pro Bono Conference, co-hosted by the Centre and the NSW and Victorian PILCHs, wound up on Tuesday 21st October with a strong sense among delegates that the two days away from work, and in many cases the additional travel time to Sydney, had been worthwhile. The program was as full as it was varied. Delegates heard about the high and low points of pro bono services in the USA, UK, South Africa and Argentina. They debated some of the difficult issues that affect service delivery in pro bono - the legal aid issue was not resolved but needed to be discussed; the difficulties for law firms in incorporating into their pro bono programs legal practice areas in which advice is commonly sought by disadvantaged groups was not resolved, but the discussion moved forward; and the urgent and unmet legal needs of those in rural regional and remote Australia was addressed with suggestions for action put forcefully by panelists and delegates. The merits of online service delivery as a means of sharing expertise and providing information, particularly in areas where there are few lawyers, was discussed as was the potential for future partnerships between pro bono service providers and the community organisations that deal directly with disadvantaged groups.

For delegates, the conference and dinner provided a good forum for networking. Networking is crucial to the development of multi-layered partnerships which require all parties to understand the needs and constraints of the others - and there is nothing better than meeting in the flesh. This was one of the key objectives of the conference and the Centre achieved it with generous financial assistance from conference sponsors. Their support enabled community delegates from different parts of Australia – and representing different needs – to attend. The conference dinner at Cockle Bay also provided a chance

for some much needed laughter evoked by Judge Virginia Bell in a seriously entertaining after dinner speech. Justice Peter Hidden's Bar Choir provided a rare musical treat - a choir comprised of barristers and judges - who demonstrated great talent and also great humour in their rendition of the *Judge Song*.

We are grateful to all our sponsors and to the speakers who gave their time and in many cases, also paid their own expenses. We made great demands of our overseas speakers, in particular Professor Esther Lardent of the Pro Bono Institute in Washington DC, whose considerable expertise in the area of law firm pro bono programs was called on for several of the workshop sessions.

Based on informal discussions with delegates and speakers and on conference evaluation forms, the Centre will review its work plan for the coming year, consulting with our stakeholders. The Centre plans to publish the conference papers on the National Pro Bono Resource Centre website within the next six weeks.

2 The Australian Pro Bono Manual

A PRACTICE GUIDE AND RESOURCE KIT FOR LAW FIRMS

A major focus for the NPBRC in its first year has been the writing and compiling of the Australian Pro Bono Manual, published in collaboration with the Victoria Law Foundation. The 'hands on' Manual is a first for Australia and was launched by Brian Withers, Chair of the Access to Justice Committee, Law Council of Australia, at the Second National Pro Bono Conference.

The Manual provides a mixture of commentary, advice, precedents and background information to assist law firms wishing to establish, develop or expand their pro bono practices. It is also of value to individuals who are seeking resources and ideas about pro bono. Law firms can 'dip' into different sections as they need or want. The Centre thanks all who contributed to the Manual and hopes that users will provide feedback and further resources so that the Manual can be updated and expanded to provide an even more comprehensive resource. View or download the Manual from the NPBRC website: www.nationalprobono.org.au/probonomanual/index.htm. Hard copies can be purchased for \$35 from the Victoria Law Foundation www.victorialaw.org.au

3 New NPBRC resources

(i) Legal resources guide

This state by state guide to internet legal resources is intended to assist pro bono lawyers, caseworkers and lawyers working in publicly funded legal services. The guide is topic based and includes links to sites which offer a brief description of available resources where caseworkers may find useful materials for their clients. The guide does not include general legal resources such as Austlii nor simple resources targeted at members of the public. Available at www.nationalprobono.org.au.

The Centre plans to update the Guide on a regular basis and encourages users to provide feedback and details of new resources to info@nationalprobono.org.au

(ii) Senate inquiry into legal aid & access to justice

In October the Centre made a submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee Inquiry into Legal Aid and Access to Justice. The submission commented on aspects of the Inquiry relating to pro bono service delivery as a mechanism for facilitating access to justice for low income and disadvantaged people. Submissions to the Inquiry and the Inquiry's terms of reference can be found at www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/legcon_ctte/legalaidjustice/index.htm.

The Centre's submission can also be found in pdf format at:

www.nationalprobono.org.au/publications/index.html

(iii) NPBRC Annual Report

Printed copies of the Centre's first Annual Report are available from the Centre or can be downloaded as a pdf from the Centre website at:

www.nationalprobono.org.au/publications/index.html

(iv) Law reform and community education

A brief article (to be published in the Law Institute Journal, November 2003) on ways in which pro bono law reform and community legal education schemes can benefit disadvantaged client groups is available on the Centre's website at:

www.nationalprobono.org.au/publications/index.html

4 Probono.net Australia

The Centre has set up a demonstration version of *probono.net australia*. Modelled on a successful US project, *probono.net australia* is an interactive website designed to support information exchange between pro bono lawyers, staff of community legal organisations and others providing free legal services in particular areas of the law relevant to disadvantaged client groups. Lawyers and other caseworkers join one or more practice areas, for example 'Asylum seeker law' or 'Housing law'. Each practice area includes a library of guides, precedents, training materials and other useful documents as well as separate areas for news, events, and a list of people involved in the area. There is also potential to use the site for referrals of pro bono matters. Users are able to share useful documents, news items and event information by posting it to the site.

The site currently has two practice areas, one in asylum law and the other a general civil law practice area. If over the next few months it is apparent that the site is a useful tool to assist in the sharing of information the Centre will consider working with the US creators of *probono.net* to expand the number of practice areas available. We welcome any comments or suggestions. To view the site and join a practice area, go to www.probono.net/au

5 To subscribe or unsubscribe to Pro Bono News

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www.nationalprobono.org.au/publications/index.html

Please forward this newsletter to anyone else you think may be interested.

6 NPBRC contact details

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