



MEDIA RELEASE

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Australian Pro Bono Centre Launches New Guide to Support Lawyers

The Australian Pro Bono Centre has launched *Client management and self-care—a guide for pro bono lawyers*. This resource which is available at no charge on the Centre’s website (www.probonocentre.org.au) can be used to help train lawyers involved in pro bono work and by people across the legal assistance sector.

The Guide is a collaboration between the Centre, Sparke Helmore Lawyers, Henry Davis York, Clayton Utz and McCabes, with substantial input from across the legal assistance sector, other law firms and experts in mental health, including Dr Tim Sharp from The Happiness Institute.

Client management

Working with clients who are experiencing disadvantage, illness (physical, cognitive or otherwise) or hardship requires specialised client management skills that are not always developed through commercial practice. Pro bono clients may be experiencing disadvantage or marginalisation through a range of social, financial or personal barriers. They may be migrants or refugees, unemployed, homeless or have experienced some kind of trauma, which can impact behaviours, and the ability to communicate and instruct.

For example, Henry Davis York and McCabes have been advising asylum seekers in preparing statements and court applications through the Refugee Advice Casework Service and Human Rights Law Centre (respectively). “Working with asylum seekers—and interpreters—requires lawyers to be adaptable in their approach to communication, creating a safe environment and building trust to encourage clients to articulate their traumatic stories”, said Jillian Mitford Burgess, Pro Bono Special Counsel at Henry Davis York.

The Guide provides information to help lawyers communicate effectively with clients, assess the client’s legal capacity, obtain clear instructions and give comprehensive, easy-to-understand advice. It educates lawyers about cultural awareness and how to best work with interpreters, as well as facilitating a better understanding of, and preparedness for, common mental health issues.

Self-care

“Lawyers often deny that their work impacts their emotional wellbeing, to avoid seeming vulnerable or weak,” said Hannah Rose, Head of Pro Bono & Community at Sparke Helmore Lawyers. “As pro bono lawyers, our work often requires listening to accounts of tragic experiences and reviewing traumatic material in detail. For example, lawyers at our firm regularly provide assistance to individuals affected by cancer through the Cancer Council Legal Referral Service. The matters are varied, but often involve end of life situations. When faced with matters like these or matters that involve serious injury, suicide, child abuse, homelessness, assault and graphic material, it’s understandably emotionally difficult.”

The Guide aims to build an understanding of the risks of compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma and burnout, as well as greater awareness of emotional response triggers. It sets out practical tips so lawyers are more perceptive to the signs of strain in themselves and colleagues.

Using the Guide

The Guide can be tailored to suit various applications, such as induction material for new pro bono lawyers, or adapted into standalone training modules.

“The authors envisage developing this content into online training modules that can be offered to the legal assistance sector and firms at no cost, which will give lawyers access to the training they need to support their clients, themselves and their colleagues,” said Hannah. If you would like to be involved in this project, please contact the Australian Pro Bono Centre.

The Guide can be downloaded as a PDF using [this link](#).

For further information or comment, please contact:

John Corker

Chief Executive Officer

Australian Pro Bono Centre

john.corker@probonocentre.org.au

(02) 9385 7371 or 0402 474 628