



# Pursuing Social Purpose

Hannah Rose, Sparke Helmore Lawyers

We sat down with Hannah Rose in the Sydney Sparke Helmore office, and discussed her path to Pro Bono Partner, her passions, and Sparke Helmore's important pro bono work.

## Since you've been with Sparke Helmore, what kind of transformation have you seen in the firm's pro bono practice?

I joined the firm in December 2013, three months after it became a signatory to the National Pro Bono Target. At that time, the firm was recording 6.78 pro bono hours per lawyer on average and there was a lack of clarity around what qualified as pro bono legal assistance. We did not have national staff engagement in the pro bono practice or many well-established referral relationships.

We prepared an initial strategy that included a step-by-step investigation, analysis and implementation plan with the primary aims of developing a well-structured and adequately resourced pro bono practice, increasing national engagement, and ultimately achieving the Target.

At the time, the firm committed to achieving the Target by 30 June 2016 and set some short-term goals to monitor progress along the way. Importantly, the strategy was supported by our Pro Bono Committee (comprised of key internal stakeholders), the management of the firm and the Board.

Almost 6 years on, we now have a well-established pro bono practice that has exceeded the Target for four years

in a row and has achieved national engagement. For example, in June we held our first ever Wills Clinic for Aboriginal clients in the Northern Territory and in August our Canberra Local Coordinator, Vanessa Parkins, was awarded the ACT Pro Bono Service Award, recognising her incredible contribution to the growth of the pro bono practice in our Canberra office.

We are about to launch our second strategic plan which sets more specific objectives around the provision of access to justice, internal participation and engagement, and our approach to external stakeholders.

## What are the current focus areas of your pro bono practice?

In our second strategic plan we have incorporated new focus areas which have been developed to align with broad social issues that are material to our business, being health & wellbeing, safety, and workplace & employment. We will not exclusively focus on these areas,

*"...I was fortunate enough to be supported to transition full-time to focusing on what I am passionate about – supporting individuals in need and organisations pursuing a social purpose."*

because the approach each office takes is unique, but we will start looking at how our existing programs fit within these areas and will undertake an analysis of these programs so we can better understand our social impact.

## What is the structure of your pro bono team?

Our pro bono team comprises Morgan Long (our National Pro Bono Coordinator), Georgia Murphy-Haste



Bodalla Wills Clinic. L-R: Sparke Helmore's Jennifer Williams, Georgina Dodd, Theo Casimatis, Aimee Clegg (no longer at the firm), Georgia Murphy-Haste

(our Sydney Pro Bono Coordinator), Jane Parry (our Communications Coordinator) and currently Harry Rutner and Trent Morfis (our Pro Bono Graduates). We are also heavily supported by a team of Local Coordinators and project Team Leaders in each office that volunteer their time to manage referrals, clinics and promote the pro bono practice in their offices. They have made a significant difference to the success of our pro bono practice and the engagement of staff. We are also lucky to have two graduates from our Government team on secondment with us currently, Luke Joseph, who has been assisting PIAC on a part-time secondment, and Hannah Jover, who is helping Marrickville Legal Centre. Our Corporate Advisory (Not-for-profit) team, which includes Alicia Snijders and Isabelle Hazell, also provide significant support to our pro bono clients that are charitable organisations.

**Please describe your journey to Pro Bono Partner. What was your position when you started at the firm? How did your dedication to pro bono work develop to culminate in your promotion to Pro Bono Partner?**

I joined the firm as a Senior Associate and the National Corporate Social Responsibility Manager, having achieved Senior Associate in a previous firm. I initially split my time between my litigated matters and my responsibilities developing the pro bono practice. Before joining the firm, I had studied a Master of International Law (specialising in corporate social responsibility and human rights law) and had a long history of involvement in pro bono legal and community activities, including spending some time working at an orphanage for children with HIV/AIDS in South Africa. I also spent some time in-house where I was fortunate to have the opportunity to roll out the activities of a new foundation in NSW and the ACT. For the past 6.5 years, I have also worked closely with a youth mental health charity, batyr, starting as their company secretary and ending the role in September this year following a couple of years as the Deputy Chair. I will continue to support batyr in a different capacity and am exploring new opportunities.

***“We prepared an initial strategy that included a step-by-step investigation, analysis and implementation plan with the primary aims of developing a well-structured and adequately resourced pro bono practice, increasing national engagement, and ultimately achieving the Target.”***

After joining Sparke Helmore we quickly realised that more time and resources were needed to achieve our first strategic plan for the pro bono practice and I was fortunate enough to be supported to transition full-time to focusing on what I am passionate about – supporting individuals in need and organisations pursuing a social purpose.

Appointing a Pro Bono Partner from the ranks was a milestone for the firm as we'd previously had Partners with other commercial practices having oversight of the pro bono practice. Pro bono is at the heart of our firm's ability to make a positive contribution to the community. Over the years, it has emerged as a key strategic issue, as evidenced by a 2018 Deloitte report that highlights the

growing importance of social capital in shaping an organisation's purpose, guiding its relationship with stakeholders, and influencing its ultimate success or failure. The decision to promote me to Partner was also due to the corporate advisory practice I had built supporting non-profit organisations and charities. I certainly wouldn't be in this position without the support of key Partners in the firm and an amazingly talented team that have thrived through what has been a constantly evolving journey.

**Outside of work, what other causes are you passionate about? Earlier you mentioned batyr - tell us about the organisation and how you became involved?**

batyr's vision is for all young people to be engaged in positive conversations about mental health and empowered to reach out for support when needed. batyr engages young people by arranging for their peers to talk to them about mental health and wellbeing, as well as educating and empowering them through the sharing of lived experience and the provision of knowledge and skills to lead mentally healthy lives. I have been invested in giving back to the community since I was a young kid, but after surviving an armed robbery a week before my Higher School Certificate exams, I suffered from PTSD and experienced first-hand how mental ill-health can significantly affect a person's life and the lives of the people around them. The fact that suicide remains the leading cause of death for Australians aged between 15 and 44 is absolutely devastating – I hope everyone will take the steps they can to change this statistic.

In addition to advancing health, in particular mental health, I am also passionate about supporting the development of the charity sector generally and am fortunate to have the opportunity to work with many charity boards and CEOs to help them build capacity within their organisation, and more effectively and efficiently deliver their valuable services. I enjoy working with a diverse range of organisations full of passionate people working hard to create positive change in our society. ■



*Tabulam  
Wills Clinic. L-R:  
Sparke Helmore's  
Theo Casimatis,  
Nina Samardzic,  
Onella Hermis,  
Rui Chen,  
Georgia  
Murphy-Haste,  
Morgan Long,  
James Stallan*