



# You can take the boy out of Sydney...

## Reflections of Davyd Wong

Truth be told, I only went to The University of New South Wales by chance. My older brother went to UNSW and lived at Warren College. So, I had been there a few times while I was still in high school. Then when it came time for me to decide where to go, UNSW was the easy option as opposed to the University of Sydney. Probably, because I was too lazy to work out how to get to Camperdown.

I do sometimes wonder how life might have been different if I went to that other school. I say this because - of all the good things that can be said about the UNSW Law School - the most important is that it instils a sense of social justice and professional responsibility in its students. That thinking was evident throughout my time at law school and it has permeated my professional career every day since then.

I am still very proud of UNSW and I believe it does live up to its motto of "Where Law Meets Justice". The most obvious way it does this is through the Kingsford Legal Centre, which it offered as an elective subject. I enjoyed that time immensely, as it gave me my first real opportunity to see how the law interacts with real people, in real life, and their livelihoods.

The smallest of regulations could create enormous suffering in people's lives, such as by unfairly denying them welfare payments for food, or it could open vast new opportunities, by giving their kids access to a local school.

We asked Australian expat Davyd Wong, Founder and Director of the Hong Kong Centre for Pro Bono Service Ltd and Group General Counsel at Star Anise, to reflect on his time in the social justice sector.

Despite this positive experience in community law, I, like many young graduates, went on to practice as a commercial lawyer. But pro bono was never far away. After work, I continued to volunteer at the Inner City Legal Centre, as it was located on the way home between the City and where I lived in the Eastern Suburbs. It became a bit of a pit stop on the way home, I felt it was a wonderful way to use my legal skills to continue contributing to the community.

I was also given the opportunity to go on secondment to the Public Interest Advocacy Centre with my firm at the time, which had a very strong social justice ethic and was one of the reasons I loved my time there so much. I was also my firm's first secondee to a non-profit organisation, but was not the last (and this is a small example of how commercial firms can use their resources to align with the broader interests of its lawyers and in a way that helps the community).

Then, in 2008, I moved to Hong Kong to get an "international experience" for a year or two and joined a Magic Circle firm in its banking practice. At the time, there were very few pro bono opportunities at the large firms in Hong Kong, but I am very happy to report that that has all changed. The scene has flourished exponentially since those days. Inspired by organisations like the Australian Pro Bono Centre, *The Hong Kong Centre for Pro Bono Service Ltd* is a charity that I helped set up to be part of a cultural shift, to

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encourage and empower commercial lawyers and their firms to create a fairer, more equal, and more just community through skills-based volunteering for the poor, marginalised and disadvantaged (ie pro bono work). I believe that the practice of commercial law and helping the poor access justice are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they are mutually reinforcing because by improving the latter we strengthen the rule of law which is good for both the community and for business. If you have watched the news lately, you will see that it has never been a more important time to be a community-minded lawyer and my mission is to show lawyers that you can do this, while still practicing commercial law.

This career path has been pioneered and well-trodden by many Australians before me. But it is now being exported to the world by those of us who are living and working abroad. As Hong Kong has the largest Australian community after London, it's no surprise that we have brought our experiences and desire to do good to our new homes.

*Dayd Wong and team at the Hong Kong Centre for Pro Bono Service*



*Annie Tang and Davyd Wong of the Hong Kong Centre for Pro Bono Service with Gabriela Christian-Hare and Jessica Hatherall of the Centre exchanging ideas in Singapore*

If I have learnt anything in the practice of law, it is that the law itself has no intrinsic moral compass, it is but a tool. It is a tool of power and wielded by people, sometimes flawed people, and the role of lawyers in society is to ensure that the follies and the flaws of one person do not inflict us all. That is what we mean when we talk about the rule of law, and access to justice. It is why the task of bringing together law and justice is one that starts from law school but never ends. ■