



ABC Legal volunteering for Thread Together in October 2020

Vincent Floro: The ABC in-house legal team launches its pro bono program

2020 was an unusual and challenging year and, like many other legal teams, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's (ABC) in-house team were required to work from home. After months of being away from the office, the team was looking for ways to bring people together and build upon the team's culture in the face of COVID-19 restrictions.

In September 2020, the ABC signed up to the Australian Pro Bono Centre's National Pro Bono Target for in-house lawyers. The ABC's General Counsel, Connie Carnabuci, encouraged us to participate in pro bono work, as a way of enhancing job fulfilment and to broaden our skills and experience. She also asked me if I could set up and manage the program.

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I started my legal career at the ABC as an intern, and one of the reasons that I love working here is the fact that the team serves the public interest every day, ensuring that the ABC remains a strong, independent public broadcaster. Signing up to the National Pro Bono Target is a way that we can continue to give back to the community.

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One of the challenges in setting up a new pro bono program was identifying organisations which could benefit from the ABC's pro bono services. The ABC legal team has a wide range of expertise. We have lawyers that provide pre-publication advice on content in areas like defamation, contempt and other statutory restrictions, and disputes and litigation lawyers who manage any claims that can arise from this content. We also have lawyers who advise on the commissioning and acquisition of television programs, specialise in intellectual property, or provide general commercial, technology, regulatory, privacy and employment law advice.

Naturally, the pro bono partners that we identified were within the media sector. Under the ABC's charter, the ABC is required to promote and encourage the creative industries, as well as music, dramatic and other performing arts in Australia, so this was our focus when we set up our pro bono partnerships.

Arts Law Centre

There has been a strong association between the Arts Law Centre of Australia and the ABC for decades. Many lawyers who work at the ABC have previously worked or volunteered at the Arts Law Centre earlier in their career.

A handful of lawyers at the ABC were also already volunteering on the Arts Law Centre's Document Review Service, so we saw this as an opportunity to set up a formal partnership to further expand the support we provide. In setting up the pro bono partnership, we have centralised the allocation of the Document Review Service matters in-house, so that we can easily conduct conflict checking and then allocate matters to lawyers with relevant expertise. We are also looking to work with the Arts Law Centre to provide training workshops for their clients and assist in reviewing Arts Law Centre's fact sheets and template agreements.

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First Nations Media Australia

Earlier this year, the ABC formed a strategic partnership with First Nations Media Australia (FNMA), the national peak body for the First Nations media and communications industry. FNMA represents the interests of its membership, which includes not-for-profit media organisations, broadcasters, journalists and filmmakers. The objectives of the pro bono partnership are to support career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in media, increase the visibility of Indigenous stories, and enhance the diversity of First Nations voices and communities represented in the media.

It was fortuitous that this partnership was being negotiated at the same time that the ABC had signed up to the Target. FNMA asked if ABC Legal could provide pro bono support and training, and we were happy to oblige. We have now started providing pre-publication advice on certain content produced by FNMA's members, and have provided FNMA with a range of fact sheets providing guidance on key areas of media law.

Thread Together

ABC Legal has also offered pro bono services to Thread Together, a charity that sources excess clothing from fashion retailers and redistributes it to those in need. In late 2020, just after the COVID lockdown in Sydney eased, a contingent from ABC Legal visited Thread Together's warehouse in Banksmeadow to help with sorting and packing clothing to go out to Thread Together's distribution partners. We found this really rewarding, so offered our pro bono legal services to Thread Together too. So, in the future we are looking to review some of Thread Together's template agreements for volunteers, service providers and their fashion distribution partners.



Lawyers from ABC legal team escort Australian Federal Police representatives into the ABC Ultimo Centre during the AFP's raid on the ABC in June 2019. AFP officers sat with the ABC legal team to review documents leaked to the ABC regarding Australian military operations in Afghanistan



ABC News studio at the ABC Ultimo Centre

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As part of the Centre's Buddy Program, I have been able to seek the sage advice of Geetha Nair, the National Pro Bono Manager at Australian Government Solicitor. Geetha provided me with really useful and practical insights about how to set up ABC Legal's pro bono program, how to set expectations, and how to encourage people to take part. Her time and generosity have been greatly appreciated.

With a huge volume of content produced and acquired every day, and a number of high-profile court matters on foot, the team at ABC Legal are extremely busy. So I am grateful to my indefatigable colleagues who still find time, often after a long day at work, to provide pro bono services and to get the new program up and running. ■

Vincent Floro is a Senior Lawyer at ABC Legal in the Acquisition & Production team, and he is also the ABC's Pro Bono Program Manager. He advises on the production and licensing of content for the ABC's television, radio and online platforms, and provides pre-publication legal advice on news stories.

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National Pro Bono Target

The National Pro Bono Target aims to raise the profile of every lawyer's professional responsibility to improve access to justice, to work for the public good, and to highlight the shared nature of that responsibility across the legal profession. In July 2020, the Australian Pro Bono Centre opened the National Pro Bono Target to in-house legal practitioners. In-house lawyers who sign up to the Target commit to using their best endeavours to achieve at least 20 hours of pro bono legal services per in-house lawyer per year. In-house legal signatories will receive support from the Centre as well as from the wider pro bono community, including other in-house legal practitioners, to meet this Target. If you are interested in finding more about the Target for in-house lawyers, please visit [here](#).

National Pro Bono Professional Indemnity Insurance Scheme

The Centre established the National Pro Bono Professional Indemnity Insurance Scheme to encourage in-house corporate and government lawyers to undertake pro bono legal work. The Scheme provides free professional indemnity insurance to lawyers and paralegals working on pro bono projects approved by the Centre. The Scheme removes one of the key barriers for in-house, private and career break lawyers who wish to engage in pro bono legal work – the need for professional indemnity (PI) insurance to cover them for any civil claims arising from their pro bono legal work.