

# Alice Rolls: Delivering Accessible Justice Through Innovation

accessible justice project

Menu

Welcome to  
The Accessible  
Justice Project

a not-for-profit law  
firm focused on  
resolving disputes.



The Accessible Justice Project (the AJP) is an innovative not-for-profit legal practice based in Adelaide. Operating since August 2020, the AJP's principal objective is to provide affordable legal services to people who would otherwise be without help because they are ineligible for publicly funded legal aid and also cannot afford the costs of private legal services.

The firm is the initiative of specialist international dispute resolution practice Lipman Karas and the University of Adelaide. Together, they want to relieve pressure on Australia's justice system and improve access to legal services for the so-called 'missing middle', particularly in the area of civil disputes.

## The Missing Middle

The Law Council of Australia's 2018 'Justice Project' found that the Australian justice system is under-resourced and under extreme pressure. Consequently, many people are missing out on timely and effective help, increasing their risk and vulnerability.

In particular, the Justice Project found that 14% of Australia's population live below the poverty line, yet legal aid representation is only available to 8% of Australians. It also found there is almost no legal aid available for representation in civil matters, which accounted for just 2.3% of all legal aid grants in 2016-17.<sup>(i)</sup> Add to this is the fact that community legal centres were unable to help nearly 170,000 people in 2015-2016 because of a lack of resources.<sup>(iii)</sup>



*The Accessible Justice Project team*

The result is a sizeable group of ordinary Australians – the 'missing middle' – who are unable to access publicly funded legal assistance but cannot afford private legal services.

***“This collaboration between the private profession and a law school is an Australian first.”***

## The Accessible Justice Project

The AJP was created to service the 'missing middle'. The new firm is a collaboration between Lipman Karas and The University of Adelaide. It is staffed by qualified lawyers enrolled in a new Access to Justice Master of Laws (LLM) program at the University of Adelaide. They are managed by senior lawyers seconded from Lipman Karas on a pro bono basis. This collaboration between the private profession and a law school is an Australian first.

The firm aims to provide legal services at no more than a quarter of the cost of private lawyers. The focus is on civil disputes, including debt recovery, consumer protection, property, tenancy, employment and estate disputes. Clients pay an initial consultation fee and, if further advice is required, it is priced transparently on a case by case basis. We endeavour to help anyone of limited means who has a civil legal problem and meets the eligibility criteria, but we give priority to those in the greatest need.

**“The hope is that through innovation, collaboration and technology, justice will be more accessible to all Australians.”**

*Alice Rolls,  
Managing Lawyer  
of The Accessible  
Justice Project*



The new firm is registered as a charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. Initial start-up costs have been met by Lipman Karas but the aim is for the not-for-profit firm to be self-sustaining over time, but for the pro bono donation of managing lawyer time.

Lipman Karas is a proud signatory to the National Pro Bono Target and the AJP facilitates the meeting of our Target obligations. We recognise the benefits of pro bono work to the community and the professional responsibility of all lawyers to assist in that regard. We also recognise that pro bono work is of value to our firm because it provides our lawyers with additional experience and opportunities to ‘give back’ to their community.

### **Innovation**

Innovation is at the heart of the AJP’s practice. We recognise that improving access to justice in Australia requires new ways of thinking and using technology.

We use a custom-built chatbot on our website<sup>(iii)</sup> for client intake and assessment purposes. The chatbot was created through a client-centred design process. It uses easy to understand language, is simple to follow and allows prospective clients to input financial information to identify within a matter of minutes whether or not they are eligible for the services of the AJP.

To make our services even more accessible, the AJP has introduced a client-facing online booking system which is integrated with an online payment system, facilitates client meetings using audio-visual technology and offers fixed pricing and ‘unbundled’ legal services to deal with the challenge of providing legal services to clients with limited income.

An exciting aspect of the project is the research component of the new LLM program, which requires students to complete a dissertation with a focus on innovation and access to justice.

Lipman Karas and the University of Adelaide see the project as being an incubator for ideas to address factors

### **Delivering Accessible Justice Through Innovation**



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inhibiting access to justice, a place where innovation and emerging technologies are part of the everyday conversation. Like most industries, technology is driving significant changes in law, helping lawyers to achieve substantive advantages for their clients and to do tasks more efficiently. The hope is that through innovation, collaboration and technology, justice will be more accessible to all Australians. ■

*Alice Rolls is a lawyer with more than 15 years of commercial dispute resolution experience, including disputes involving insolvency, professional negligence, breach of contract and trade practices issues. She has handled disputes across a range of industries, including property, transport, agribusiness and finance.*

*She is a graduate member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and has served on the boards of several not-for-profit organisations in South Australia, including Young Adelaide Voices Inc, Welcoming Australia Ltd and The Accessible Justice Project Limited.*

*In addition to her work for commercial clients, Alice leads The Accessible Justice Project as a Managing Lawyer.*

(i) Law Council of Australia, *The Justice Project: Overarching Themes (Final Report, August 2018)* 10.

(ii) National Association of Community Legal Centres, *Submission to the Australian Government: Federal Budget 2018-2019 (21 December 2017)*

(iii) [www.accessiblejustice.org.au](http://www.accessiblejustice.org.au)