

DMAW Lawyers - Growing Pro Bono in South Australia



L-R: Senior Associate, Kylie Dunn, and Principal lawyers, Justin Sharman and Paul Dugan

The Australian Pro Bono Centre interviewed DMAW Lawyers about its growing pro bono practice in South Australia.

Why did the firm decide to take on pro bono matters?

DMAW Lawyers has been involved in pro bono work for a number of years. We joined the National Pro Bono Target approximately 2 years ago. Our initial involvement in pro bono work was in part triggered by the establishment of JusticeNet, South Australia's main pro bono clearing house. Our relationship with JusticeNet has provided a reliable source of pro bono referrals.

As a firm we are committed towards improving access to justice, and our involvement in pro bono work contributes to addressing accessibility issues. Pro bono work also creates opportunities for our lawyers to work on a greater variety of files and interact directly with a range of people, and in the case of our junior lawyers, further develop their legal skills.

The firm's commitment to pro bono work is also attractive to prospective employees.

How did you get started?

Referrals of discrete files from JusticeNet, and our involvement in JusticeNet's Federal Court Self-Representation Service, were two key sources of pro bono work initially. The Federal Court Self-Representation Service offers self-represented litigants in the general federal jurisdiction a pro bono appointment with a lawyer in relation to their proceeding. Lawyers who attend the appointment provide advice, discuss dispute resolution options, and draft court documents and/or correspondence.

More recently we have broadened our scope of pro bono work. We now regularly accept pro bono referrals from our clients and undertake pro bono work for our existing not-for-profit clients.



L-R: Principal lawyers Tom Dachs & Tasha Naige

What management has been put in place thus far to manage the pro bono practice?

We have established a pro bono committee, comprising both lawyers and support staff, to coordinate the firm's pro bono work and ensure that pro bono hours are tracked and recorded. One of the initial tasks of the committee was to establish a charter which confirms the purpose and core objectives of the committee. We have also introduced specific file management processes in respect of pro bono matters.

How has the pro bono practice achieved positive outcomes for its clients / impact?

In the short amount of time that we have been a signatory to the National Pro Bono Target, we have already achieved

a number of positive outcomes for our pro bono clients. In particular, it has been pleasing to be able to assist a number of not-for-profit organisations and charities with reviewing and preparing relevant commercial documents including advising a charity in respect of potential gaps in its insurance coverage. Additionally, we have been able to provide assistance to a number of disadvantaged clients in litigious proceedings who may have otherwise struggled to represent themselves.

How does the firm want to grow its pro bono practice?

We are seeking to continue to grow our pro bono practice, including through collaboration and cooperation with key stakeholders. In addition to continuing to foster relationships with bodies such as the Australian Pro Bono Centre and JusticeNet, we are also partnering with a number of local universities to explore joint pro bono opportunities. We are also exploring opportunities to partner with some of our clients who have existing relationships with charitable or non-profit organisations.

Could you provide some tips and tricks for other SA firms wanting to start or grow a pro bono practice?

We recommend that firms looking to start or grow their pro bono practice establish a pro bono committee comprising practitioners of differing levels of experience from various practice areas within the firm. Doing so will help to ensure that pro bono work can be allocated and undertaken in an appropriate way having regard to team and individual workloads and capabilities.

We also recommend that each lawyer's number of pro bono hours be accessible and regularly tracked and reviewed. ■

DMAW Lawyers was represented in this interview by Tom Dachs and Nicole Mead.



Tom Dachs is a principal in DMAW Lawyers' disputes practice and leads the Pro Bono team. Tom specialises in commercial disputes. He has acted in a full spectrum of complex commercial litigation,

construction, superannuation, transport and trade matters. Tom's experience includes advising and representing a variety of clients, ranging from ASX listed companies, international and larger private entities, through to smaller entities, families and individuals. In all instances, Tom draws on his experience to support the clients in making early informed assessments of risk and, if necessary, their alternative dispute resolution options. Tom works closely with clients to resolve the dispute in line with their desired approach to conflict management.



Nicole Mead is a senior associate in DMAW Lawyers' disputes practice and is a valuable member of the Pro Bono team. Nicole has worked on a wide variety of disputes for corporate

clients, ranging from small debt recoveries to large commercial disputes. Nicole also advises clients with respect to contractual, workplace, insolvency and regulatory compliance matters. Nicole's competition law experience includes the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission in respect of formal information requests, authorisation for acquisitions/mergers, and proceedings relating to small business unfair contract terms.

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