

Korean Community Legal Service – Over 4,000 hours of pro bono support to more than 840 clients



The Korean Community
Legal Service Team

By Chris Yoo,
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There continues to be a strong need in the Australian community for access to legal services by those who do not have the financial means to pay. Publicly funded legal services, including Legal Aid, due to funding pressures but more significantly due to means testing, do not provide legal services to a broad range of citizens who require legal advice to protect their rights but do not meet stringent income (<\$400/week) and assets (<\$1,500 net assets) tests. The gap in the

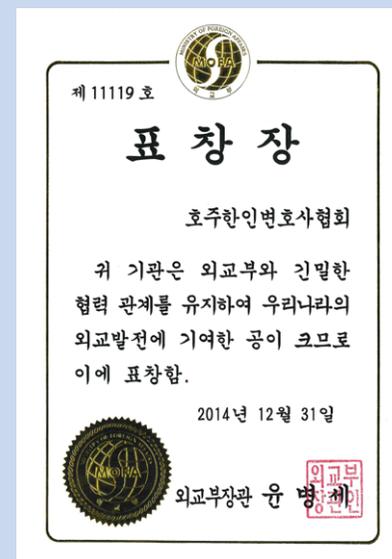
availability of legal services to members of the community who are unable to pay for legal services but do not qualify for legal aid, has been identified in articles such as “Middle Australians missed out” (The Australian Financial Review, Friday 15 April 2011).

This issue is further compounded in ethnic communities such as the Korean and Korean-Australian community due to:

- Language barriers;
- Lack of knowledge of available services, in particular amongst the relatively large populations of temporary residents; and
- Cultural barriers, including embarrassment with respect to discussing personal affairs with a third party and fears of ‘losing face’.

Due to the prohibitive cost of receiving legal advice for many members of the Korean community, community members run the risk of not properly protecting themselves or their rights in situations of legal distress.

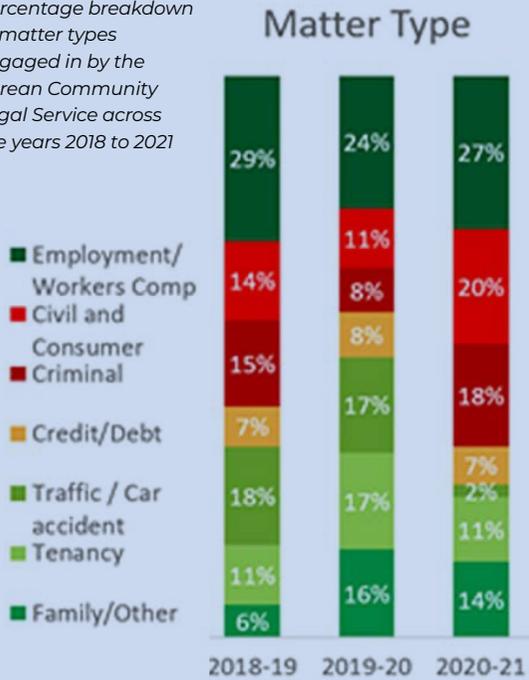
In response to this need, following a successful pilot program in partnership with the Marrickville Legal Centre between February and May 2011, the Korean Community Legal Service was established providing free legal advice to members of the Korean and Korean-Australian community who are unable to easily access legal services. Now in its 11th year of operation, the service provides a once a month in-person and telephone-based advice service to clients across Australia, with face-to-face services delivered at the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Sydney. The primary focus of the service is on clients who are unable to afford appropriate legal advice, or where language or culture differences create barriers to accessing appropriate legal services. The service is provided through the pro bono contributions of lawyers and law student members of the Korean Australian Lawyers Association and coordinated by an employed practice coordinator.



Award Certificate from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea to the Korean Australian Lawyers Association, for providing pro bono services to the Korean and Korean-Australian community.

To date, the service has been fortunate to have had more than 60 dedicated volunteer lawyers and law students giving their valuable time after their busy working hours. Since its inception, Chris Yoo has been serving as the Executive Director responsible for overall delivery of the service whilst Christina Choi and Ken Hong have been working as Principal Lawyers responsible for operations and supervision of the volunteers.

Percentage breakdown of matter types engaged in by the Korean Community Legal Service across the years 2018 to 2021

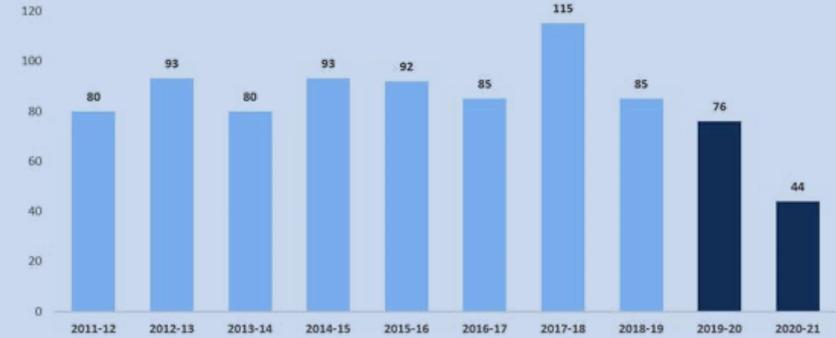


As the sole pro bono legal service providing Korean-language-based advice, the service is an important avenue for a range of Australian-based Korean community members to gain access to much needed legal advice. A significant proportion of services are provided to temporary residents in Australia from Korea (on student and working-holiday or employment visas) who often have a very limited understanding of their rights under the law, or of what to do if they find themselves in legal difficulty.

Over the last 10 years, the service has advised more than 840 clients in matters ranging from employment, criminal, tenancy and consumer claims.

On 31 December 2014, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea awarded the Korean Australian Lawyers Association for

Number of clients assisted by the Korean Community Legal Service across the years 2011 to 2021



providing the pro bono service to the members of the Korean and Korean-Australian community.

But for the continuous support from the Australian Pro Bono Centre through its National Pro Bono Professional Indemnity Insurance Scheme, this would not have been possible as more than 4,000 pro bono hours have been covered for the service thus far. We look forward to continuing with the service for many more years to come. ■

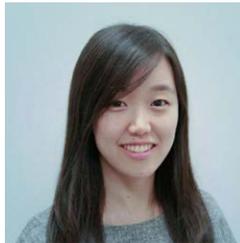


Chris Yoo is Executive Director of the Korean Community Legal Service. Chris is a Partner at Genesis Capital, a private equity firm, and Managing Director at For Purpose Investment Partners, a not-for-profit impact investment manager. He is also the president of the

Refugee Advice & Casework Service (RACS).

Over the past 14 years Chris has held roles with Crescent Capital Partners, Bain Capital and Bain & Company and numerous corporate directorships including Smart Clinics, Australian Clinical Labs, MyHealth Medical Centres, NZ Panels Group, National Dental Care, Cover-More Group and Lifehealthcare.

Chris is a Solicitor of the Supreme Court of NSW and holds a Bachelor of Laws / Bachelor of Engineering from the University of Sydney.



Christina Choi is Principal Solicitor of the Korean Community Legal Service. Christina is an Assistant Director of 'Commercial, Financial and Corruption' and 'Revenue and Benefits Fraud' practice groups at the Commonwealth

Director of Public Prosecutions and has been in that Senior Executive role since August 2019.

As a federal prosecutor, Chris has prosecuted a broad range of offences including drug offences, child sex exploitation offences, human trafficking offences, organised crime and terrorism offences, and now specialises in white collar crime.

In 2011, Chris became one of the youngest Accredited Specialists in Criminal Law at that time and has served on the Specialist Accreditation Advisory Committee since 2016.



Ken Hong is Principal Solicitor of the Korean Community Legal Service. Originally from Seoul, Ken first came to Australia as an overseas student in 1994. He was admitted as a lawyer in NSW in 2004. Ken has more than 17 years of experience in advising and acting for clients who

are private and public companies and government agencies.

Ken is an active member of the Korean and Australian community. He previously served as a council member of the Medical Council of NSW, and the president of Korean Australian Young Leaders. Currently, Ken is the president of the Korean Australian Lawyers Association and an Advisory Board Member of Multicultural NSW. He also serves as a member of the Diversity & Inclusion Committee and the Professional Conduct Committee of the Law Society of NSW.

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