K&L Gates: **Serving Humanity Through Legal Practice**

By Adam Levine, Christien Corns, Paul Hardman, Katherine Smith and Belinda Tralli

L-R: Belinda Tralli, Chris Round, Harmonie Cribbs (volunteer coordinator at Refugee Legal), Christien Corns (Melbourne Pro Bono Coordinator), Makaila Cass (Lawyer) Cassandra Benjamin (senior lawyer at Refugee Legal) and Amy Groff (Global Pro Bono Coordinator)

"We serve a wide range of charitable and not-for-profit organisations. Human rights, child protection, refugees and asylum seekers are among our focus areas."

A commitment to pro bono work has been ingrained in K&L Gates' culture since our early years, dating back to the legacy firms that gave root to what we are today.

Our Pro Bono Committee, which is made up of a global network of pro bono coordinators, guides these efforts with the aim of assisting the most vulnerable among us and helping improve the many communities we serve, whether they are across the globe or across the street.

We are incredibly proud of our pro bono successes to date, with a wide and varied remit, and we continue to expand our program and explore further opportunities for our partners and employees to engage globally and locally.

K&L Gates in Australia has been working with pro bono client Refugee Legal for nearly a decade. Refugee Legal offers a breadth of valuable services to those seeking asylum, refugees and disadvantaged migrants through advice, casework and policy work. Our partnership provides the opportunity for our lawyers and allied professionals to participate in legal clinics run by Refugee Legal, in-person or virtually, across offices in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Perth. Call-outs for clinic volunteers are enthusiastically embraced by the firm and receive a high response rate from both legal and support staff.

Through these clinics, we assist with protection visa applications (onshore and offshore), requests for ministerial intervention, reuniting families and applications for change of status for those seeking permanent residence in

Australia. Our involvement in the clinics, including The Afghanistan Clinic (established following the 2021 crisis and assisting Afghan nationals located overseas to apply for offshore protection to Australia) and the TPV/SHEV Conversion Clinic (enabling people to convert from temporary protection to permanent residence), ranges from providing legal volunteers to offer preliminary advice over the phone, pre-clinic appointments to obtain required information and assist clients to fill in required forms, and clinic appointments to provide advice and assistance in finalising applications, responding to additional information requests from the Department of Home Affairs and, (where relevant) requesting ministerial intervention.

"Helping individuals and families to build a new life for themselves and their family is highly rewarding and engaging work."

"We look forward to our continued collaboration with K&L Gates, providing critical legal assistance to vulnerable people with predicaments that could hardly matter more: seeking protection from persecution, safety from family violence, freedom from detention and reuniting with family."

- Refugee Legal

"I have been regularly participating in the TPV/SHEV Conversion Clinic (on-site) and I have found it really rewarding because you get to speak to and directly assist individuals who require your assistance. Some of these individuals have lived in Australia for 10+ years and until receiving their ROS visa, had not had permanent status in Australia."

- Belinda Tralli, K&L Gates, Senior Associate, Melbourne.

Our partnership with Refugee Legal also encompasses work with the Family Violence Project, which aims to assist people on visas who experience family violence. Many visa holders who experience family violence are concerned that taking action will affect their visa and their children's safety, with many women in these situations believing that they need to stay with their abusive partner in order to keep their visa and remain in Australia.

Similarly, K&L Gates also provides assistance to the Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre (NSCLC), a not-for-profit that provides legal services primarily across the northern metropolitan area of Perth, Western Australia. Our focus with the NSCLC has been to advise on migration law issues for visa holders who are experiencing family violence, noting that visa holders may be particularly vulnerable due to language barriers and isolation.

We provide advice to secondary visa holders experiencing family violence at the hands of the primary visa holder, or visa holders who are in a relationship with an Australian citizen. The particular area of vulnerability with these secondary visa holders is that their immigration status is dependent upon the sponsorship of the primary visa holder against whom the allegation of domestic violence is made. We have assisted these individuals to explore visa pathways independent of the sponsorship of their partner.

In 2019, K&L Gates was heavily involved in the transfer of a cohort of refugees and asylum seekers to Australia, from detention in regional offshore processing centers (Nauru and PNG) pursuant to the Medevac legislation. We sought and successfully obtained urgent interlocutory injunctions to enable transfer of those in need of urgent medical treatment (and their family members) to places where they could receive appropriate care. Undertakings were also obtained that these individuals would not be removed from Australia without notice. K&L Gates continues to act for many of these individuals, who remain residing in Australia. Others have since been successful in securing residency in overseas jurisdictions.

"In all of our work, the strength and persistence of human determination is constantly reinforced. We have witnessed such tenacity in people both locally and globally, as we continue to learn from challenging circumstances and adjust to hardships experienced within and outside our immediate communities, we never stop trying to get better at whatever we do."

Pro Bono work @ K&L Gates also focuses on:

- **K&L Gates for Equal Justice:** an initiative focusing on voting rights, criminal justice reform, and equal justice for indigenous peoples.
- **Make It Happen:** a collaboration with the Cultural Intelligence Project providing pro bono legal assistance to indigenous businesses.
- **Cyber Civil Rights Legal Project:** our global CCRL Project has helped thousands of victims of non-consensual distribution of intimate images.
- **Castan Centre for Human Rights Law:** assisting in submissions before the High Court focused on safe access zones near reproductive health clinics.
- **Free to Shine:** providing trademark advisory services to a not-for-profit child protection organisation.
- **RSPCA:** prosecuting animal cruelty offences in the Magistrates Court of Western Australia.
- **Tech4Justice Project:** assisting The National Justice Project with creating pathways that empower people to access justice, right wrongs, be heard and effect change specifically in relation to building the Hear Me Out platform.

K&L Gates is a fully integrated global law firm with lawyers located across five continents. The firm represents leading multinational corporations, growth and middle-market companies, capital markets participants and entrepreneurs in every major industry group as well as public sector entities, educational institutions, philanthropic organisations and individuals. ■

***Adam Levine** is a Corporate/M&A partner at K&L Gates. He advises on a broad range of commercial matters, including equity capital markets. While focusing on corporate issues, Adam also plays an active role in ensuring access to justice for those less fortunate in the community and proudly heads the firm's pro bono practice in Perth.*

***Christien Corns** is a partner at K&L Gates in the Litigation and DR practice. Christien has extensive experience acting in complex commercial litigation. He is also a passionate advocate for the firm's pro bono program, and is the pro bono coordinator for Victoria.*

***Paul Hardman** is a partner in K&L Gates' Labour, Employment, and Workplace Safety practice. Paul provides a wide range of services to clients regarding employment, safety, investigations and disputes relevant to the workplace. Paul is the pro bono coordinator for Brisbane.*

***Katherine Smith** is a Special Counsel in K&L Gates' Finance practice area. Katherine serves on the firm's Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) committee and is the pro bono coordinator for the Sydney office. Katherine is also a proud past recipient of the Managing Partner's Women's Achievement Award.*

***Belinda Tralli** is a Senior Associate in K&L Gates' Melbourne office. She has a particular focus on commercial contracting and is a passionate member of the Melbourne pro bono committee. Belinda regularly participates in Refugee Legal's TPV/SHEV Conversion Clinic and encourages others to do the same.*

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