Breanna Ivankovic, Joel Fam and Tom Haystead were joined by Tatiana Hermann (not pictured) on the way to the 2025 Sydney Walk for Justice.

Squire Patton Boggs' Emerging Australian Pro Bono Practice

By Jessica Antal, Angela Radich and Melissa Koo

In recognition of the inherent professional obligation lawyers have to assist in providing access to justice, Squire Patton Boggs AU (SPB) has a long-standing commitment to the development and delivery of legal services to people of limited means.

At the heart of the firm's culture is a commitment to give back to the communities in which we live and work.

SPB supports and encourages its employees to be involved in providing legal services pro bono. To do this, the firm has increased its global pro bono billable credit policy to encourage fee earners to record up to 100 hours of pro bono legal work per calendar year.

The United States' Squire Patton Boggs offices have a strong history of providing pro bono legal advice to the most vulnerable in society. With a much smaller presence in Australia, the firm's Sydney and Perth offices have previously had a comparably modest pro bono program, limited to providing pro bono legal support to Many Rivers Microfinance and its clients for approximately twelve years. Despite the limited remit of this model, the firm's assistance carried a commercial value of nearly $2.5 million.

In 2022, the firm committed to expanding its pro bono program in Australia by creating the role of a dedicated pro bono lawyer to coordinate the program across the Perth and Sydney offices.

As part of the establishment of a formal program, the firm sought to bring pro bono legal referrals from six Key Focus Areas, determined from an internal survey of lawyer interest in the following areas of legal need:

- Women
- First Nations
- Arts
- Youth
- Rural, Remote & Regional
- Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Immigrants

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During this time, the firm is proud to have seen an increase in the participation rate to 76%, and an average of 38 hours of pro bono legal work per lawyer during the past financial year.

In addition to maintaining our ongoing relationship with Many Rivers Microfinance Limited,

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the firm has several other community stakeholders which provide ongoing referrals that fit within the Key Focus Areas, such as Women's Legal Service Western Australia, Law Access, and National Justice Project.

Case Study: Working with National Justice Project to Advocate for First Nations and Refugee Rights

Several of the firm's Perth and Sydney lawyers have had the opportunity to volunteer with National Justice Project (NJP), a Sydney-based non-profit human rights firm who takes on strategic legal action to create a fair and equitable society free from discrimination. The firm is proud to provide ongoing pro bono legal support to NJP across multiple areas, including those set out below:

Refugee Rights: Casework support in relation to cases NJP have brought before the High Court of Australia against the Australian government to hold it accountable for the foreseeable and avoidable harm that has been caused to people taken to offshore detention centres in Australia, by it and its contracted service providers.

First Nations Rights: On the ground assistance for Perth based coronial inquests into the deaths in custody of First Nations individuals, including the inquests into the deaths of Mr Alf Eades and Mr Ricky-Lee Cound while incarcerated in Hakea Prison in 2019 and 2022, respectively.

Improving Access to Justice: Legal research to inform NJP's AI-powered platform, 'Hear Me Out, which is designed to provide users with tailored guidance on their available complaint pathways and improving access to justice.

From L-R: Georgia O'Driscoll, Dom Rotondo, Zahra Ali, Virginia Petrussenko-Alves, Ben Myburgh, Rachel Lendich, Eloise Wright and Tony Chong were joined by Jessica Antal (not pictured) on the way to the 2024 Law Access Walk for Justice

Case Study: Law Access Graduate Secondment

Each of the firm's Perth graduate lawyers attend Law Access one day per week for eight consecutive weeks. This secondment supports the work Law Access undertakes by expanding their resources. While on secondment, the firm's graduates assist with tasks such as completing means tests to ensure applicants meet the Law Access criteria; drafting letters to lawyers considering accepting an applicant's matter; completing legal analysis of an applicant's issue(s); and drafting client letters regarding the status of their application.

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Case Study: Supporting Survivors of Family Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault

Upon joining the firm in 2022, Pro Bono Manager, Jessica Antal, brought with her a passion for assisting victims of crime via the completion of criminal injury compensation applications.

As part of the pro bono program, lawyers in the Sydney and Perth offices work with Jessica on referrals from Women's Legal Service Western Australia, a community legal centre providing legal support to Western Australian women and children who have survived family domestic violence and/or sexual assault.

Referrals received from WLSWA are to assist women and children apply for criminal injury compensation under the Western Australian Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme. The Scheme compensates survivors for bodily harm, mental or nervous shock, and/or pregnancy, resulting from a criminal offence.

Since commencing this aspect of the program in 2022, our team have secured awards totalling nearly $700,000 for survivors of domestic violence and/or sexual assault offences.

When reflecting on this aspect of the program, Jessica noted, *"It is an amazing feeling to know that our hard work and knowledge have been able to help women in our community in such an impactful way. These awards are life changing; not only will they assist them financially to make a fresh start and obtain necessary treatment, but it also acknowledges their ongoing pain and suffering. By doing so, it shifts the dialogue away from the offender and empowers these individuals to take back control of their lives."*

In addition to working with these organisations, we consider ad hoc requests for legal assistance from organisations in our community who demonstrate a genuine need for pro bono legal support. For example, the firm has an ongoing relationship with Animal Defenders Office, a national community legal centre based in Canberra providing advice and assistance in the niche area of animal law. Typical referrals received from ADO include providing advice and assistance relating to backyard breeders, government wildlife culls, pets and strata properties, animal rescue organisations, wildlife protection activities, and animal welfare concerns in for-profit zoos. In addition to these, our Sydney Pro Bono Director, Angela Radich, led a team to draft submissions to the European Court of Human Rights for Vegan Australia as a third-party intervener. The submissions, drafted by Angela and her team in partnership with the Animal Defenders Office, were part of an international effort by several vegan organisations, including the Vegan Society UK. The proceedings concern the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion of vegan prisoners and inpatients in Swiss prisons and hospitals (i.e. to be provided with vegan meal options). The Court's judgment is currently reserved.

While the firm is proud of its growth over the past few years, we recognise that the program remains comparatively modest and continue to explore ways in which the firm can better support our local communities. ■

***Jessica Antal** is Pro Bono Manager at Squire Patton Boggs (AU). Together with Melissa and Angela, Jessica is responsible for developing and managing the Australian pro bono program, as well as completing pro bono case work, in her role of dedicated pro bono lawyer.*

***Angela Radich** is a Director in the Sydney office of Squire Patton Boggs and an experienced litigator who has acted for clients in the full range of courts, including the NSW Court of Appeal, Full Federal Court and High Court. In addition to this role, Angela oversees the pro bono program as the Sydney Pro Bono office representative.*

***Melissa Koo** is a Partner in the Perth office of Squire Patton Boggs and is a specialist construction lawyer with extensive experience across both contentious and non-contentious matters, in representing clients on major Australian and international construction, energy and infrastructure projects. In addition to this role Melissa oversees the pro bono program as the Perth Pro Bono Partner.*

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