

Pro Bono Week: behind the numbers

Solicitors' pro bono charity LawWorks reports on the vital role of pro bono within the legal support ecosystem



LawWorks is passionate about pro bono and the important contributions it makes to enabling people to access legal support. Every day we see the difference that volunteer solicitors and law schools make—from providing initial advice, to, for example, representing clients at benefit and employment appeal hearings.

However, we are equally clear about the limits of pro bono; it should never be expected to replace an adequately funded system of legal aid nor funding for law centres and advice agencies. Pro bono makes a difference when seen as part of 'an ecosystem' of legal support—it can work hand-in-hand with legal aid, including identifying when legal aid might be available, but is much less able to provide holistic legal support, particularly for complex needs, in isolation.

To understand the impact of pro bono, you need to also look beyond counting pro bono hours and look to the activities undertaken and the service delivered in partnership, the number of volunteers, but more crucially the numbers of people helped, and the impact on the lives of clients. Partnership with the 'third sector' is a vital aspect of pro bono activity and it is important to be realistic about the capacity, scale, and contexts for pro bono—including its appropriateness where there are more complex personal and legal needs. There is no one single model of pro bono; legal needs are diverse and require a range of services and strategies, so our programmes range from supporting clinics, specialist casework projects, brokering legal advice for charities and developing digital platforms, including the Pro Bono Portal UK, to support and facilitate lawyers' capacity to undertake pro bono work.

Inputs, outputs & outcomes
As our clinic reports in recent years

demonstrate, the range of pro bono clinics provided through law schools and advice agencies has grown steadily in recent years (bit.ly/3bef5cd). As of June 2021, there were 300 clinics across England and Wales in the LawWorks Clinics Network, although during 2020 not all clinics were operational due to the pandemic. Clinic services range from providing generalist support across a broad range of legal issues, to specialist clinics focused on identified needs, such as homelessness, immigration or social welfare. In 2020, 49,651 separate enquiries were reported, and 87% of enquiries resulted in either advice (56%) or signposting (31%). This is a reduction in the number of enquiries (77,550) and people helped (70,261) recorded over 2019; however, this reflects the impact COVID-19 had on clinic operations, and the capacity to collect data given their migration to

remote service delivery. Over 9,000 lawyers and law students volunteered in clinics over 2020.

It also important, however, not just to capture inputs and outputs, but also outcomes—how the services provided have made a difference. In the past we have been successful in researching client outcomes, although client monitoring has been harder to do during the pandemic. Our last outcomes monitoring exercise (in 2018) demonstrated, from a representative sample of clients supported by clinics, that 87% reported a better understanding of their situation and next steps to resolve their issues, whilst 68% reported reduced stress (bit.ly/3vKs7rB). Understanding outcomes and impact adds to the incentivising of pro bono engagement, and complements aspirational hours targets. **NLJ**

LawWorks

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LawWorks (the Solicitors Pro Bono Group) enables access to justice through pro bono legal advice. We:

- ▶ promote and support pro bono within the solicitors' profession and in law schools;
- ▶ help connect those needing legal advice with pro bono volunteers; and
- ▶ advocate for policy change and the goal of access to justice for all.

Opportunities for pro bono volunteering include:

- ▶ joining a network of over 300 independent pro bono clinics across England and Wales;
- ▶ our Not-for-Profits programme connecting smaller charities with free legal advice;
- ▶ Pro Bono Connect—facilitating barristers and solicitors working together on pro bono cases;
- ▶ Free Legal Answers—a website for individuals on low incomes seeking initial legal advice (currently employment, family, consumer, debt and housing) www.freelegalanswers.org.uk;
- ▶ The Pro Bono Portal UK—working towards the vision of creating a national 'one stop shop' for remote and online pro bono volunteering.

For more information on the work of LawWorks and how you can get involved, visit www.lawworks.org.uk.

