



TC Beirne School of Law

UQ PRO BONO CENTRE

Newsletter No. 2, August 2011

IN THIS ISSUE

[The UQ Pro Bono Centre](#)

[Clinical Legal Education](#)

[The Pro Bono Roster](#)

[The Manning Street Project](#)

[Events](#)

Law Week: Magistrates Open Day

THE UQ PRO BONO CENTRE

The UQ Pro Bono Centre is an initiative of the TC Beirne School of Law, The University of Queensland, which aims to provide students with opportunities to use their legal training to assist disadvantaged members of the community. The Centre was launched in February 2009. To date, the Centre has administered two programs:

Clinical Legal Education – Under the Centre’s clinical program, 20-30 students per semester participate in the work of a community legal centre one day per week for academic credit. This is an elective subject (LAWS5180/7180) which is open to students in their second year of legal study and beyond.

Pro Bono Roster – The Pro Bono Roster is a list of students who have indicated a willingness to undertake pure pro bono work in a legal or socio-legal setting. The students are then linked with organisations seeking assistance with their pro bono activities. Students receive no academic credit for this work. All law students who have studied for two years are eligible to undertake pro bono work under the roster.

In 2011, a third project, **The Manning St Project**, was launched in partnership with Caxton Legal Centre (see further below).

LAW WEEK: MAGISTRATES OPEN DAY

Academics and students from the TC Beirne School of Law Pro Bono Centre participated in the annual Magistrates Court Open Day on Saturday (21 May 2011) as part of National Law Week. This event sees the Queensland Magistrates Court in Brisbane’s CBD open its doors to the public, with court house tours running all day, as well as stalls representing the various legal organisations available to Queenslanders.

The theme of National Law Week for 2011 was *Law and Justice in your Community*. Staff and students from the UQ Pro Bono Centre were proud to showcase the ways in which this initiative gives back to the community.

Dr Peter Billings, who is a senior lecturer at TC Beirne School of Law and a Co-Director of the UQ Pro Bono Centre, said he found the Magistrates Court Open Day a worthwhile platform to further inform members of the legal profession of the work the Centre is doing and encourage others to request assistance with their casework. Dr Billings said, “We have more law students requesting to be placed on the Pro Bono Centre roster than we currently have placements for.”



From left: Ms Franky Bain (Asylum & Refugee Law Project), Ms Charmaine Panickar (Sisters Inside), Ms Marissa Dooris, Mr Benjamin Russo (Asylum & Refugee Law Project), Ms June Loh (Caxton Legal Centre), Dr Peter Billings, Mr Edward Brackin (Pine Rivers Neighbourhood Centre) and Ms Jessica Faithful (Manning St Project).

We welcome your feedback on the layout and content of this newsletter. Please email your feedback to probono@law.uq.edu.au



TC Beirne School of Law

UQ PRO BONO CENTRE

Newsletter No. 2, August 2011

CLINICAL LEGAL EDUCATION

In 2011, to date, the Centre has placed 27 students in five clinics, being:

- Homeless Persons Legal Clinic (HPLC) at QPILCH
- Public Interest Research Clinic (PIRC) at QPILCH
- Mental Health Law Clinic at QPILCH
- Prisoner Law Clinic at Prisoners' Legal Service (PLS)
- Consumer Law Advice Clinic at Caxton Legal Service

On all levels, the clinical program is successful. Dozens of clients are assisted every semester and our partners are better able to address their needs and to progress their law reform and community legal education projects with the help of our students.

For the students, the experience of working with the highly skilled lawyers who supervise the clinics, assisting clients with "real world" problems and developing practical skills such as interviewing and letter writing, makes clinical legal education a uniquely valuable part of their UQ law degree. Their research skills, already developed in their studies, are brought into sharp focus by the casework, policy and legal education tasks presented to them by the various services in which they are placed.

Our students clearly appreciate this opportunity:

"...I have enjoyed wide-ranging and varying opportunities while at PLS and greatly benefited from exposure to an array of dilemmas, procedures and subject matters. I gained so much from this experience and not only learnt particular procedures and policies relating to corrective services but also learnt a great deal about the context that informs these procedures and policies."

Amy Ruben, Prisoners Legal Clinic, Sem 1, 2011

"Whereas the bulk of our legal education is spent learning what the law is, socio-legal research enables us to question the effectiveness of laws at achieving their stated aims and to indentify the unintended consequences of laws. This places us in a better position to be able to review the need for reform and the necessary elements of any reform."

Katrina Cuskelly, Public Interest Research Clinic, Sem 1, 2011

"After completing eight challenging, at times, frustrating but extremely rewarding advice weeks of the Caxton Consumer Law Clinic, my outlook on what a solicitor's focus should be and the form an advice should take has certainly undergone a paradigm shift."

Simon Kalinowski, Consumer Law Advice Clinic, Sem 1, 2011

Among the projects undertaken by the clinic students in semester 1, were:

- **Homeless Persons Legal Clinic**
Assisting clients at various locations and developing a "legal health check" document to be completed by prisoners upon release because they are overrepresented among the homeless.



- **Public Interest Research Clinic**
Completed a submission to the Queensland Law Foundation for funding for community legal education clinics in North Queensland.
- **Consumer Law Advice Clinic**
Letter writing and negotiation for clients with consumer credit and fair trading issues arising out of the sale and installation of solar panels.
- **Prisoner's Legal Clinic**
Assisted in the development of a "Declarations Kit" and with applications by prisoners to the Parole Board.
- **Mental Health Legal Clinic**
Assisting clients with mental health related issues and researching the use of Electro-convulsive therapy in Queensland.

Another 24 students are enrolled for clinics in semester 2. They were selected from 45 applicants. We look forward to their reports. Thanks to our stakeholders and clinic supervisors without whom we could not conduct this program.

Mr Paul O'Shea

Co-Director, UQ Pro Bono Centre

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THE PRO BONO ROSTER

The Pro Bono Roster attracted interest from over 100 hundred law students when it was re-opened in February 2011. Building on the successes of 2010 semester 1 has seen the establishment of wonderful new working relationships with local, regional and national organisations. Locally, two students have been volunteering regularly at **Pine Rivers Neighbourhood Centre** (Edward Brackin and Ashlee Bonanna) three more at **Sisters Inside** (Charmaine Panicker, Judy Lai and Rachel Gallagher), as well as one further placement at **QPILCH** (Britt Abbott). Further afield, in Cairns, two students were placed with the **Environmental Defenders Office** for a month during the University vacation period (Sophie Boyd and Tyrone Handley), this relationship should blossom during future University holiday periods. We also have the opportunity to send students to the **Cairns and Far North Environment Centre** in the future.

Geoffrey Wong and Erin Furlong have provided research assistance to **Bravehearts**, for the purposes of revising their community booklet – *Loud and Clear* – which provides information about the criminal justice process to adult survivors of childhood sexual assault and those who support them.



Several projects have been undertaken in conjunction with **Arts Law Centre of Australia**, including a large research project into the State's regulation of prisoner's artwork and any proceeds of sale from their artwork (Lizzy Clare and Alison Black (pictured left)). This work is ongoing during semester 2.

Robin Wynn provided a thorough brief to Kirsty Rourke (**Holding Redlich**) in respect of a property law matter.



TC Beirne School of Law

UQ PRO BONO CENTRE

Newsletter No. 2, August 2011

During semester 1, in conjunction with Eve Massingham at the **Red Cross**, several students were trained in the basics of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in order that Queensland could be the second state (after Victoria) with a schools education program in IHL. Anna Charles, Catherine Drummond, Lindsay Collins, Brooke Thompson and Alexandra Wolhuter, delivered their first class, with great success, to year 12 students at Brisbane State High early in semester 2.

The IHL education program runs in parallel with the Refugee Law schools program established during 2010. Now in its second year, pro bono students have prepared and delivered classes on the topic of forced migration/refugees to high school students at **St Hildas College** (Gold Coast) and **Moreton Bay College**. Franky Bain and Liz Mathews led this education initiative during semester 1 2011, and were ably assisted by Ellen Bevan, Caroline Ee, Bianca Kabel, Danielle McKeen, Bronwen Perberdy, Alice Pinkerton, Jay Prabhu and Kate Stacey. This schools program along with the [Asylum and Refugee Law Project](#) blog was given due recognition in May 2011 when the students were awarded the prestigious UQ [Vice Chancellor's Award for Equity and Diversity](#). Marissa Dooris must be acknowledged for her considerable efforts, she gave impetus and enthusiasm to both the blog and the schools program in 2010/11.

Very many thanks to all those colleagues in community legal centres, private practice and schools who have worked with the pro bono students during 2011 to date.

Dr Peter Billings

Co-Director, UQ Pro Bono Centre

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THE MANNING ST PROJECT

In semester 1 this year, the Centre's new 'Manning St Project' commenced. The Manning St Project is a partnership between the UQ Pro Bono Centre and Caxton Legal Centre Inc. that provides opportunities to UQ law students to participate in law reform work, action research and other community law activities on a pro bono basis. The students work within the premises of the Caxton Legal Centre (at Manning St, South Brisbane) under the supervision of practicing lawyers and legal academics.

During its first semester, 16 students participated in the Project. Six students worked out of Caxton Legal Centre on two research projects on a Wednesday morning. Three of the students investigated issues related to oral health care. They found that, for low income people, access to dental care is limited, and that many people live with oral health complaints that affect their health, their self-esteem, and their employment prospects. Another three students researched the legal implications of 'doctor shopping' in circumstances where the patient is



addicted to prescription medication. They also examined the implications of the e-health system for these individuals' human rights and well-being.

In addition to this, 10 students worked as part of Caxton's casework team. Six students worked in intake and evening advice support roles, and four students worked within Caxton's flood recovery project.



TC Beirne School of Law

UQ PRO BONO CENTRE

Newsletter No. 2, August 2011

In semester 2, Manning St will host several more research projects. Three students will work with QPILCH and Prisoner's Legal Service (PLS) investigating issues related to the imposition of fines for minor criminal offences, and their enforcement in circumstances where the offender cannot pay. A further three students will work with PLS on a project on discrimination within the Queensland prison system. Finally, three more students will commence a project on the offence of public nuisance and the use of infringement notices as an enforcement mechanism for offensive language and offensive behaviour.

'In the course of the project, I have gained insight from working in groups and interviewing legal professionals. All of this has developed in me a sense of responsibility and the confidence to lead a project by myself. The project has also taught me the importance of thinking critically about particular legal issues and has informed me about the importance of law and policy reform in minimising the flaws in laws, so as to uphold social justice for the benefit of the disadvantaged community. I became appreciative of the fact that the principles of law manifested in reality in a form different from what it aims to achieve. Yet, it has reinforced my interest in pursuing it and caused me to gain legal experience and knowledge about social justice and law reform issues.'

Kah Hey Loh (Oral health care research team member)

If you are interested in being involved in the Manning St Project, please contact Tamara Walsh.

Dr Tamara Walsh

Co-Director, UQ Pro Bono Centre

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