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COMPANY OF GOOD

# Playing a part in making legal aid accessible to all

WMH Law Corporation provides legal representation to those who are unable to afford a lawyer. BY NAVIN SREGANTAN

**Singapore**  
LEGAL representation is often costly and out of reach for the underprivileged. However, a young law firm is punching above its weight in providing legal representation to a number of underserved communities in Singapore.

"At WMH, we feel that the disadvantaged very often get shunned (rightly or wrongly) by the community. Be that as it may, we firmly believe that everyone deserves to have their day in Court," said Mark Lee, managing director at WMH Law Corporation.

For the partners of WMH, which commenced practice in November 2016, an emphasis on giving back to the community is omnipresent.

"Joint managing director Wilbur Lim and I were law school classmates at Singapore Management University. We already had dreams of running our own practice where we would be able to marry both the provision of quality legal service and have a greater emphasis on pro bono/CSR initiatives," said Mr Lee.

The firm joined the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme (CLAS) shortly after it commenced practice in November 2016.

The Law Society's CLAS is a programme which provides criminal legal assistance to those who are unable to afford a lawyer, and are facing charges in a Singapore court for non death-penalty offences.

"We wanted to apply our expertise to where it would have the most impact and, therefore, chose to collaborate with CLAS to provide legal representation to individuals charged with criminal offences but cannot afford a lawyer," says Mr Lee.

WMH's involvement with CLAS has seen some of its beneficiaries with reduced sentences or cleared of their alleged offences.

"We had a case of a client who did not have much legal awareness and could not afford to hire lawyers. He was initially prepared to plead guilty to the charges to get it done and over with despite having done nothing wrong," said Mr Lee.

"Without legal representation, the client could have been jailed for up to two years, fined, caned or receive any combined punishment."

With representation, Mr Lee's client was able to have his charges cleared.

This brings to light the understated import



(From left) Mr Lee, Mr Lim and Ms Hazell Ng of WMH Law Corporation regularly volunteer at legal clinics organised by the Community Justice Centre.

ance of basic legal knowledge which WMH also looks to address through participating in outreach programmes to make legal advice accessible to the masses and, in particular, to more vulnerable groups of people.

Its involvement in Justice Without Borders (JWB), a not-for-profit organisation that supports victims of labour exploitation and human trafficking by seeking just compensation against their abusers, is one such case.

"Wilbur recently gave a talk at a seminar organised by JWB, which had the aim of providing legal education to migrant workers in Singapore, to give them better education in understanding their rights and protecting their interests," said Mr Lee.

"We also give talks to residents at various neighbourhood constituencies on issues such

as drafting of wills, probate, lasting power of attorney and deputyship applications."

Mr Lee and the team from WMH regularly volunteer at legal clinics organised by the Community Justice Centre in Singapore.

These legal clinics held at the State Courts are open to members of the public to raise any concerns they may have and receive free legal consultation.

"Our lawyers will assess the applicant's circumstances and offer a preliminary view on the best way forward to handle their issues," said Mr Lee.

WMH also extends a helping hand to Supreme Court legal clinics where lawyers volunteer to provide help to applicants facing bankruptcy proceedings on how best to protect their interests.

On WMH's future plan on expanding its

range of CSR initiatives, Mr Lee said: "We are currently in talks with the Ministry of Social and Family Development for further volunteering opportunities with the Assisted Deputyship Application Programme Initiative."

"The initiative presently being discussed would involve my firm assisting with such applicants who cannot afford lawyers to apply for the said Court order."

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