

ANNEX 1 – PROFILES OF AWARD RECIPIENTS

Mr Lokman Hakim Bin Mohamed Rafi Spirit of Pro Bono Award (JD)

(for achieving the highest number of pro bono hours in his graduating cohort)

1. Academic/career background

I have a BA in Media & Communications from the University of New South Wales. Before law school, I was a civil servant. I spent about the first half of my career doing regulatory enforcement work with the Ministry of Manpower(MOM) and Ministry of Education(MOE). I was a Senior Investigation Officer in MOM's Foreign Manpower Manager Division, and also a Registration Officer with the Council for Private Education. I spent the other half of my career as an Information Officer with the Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI). At MCI, I managed Gov.Sg's social media platforms and also did some staffing work.

2. What motivates him to contribute beyond your required pro bono hours to the Singapore community

I have never thought of pro bono work as giving back to the community. I just wanted to help, especially when I have the ability to do so. Being a law student equipped me with some basic legal knowledge and that puts me in a better position to help than most.

3. Community and legal issue he is passionate about

When I was in MOM, I had first-hand look at how vulnerable foreign workers can be to exploitation. They are far from home, often in debt for the fees they pay their agents to work in Singapore, and unfamiliar with our laws and the protection they may have under our regulations. Being far from home, they are also without the support network that we often take for granted. The power imbalance is tilted against them and I wanted to be able to help balance this a little bit.

4. Challenges you faced during pro bono work

Besides the entire COVID situation and learning the nuances of communicating mostly via Zoom, it was really about balancing the needs of schoolwork and pro bono work. I think the trick is to set small daily goals of things to get done by the end of the day and making the most of your liminal time (like doing work during commutes) so that time at home can be better spent with family.

5. Fulfilling experiences

Much of my pro bono hours were spent with Justice Without Borders (JWB), an NGO that assists migrant domestic workers (MDWs) who have returned home to make claims (for unpaid salaries or injuries suffered at work as examples) against their former employers in Singapore.

I helped with the case management for some of these claims but it was not this work that I found most fulfilling. As part of its outreach efforts, JWB also runs workshops to equip the caseworkers at other NGOs with the necessary legal knowledge and skills to handle complaints from MDWs. This includes educating them on their rights, evidence collection, and handling interviews. These caseworkers are often other MDWs that volunteer their time. I was proud to be able to assist at these workshops because I felt that it has a much larger downstream effect. For example, the caseworkers will be able to gather information and evidence more effectively,

which will help strengthen cases they refer to JWB in the future. This leads to better outcomes for the MDWs.

6. How pro bono work impacted his life

Before law school, a lawyer-friend once told me that law was like a pie-eating contest where the prize is more pie. As I was going through law school, I could see what he meant by that. For a while, I was not sure how to feel about pie until I did some pro bono work with legal clinics and JWB. This convinced me that pie can be meaningful.

7. Other interests

I am into photography, and I got interested in doing video work recently as well. It is a form of creative expression that also preserves memories and experiences. My photos are not great but I enjoy the process of taking them. It also forces me out of my comfort zone. For example, it got me into hiking a few years back because I wanted photos from the mountain top.

Ms Farahna Alam

Spirit of Pro Bono Award (LLB)

(for achieving the highest number of pro bono hours in her graduating cohort)

1. Academic/career background

I am an LLB graduate from Singapore Management University's Yong Pung How School of Law. My past experiences include a Summer Fellowship with Justice Without Borders in 2020 and a part-time Litigation Internship at the Refugee and Immigrant Centre for Education and Legal Services from 2020-2021.

I am currently taking the Part B course and will commence my legal traineeship with Withers KhattarWong in 2022.

2. What motivates her to contribute beyond required pro bono hours to the Singapore community

The Pro Bono Centre in SMU provides a wide range of projects that allow for opportunities to develop my legal skills. This ranges from legal research to communications with clients and members of the public. These projects opened my eyes to see first-hand the impact such work has on the community and the importance of increasing legal accessibility to the less fortunate. It is this feeling of fulfilment and purpose that drives me to contribute beyond my required pro bono hours.

3. Community that she is passionate about

While I have been open to engaging in diverse community projects, one such community that I have spent a majority of my time volunteering with is the migrant community. Being a child of Bangladeshi migrants myself, I am especially passionate about helping the migrant community as I understand how daunting it may be to uproot oneself to a foreign country where they might not truly understand the regulations or legal assistance they may have access to.

4. Challenges faced during pro bono work

One of the main challenges I encountered during Pro Bono work was the difficulty in continuing lengthy cases. A majority of these projects required long-term commitments which if not fulfilled, created informational gaps when handed over to the next volunteer. Such a challenge highlights the importance of proper notetaking, as well as the commitment required of volunteers to work on projects long term so that beneficiaries are fully able to get the best out of the programmes.

5. An anecdote to share

During my stint with the DSAP SUNDAC project, I remember having to redo the filling in of court documents due to sudden and recent changes to the court forms as well as the then emerging Covid-19 exigencies. Recalling how long it took the first time round the forms were filled in, I had a newfound appreciation for the communal nature of our volunteer work, as it took the cooperation of the client, her family, her case worker, volunteers from SUNDAC as well as Student Volunteers from both NUS and SMU to come together in order to meet the tight deadlines of the court applications.

6. How pro bono work has impacted her life

Pro Bono has provided me with a deeper appreciation and even instilled a purpose for continuing my journey working in the legal industry. It has also allowed me to have a more holistic perspective of my academic journey whereby I am able to foresee the practical application of my study of law. Furthermore, it has connected me with other like-minded peers who have a similar desire to contribute to the community.

7. Other interests

My other interests include the arts, especially theatre; in which I was heavily involved in during my undergraduate years. Leading and participating in the Arts Festival 2018 and 2020 as well as other projects by SMU StageIT, the university's theatre group, and Literati, a collaboration of literature lovers, has been one of the main highlights of my journey in SMU. These experiences have provided a liberating avenue for me to express myself. It taught me not to underestimate the power of stories and how it moves the community in an impactful manner.

Mr Richard Tan Ming Kirk Volunteer Lawyer Award

(Participated the most times at the SMU Pro Bono Centre Legal Clinic in 2021)

1. Career background

I qualified as a Singapore lawyer in 1985 and practised law full-time or part-time till my retirement this year after 35 years of practice. In retirement, I am continuing with pro bono and other volunteer work. Presently, I am chair of the Project Law Help Committee of Law Society Pro Bono Services and also sit as a strata titles board member to mediate and arbitrate strata title cases.

2. What motivated him to volunteer for pro bono work

It was due to a combination of factors including trying to be a good person and wanting to lead a more meaningful life. I have been a volunteer in various organisations since school days and started volunteering at the Law Society's legal clinics more than a decade ago. Several years later, when SMU was looking for volunteer lawyers to help start its legal clinic, I volunteered as well.

3. Challenges faced, and what keeps him going

The main challenges come from competitors for my time like family and other commitments. However, pro bono work can be rewarding and create happiness.

4. Other interests

There are many, including drowning prevention and rescue (I was a lifeguard long before I was a lawyer), food (I like to eat), reading (mostly non-fiction), and travel (always an educational experience). In my younger days, I also enjoyed squash and scuba-diving but activities like walking and yoga are more likely nowadays.

5. Words of advice for young law students about volunteering

One of the things you might increasingly realise with time is that chance plays a role in life. As part of the fortunate minority who have the benefit a legal education, it is good to help those who may not be able to afford legal assistance. You may start off thinking that volunteering is an obligation, but it is really a privilege.

Ms Zheng Pei Long Service Award

(for participating at the SMU Pro Bono Centre Legal Clinic for at least 5 years)

1. Career background

I am currently working in house with a focus on intellectual property and general corporate work.

2. What motivated her to volunteer for pro bono work

At the start, it was solely because I felt glad that other than making a living, my "skillsets" can be used to help others.

3. How pro bono work has impacted her life

Somewhat as a realisation of my motivation, it keeps me grounded knowing that practising the law goes beyond just developing a career or making a living.

4. Challenges faced, and what keeps her going

After moving in house there were not many opportunities to do pro bono work, but my current manager is very invested in this area too and has been understanding even if it would "eat into" my work time. When the senior lawyers share the same mentality towards pro bono work, it is always encouraging.

5. Other interests

I don't have any specific interest; I just enjoy learning random new things that pique my interest now and then. If I had to share something – all the social distancing at the moment has helped me to pick up my guitar again and given me some time to read a little poetry.

6. Words of advice for young law students about volunteering

For me, the hardest part is when I know there is no answer for those who really need one. Then, I question why I do this and who am I to be doing this. I think this is the reason why I keep doing it, even if I may never get to the answers.

PHOTOS OF AWARD WINNERS

High res versions downloadable from this [link](#)



Professor Chan Wing Cheong, with Spirit of Pro Bono Winners, Lokman Hakim Bin Mohamed Rafi and Farahna Alam.



Professor Chan Wing Cheong, with Volunteer Lawyer winner Richard Tan, and Long Service Award winner, Zheng Pei.