



Media Release

SMU Pro Bono Centre Legal Clinic saw 14.8% more cases in 2022

Despite fewer placement opportunities, the Class of 2022 served 42.6 pro bono hours on average

Singapore, 3 November 2022 (Thursday) – According to the latest Annual Report released by Singapore Management University's (SMU) [Pro Bono Centre](#) (PBC) for the period January to September 2022, the number of cases seen by the Centre's Legal Clinic rose by 14.8% to 155 cases, compared with 135 for the same period in 2021. The most common types of cases seen in the same period were those related to family (14.8%), employment (13.9%), tenancy (13.5%) and criminal (11.1%). While the Class of 2022 (LLB and JD) are required to complete at least 20 pro bono hours upon graduation, they served an average of 42.6 pro bono hours, and recorded a total of 8,698.2 hours.

The PBC Annual Report was released this evening at the Centre's annual Appreciation Dinner, which was graced by **Guest-of-Honour Ms Indranee Rajah, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, Second Minister for Finance and National Development.**

The event held at the Yong Pung How School of Law served to thank lawyers and students for their contributions, as well as community partners for offering a wide range of pro bono placement opportunities to SMU Law students.

Ms Rajah also gave out eight top Awards at the event to deserving students and volunteer lawyers for their outstanding pro bono efforts:

- Spirit of Pro Bono Hero Award (JD) : Ms Sarah Teo
- Spirit of Pro Bono Hero Award (LLB) : Ms Meher Malhotra
- Spirit of Pro Bono Leadership Award : Ms Kit Pang
- Spirit of Pro Bono Endeavour Award : Mr Neo Yu Fan
- Spirit of Pro Bono Bronze Award : Mr Alvin Sia, Ms Charlotte Tan and Ms Jolie Giouw
- Spirit of Pro Bono Pinnacle Award : Mr Richard Tan Ming Kirk

The Spirit of Pro Bono Hero Award (JD) winner, **Ms Sarah Teo**, completed 70.4 pro bono hours; while the Spirit of Pro Bono Hero Award (LLB) winner, **Ms Meher Malhotra**, completed 311.8 pro bono hours. Both of them are from the Class of 2022, and had completed the most number of pro bono hours amongst their respective JD and LLB cohorts upon graduation.

Volunteer lawyer **Mr Richard Tan** was lauded for not only participating the most times this year at the SMU Pro Bono Centre Legal Clinic but also for having done so for the past three consecutive years. He wins the Spirit of Pro Bono Pinnacle Award. The Centre also recognised the commitment of **Mr Alvin Sia, Ms Charlotte Tan and Ms Jolie Giouw** for serving more than five years as a volunteer lawyer at the Centre's Legal Clinic.

Two new award categories – Spirit of Pro Bono Leadership and Endeavour – were also given to **Ms Kit Pang and Mr Neo Yu Fan** who stood out by initiating Project Lighthouse and developing pro bono opportunities for their peers in at the Yong Pung How School of Law.

Certificates of appreciation were also presented to three JD graduates and 28 LLB graduates from the Class of 2022 who completed more than 50 and 80 hours respectively in approved pro bono work; as well as to 23 volunteer lawyers in recognition of their participation at the Centre’s Legal Clinic in 2022.

Minister Indranee Rajah acknowledged the pro bono contributions of PBC, along with the legal fraternity, community leaders and Law students.

Professor of Law, Chan Wing Cheong, Director of the SMU Pro Bono Centre, said, “Even though the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the number and range of pro bono placement opportunities available to our students, it certainly has not dampened their spirit to contribute to the community. Some of them have even initiated pro bono projects to create pro bono opportunities for their peers.”

“Going forward, the detrimental economic effects of the pandemic continue to be felt, and geo-political uncertainties in the rest of the world are expected to take a toll on the economy. Our Centre is glad to be in a position to continue to lend a helping hand to those in need, and facilitate access to law and justice. I thank all our partners for entrusting our students with the invaluable opportunity to utilise their legal knowledge to give back to society meaningfully,” he added.

-End-

Enclosures:

- The *PBC Annual Report (Jan – Sep 2022)* can be viewed [here](#).
- Annex 1 - Citation of Pro Bono Award recipients
- Annex 2 - Fact sheet – Community service and pro bono contribution by SMU law students

About SMU Yong Pung How School of Law

SMU’s law school was renamed Yong Pung How School of Law (YPHSL) on 11 April 2021 to celebrate and honour the late Dr Yong Pung How, Singapore’s former Chief Justice and SMU’s third Chancellor.

The law school had proudly welcomed its first cohort of 116 students in August 2007. Taught by a dynamic faculty with postgraduate degrees from renowned universities, the School aims to nurture its students to become excellent lawyers who will contribute significantly to society. Trained with the ability to contextualise legal expertise and to think across disciplines and geographical borders coupled with SMU’s interactive pedagogy, SMU’s law graduates are confident articulate and analytically agile.

The School offers a four-year full-time Bachelor of Laws programme, a five-year double-degree programme which combines law with Accountancy, Business, Economics, Computing & Information Systems or Social Sciences, a three-year Juris Doctor programme, a Master of Laws programme, as well as continuing legal education. From Academic Year 2020-2021, the School also jointly offers a new Bachelor of Science (Computing & Law) with the SMU School of Computing and Information

Systems. This new degree will produce IT and legal professionals who are adept at bridging technology and law.

Research at the SMU YPHSL has a strong focus in three main inter-related areas – Law and Technology, Transnational Commercial law in Asia, and Dispute Resolution. The School has also set up legal research centres focusing on A.I. and data governance, computational law, commercial law, and international dispute resolution. www.law.smu.edu.sg

About SMU Pro Bono Centre

Since its inception in 2013, the SMU Pro Bono Centre has been instrumental in cultivating the pro bono culture at SMU and in sensitising Law students to social justice issues. The Centre advocates a pro bono culture among Law students through various pro bono programmes that it has nurtured since 2007. It involves law students in regular legal clinics which serves indigent members of the community, and trains students in client interviewing skills and in managing the clinics. Through these activities, SMU law students are exposed to legal aid work and have the opportunity to integrate academic work with real-life experience. <https://pbc.smu.edu.sg/>

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Annex 1

Citation of Spirit of Pro Bono Award recipients

Award : Spirit of Pro Bono Hero Award (JD)
Recipient : Ms Sarah Teo

This award is given to the SMU JD graduate from the Class of 2022 who has completed the most number of pro bono hours in his/her cohort.

Sarah completed 70.4 pro bono hours. Sarah chose to do all of her pro bono at the On Site Legal Assistance Scheme and at community legal clinics because she wanted to help those who could not afford to pay lawyers for legal advice. She found her pro bono experience rewarding because it offered her the chance to make a difference in someone's life.

Award : Spirit of Pro Bono Hero Award (LLB)
Recipient : Ms Meher Malhotra

This award is given to the SMU LLB graduate from the Class of 2022 who has completed the most number of pro bono hours in his/her cohort.

Meher completed 311.8 pro bono hours. This is a remarkable achievement considering the number of assignments, internships and exams that students have to handle during their law studies.

As a child of immigrant parents, Meher observed first-hand her parents' struggles to assimilate in a new country. This background sensitised her to the difficulties faced by migrant workers in Singapore and she spent many pro bono hours at Justice Without Borders helping foreign domestic workers on issues such as wrongful salary deductions, illegal deployment and abuse.

Award : Spirit of Pro Bono Leadership Award
Recipient : Ms Kit Pang

Award : Spirit of Pro Bono Endeavour Award
Recipient : Mr Neo Yu Fan

These two awards are given to students who have distinguished themselves by initiating pro bono opportunities for law students. They initiated Project Lighthouse where students assist lawyers who take on cases from LAB, CLAS and LASCO.

Kit has a heart to serve and hopes that more students will join her in Project Lighthouse to assist lawyers.

Yu Fan helped to initiate Project Lighthouse because he wanted a meaningful experience during his time in Law School.

Award : Spirit of Pro Bono Bronze Award
Recipient : 1. Mr Alvin Sia, 2. Ms Charlotte Tan, 3. Ms Jolie Giouw

This award is given to volunteer lawyers who have participated continuously for the past 5 years at the SMU Pro Bono Centre Legal Clinic.

Alvin started on his pro bono journey when he realised that there are many people in the community who are not familiar with the law or are intimidated by legalese and hence required help from a trained lawyer.

Charlotte entered Law School wanting to make a difference. She wanted to make the law accessible to those who needed protection. But as a corporate lawyer, she found that she did not have much opportunity to do so until she started doing pro bono work. She found it rewarding to be able to use her legal knowledge to help others.

Even though Jolie has a busy work life and family life as a mother of a toddler and a new baby, she continues to take part in what she calls “extra-curricular” activities. She finds it a blessing to have the ability to make a difference in someone’s life no matter how small the difference it may be.

Award : Spirit of Pro Bono Pinnacle Award
Recipient : Mr Richard Tan Ming Kirk

Richard started volunteering at the Law Society’s community legal clinics more than a decade ago. When SMU set up its legal clinic in 2013, he was one of the first to volunteer. He says that doing pro bono work has helped him to realise the role that chance plays in life; and it is really a privilege to be able to help someone in need.

Annex 2

Fact sheet – Community service and pro bono contribution by SMU law students

Since SMU's establishment in 2000, all students must participate in community service as a graduation requirement. This means that for students of SMU Yong Pung How School of Law, contributing to the legal community and volunteerism is an integral part of their legal education well before it became mandatory in Singapore (all law students are required from 2013 by the Singapore Institute of Legal Education to complete at least 20 approved pro bono hours before graduation).

SMU requires all Bachelor of Laws (LLB) students to fulfil 80 hours of community service before graduation, and at least 20 of the 80 hours must be in approved pro bono work. Juris Doctor (JD) students are exempted from the 80 hours of community service but are still required to fulfil 20 hours of pro bono service.

While only 20 hours of approved pro bono is required of them, graduates in the LLB and JD Class of 2022 contributed an average of 46.5 hours and 27.9 hours respectively in pro bono service. This is a remarkable achievement considering the many competing demands on the time of law students and the disruptions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021.
