

## COMMUNITY LEGAL CLINICS AND CLINICAL LEGAL EDUCATION IN SINGAPORE

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A common thread underlying many clinical legal education initiatives – to support access-to-justice imperatives – is interwoven with broader policy initiatives within a legal system to develop its *pro bono* legal service channels for the benefit of the wider community. The former can make meaningful contributions towards the pursuit of the latter, while the flourishing of the latter can create valuable opportunities for the growth of the former. This article explores the potential for a closer alignment between the *pro bono* activities of Community Legal Clinics and the development of clinical legal education initiatives within Singapore’s law schools, analysing empirical data from the author’s experience volunteering at a legal clinic alongside undergraduate law students to formulate recommendations that may generate desired outcomes on both fronts.

### I. INTRODUCTION

More than ten years have passed since major reforms were made to Singapore’s legal education landscape to require undergraduate law students within the jurisdiction to perform at least 20 hours of *pro bono* work as part of their degree requirements, with the Singapore Institute of Legal Education commencing its *Pro Bono Programme for Law Students* in 2013.<sup>1</sup> This has led to the emergence of new university-based programmes, both within the formal curriculum and extra-curricular offerings of Singapore’s law schools, that have given this generation of law students

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sile.edu.sg/pro-bono-programme>. The 2012 Report of the 4<sup>th</sup> Committee on the Supply of Lawyers recommended that Singapore law schools should “actively incorporate pro bono activities as part of their curriculum”, either through the implementation of more structured programmes (in partnership with the Ministry of Law or the Law Society of Singapore, for example) or through focused modules such as law clinics. See 4<sup>th</sup> Committee on the Supply of Lawyers, *Report*, <<https://www.mlaw.gov.sg/files/news/press-releases/2013/05/4th%20Committee%20Report.pdf>> at [4.33] [4<sup>th</sup> Committee Report], with reference made to the practice of top overseas law schools, such as Harvard Law School and Stanford Law School, which have incorporated *pro bono* activities as part of their curricula as a way to “instil in students a fundamental commitment to a lifetime engagement with public service and pro bono activities” and “a good way of inculcating an ethos within the legal profession of contributing to society”. See also 4<sup>th</sup> Committee Report at [4.23] and [4.31].

various formal opportunities to apply what they have learnt in the classroom to real-world legal issues before graduation, allowing them to interact with members of the public under the close supervision of qualified legal practitioners in law clinic settings.<sup>2</sup> A handful of legal clinic elective modules are now available to law students in Singapore, making it possible for them to earn academic credits for their contributions to Faculty-led *pro bono* legal activities.<sup>3</sup>

During the same period described above, national plans were set in motion to reform the Singapore legal profession to require lawyers from the Singapore Bar to engage in *pro bono* work that would make the law more accessible to those segments of the community who would not otherwise have the means to engage legal professionals to act on their behalf.<sup>4</sup> This is an ongoing process which has required the different stakeholders within the Singapore legal system to adjust to the dynamic conditions of the local legal profession as well as other related policy initiatives to engage volunteer lawyers to contribute more of their time to *pro bono* legal services. One major initiative was the Law Society of Singapore's Memorandum of Understanding with the mayors of the five regional districts to establish the *Community Legal Pro Bono Services Network*, signed on 12 September 2014, to set up a network of Community Legal Clinics at Community Development Councils via Community Centres and Residents' Committees across the island. Similar efforts to set up Community Legal Clinics have been pursued by other private sector organisations, charities and religious institutions with the help of volunteer lawyers from their respective memberships.

These developments to Singapore's legal system all flow from the same head-spring of policy reforms to Singapore's legal profession: to nudge the legal community, starting from would-be lawyers while they are university students, towards playing a bigger role in helping laypersons navigate Singapore's legal system. This article seeks to explore the possibility of a closer nexus between these two facets of Singapore's legal landscape, making the case for greater coordination between the *pro bono* activities of Community Legal Clinics and the development of clinical legal education opportunities within Singapore's law schools. How can the quality of one be enhanced by closer engagement with the other, given the natural synergies between them? How can better outcomes be achieved in both spheres by facilitating the integration of clinical legal education programmes into the public services delivered by Community Legal Clinics?

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<sup>2</sup> Law clinics exemplify the main characteristics associated with clinical legal education, with students taking on "responsibility for legal or law-related work ... in collaboration with a supervisor" in a structured setting which gives them the opportunity to receive feedback and learn from their practical experiences: see Bleasdale et al, "Law clinics: What, why and how?" in Linden Thomas and Nick Johnson eds. *The Clinical Legal Education Handbook* (United Kingdom: University of London Press, 2020) 8 at 8.

<sup>3</sup> These include litigation-based and corporate-advisory based legal clinics offered to students by the Faculty of Law at the National University of Singapore. See <<https://law.nus.edu.sg/cpbclc/our-activities/clinical-legal-education/>>.

<sup>4</sup> Committee to Study Community Legal Services Initiatives, *Report*, <<https://www.mlaw.gov.sg/files/news/press-releases/2014/03/Annex%20B%20-%20Report%20of%20the%20Committee%20to%20Study%20Community%20Legal%20Services%20Initiative.pdf>>. The 2013 Report proposed mandatory reporting of the *pro bono* work contributions of all Singapore lawyers holding a practising certificate, which subsequently led to the introduction of the Legal Profession (Mandatory Reporting of Specified Pro Bono Services) Rules 2015.

The first section of this article will provide an overview of the different forms in which Community Legal Clinics have operated within Singapore over the last decade, and give a birds-eye view of the current landscape of *pro bono* work done in such settings. The second section of this article will provide a ground-level perspective of the *pro bono* work done at a particular Community Legal Clinic in Singapore to highlight its suitability for hosting the participation of law students in a supporting clinical legal education programme. Aggregated data collected over a number of years will be analysed to illustrate the nature of the *pro bono* legal services delivered by volunteer lawyers in such settings. The third section of this article will explore the legal and practical challenges encountered by volunteer lawyers engaged in the *pro bono* activities of Community Legal Clinics, highlighting the need to overcome these obstacles to make them more conducive for the establishment of integrated clinical legal education programmes. The fourth section of this article will explain how a closer alignment between the development of clinical legal education programmes and Community Legal Clinics (“CLC”) in Singapore can generate mutually beneficial outcomes for all stakeholders concerned. The last section concludes with three broad recommendations.

## II. COMMUNITY LEGAL CLINICS IN SINGAPORE

While there is no comprehensive definition for what should be regarded as a CLC within the Singaporean context, one would expect the following features or characteristics to be present in every CLC: firstly, it should be staffed by legal professionals who meet with clinic-attendees (not “clients”, bearing in mind that an orthodox lawyer-client relationship would not arise<sup>5</sup> in most CLC settings) in short consultation sessions; secondly, the purpose of each legal consultation session is to help the attendee better understand any legal issue for which they are seeking to be advised upon (perhaps explaining why the term “legal counselling” is sometimes used in such settings); thirdly, these CLC consultation sessions are provided on a *pro bono* basis by volunteer lawyers on a regular basis; fourthly, CLCs are set up to serve, and to some extent provide assistance to, particular communities (whether geographically defined or otherwise), especially vulnerable or disadvantaged laypersons; and fifthly, there is an accompanying framework of administrative and organisational support to facilitate these sessions.

It is worth distinguishing between the *pro bono* legal work done by CLCs and the various legal aid schemes in Singapore which assign a volunteer lawyer to an eligible person requiring legal representation in relation to specific types of legal issues.<sup>6</sup> The vast majority of volunteer lawyers at CLCs may provide guidance or information on legal matters to attendees, but typically *do not act for* them in any

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<sup>5</sup> This is because of the practical and regulatory constraints on the nature of the interactions taking place during each legal consultation session. Volunteer lawyers doing *pro bono* work at CLCs are unlikely to act for the members of the public they interact with in their legal consultation sessions but may facilitate referrals to various other legal aid schemes. See discussion on Section 47 of the Legal Profession (Professional Conduct) Rules 2015, below at Section IV.

<sup>6</sup> See Annex A below.

professional capacity. In contrast, a more recent variant of the CLC model – the Northeast Community Law Centre<sup>7</sup> – was launched in January 2023 to provide free on-site legal *assistance* to vulnerable members of the community in a heartland neighbourhood location, with four more centres still in the pipeline.

The main organiser of CLCs in Singapore today is Pro Bono SG (“PBSG”), a registered charity which began its operations as a department within the Law Society of Singapore (“Law Society”).<sup>8</sup> In 2007, the first pilot project CLCs were set up by the Law Society in the North West and South East Districts, following a Parliamentary speech by the then-Deputy Prime Minister to “set up, on a trial basis, legal clinics which will not be providing full-fledged legal aid, but rather basic legal advice and information, where members of the public can go to as first-stops to get basic information.”<sup>9</sup> In 2014, the Law Society went on to establish two more legal clinics in the South West and Central Singapore Districts. In 2021, a youth-oriented legal clinic was set up to target younger members of the public, with consultations taking place virtually over an online communication service platform; younger lawyers volunteer at this clinic to give guidance on legal issues of greater significance to this demographic. Today, PBSG is directly responsible for running seven legal clinics: one clinic for each of the five Community District Councils in Singapore, a Youth & Community Legal Clinic and a Video Conference Legal Clinic. Each legal clinic session runs for between 2 and 2.5 hours, with weekly sessions that provide legal information relating to “personal matters only; no business investment or commercial matters”.<sup>10</sup>

Following a Memorandum of Understanding between the Law Society of Singapore, the Office of the Mayors (of the five districts of Singapore) and the People’s Association on 12 September 2014, further CLCs were set up across Singapore through a network of partnerships with grassroots organisations (the “Community Pro Bono Services Network”). PBSG supplies these “Network Clinics” with resource materials and guides, while leaving the running of these clinics to local organisations such as Community Clubs and Residents’ Committees. Today, there are currently 36 Network Clinics<sup>11</sup> which offer legal consultation sessions to

<sup>7</sup> Set up in a refurbished container office in the carpark of the Tian De Temple, this centre is run by Pro Bono SG to provide free legal assistance to members of the public and is staffed with two full-time lawyers. Pro Bono SG chairman Gregory Vijayendran has described this initiative as “a monumental and weighty step forward on our mission of enabling access to justice” because “by being in the heartland, we will be where our clients are. Physical proximity to pro bono services significantly enhances access to justice for the most socially and virtually excluded”. See Jean Iau, “First community law centre opens in Hougang”, *Straits Times* (25 November 2024), <<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/first-community-law-centre-opens-in-hougang>>.

<sup>8</sup> Pro Bono Services Office, “Community Legal Clinics”, *Law Gazette* <<https://v1.lawgazette.com.sg/2016-03/1528.htm>>.

<sup>9</sup> *Singapore Parliamentary Debates, Official Report* (2 March 2007) vol 82 at col 2439 <<https://sprs.parl.gov.sg/search/#/report?sittingdate=2-3-2007>> (Prof S Jayakumar, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Law).

<sup>10</sup> See <<https://www.probono.sg/legal-clinics-in-singapore/#Community-Clubs-and-Centres-Anchor>>. An informal survey conducted by my research assistants indicated that each CLC sees about 9 cases per week.

<sup>11</sup> These are facilitated by grassroots organisations in Braddell Heights, Bukit Batok East, Cheng San, Chua Chu Kang, Ci Yuan, Eunos, Geylang West, Henderson, Aljunied-Hougang, Jalan Kayu, Jurong Spring, Kallang, Kampong Kembangan-Chai Chee, Kebun Bahru, Kreta Ayer, Marine Parade, Pasir Ris East, Pasir Ris Elias, Pek Kio, Pioneer, Potong Pasir, Punggol West, Queenstown, Radin Mas, Rivervale, Siglap, Tampines Central, Tampines Changkat, Tampines North, Tanjong Pagar, Teck Ghee, Telok Blangah, Ulu Pandan, Whampoa, Yio Chu Kang and Zhenghua.

registered persons once a month, with priority typically given to local residents of the geographical district in which the CLC is run.

Other organisations which operate CLCs focus on legal issues that are most relevant to their stakeholders or pay specific attention to particular demographic groups. The Association of Women for Action and Research (“AWARE”) and the Singapore Council of Women’s Organisations (“SCWO”), for instance, offer legal consultation sessions to women only. The Institute of Estate Agents (“IEA”) facilitates the IEA-R.S. Solomon LLC Free Legal Clinic which is available to IEA members only.<sup>12</sup> The Migrant Workers’ Legal Clinic extends its *pro bono* services to foreign workers holding Work Permits and Special Work Passes. The Singapore Armed Forces Reservist Association (“SAFRA”) organises quarterly legal clinics for SAFRA members only. Similar eligibility membership-based criteria are applied to CLCs organised by the Singapore Association for the Deaf and the Tamils Representative Council. Some CLC organisers use means-testing based on income and other criteria as part of their registration criteria to determine whether or not someone is eligible for their *pro bono* services.<sup>13</sup> Most CLCs conduct their legal consultation sessions in the English language, though some offer Chinese dialect and Mandarin options,<sup>14</sup> as well as in Tamil<sup>15</sup> and Bahasa.<sup>16</sup>

This brief survey of the CLC landscape in Singapore suggests that this mode of delivering *pro bono* legal services to the wider community has proliferated significantly over the last decade or so. The success of the collaboration between the Law Society of Singapore and the Community Development Councils led to a renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding in 2017 to continue operating the Community Legal Pro Bono Services Network, which had helped more than 7,600 people since it commenced operations in 2014.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, a second Memorandum of Understanding was also signed in 2017 between these parties and the three Singapore law schools to facilitate this collaboration, with the Senior Minister of State for Law describing it “as a partnership for more law students to provide paralegal support at the Community Legal Clinics”, while encouraging students to recognise “[p]ro bono work ... [as] a valuable opportunity to pick up the skills and knowledge beyond what you can learn within the classroom.”<sup>18</sup>

At present, the direct involvement of law students in contributing to the *pro bono* work in legal clinic settings is exemplified by the weekly legal clinic run by the Pro Bono Centre at the Singapore Management University’s Yong Pung How School

<sup>12</sup> See <<https://iea.sg/for-members/free-legal-clinic/>>.

<sup>13</sup> These include the CLCs organised by the Catholic Lawyers’ Guild and the Singapore Indian Development Association (“SINDA”), both of which confine their services to legal issues pertaining to personal (rather than business or commercial) matters.

<sup>14</sup> According to PBSG’s website, these include clinics organised by the Boscombe Life Church (BLC Community Services Ltd), Bless Community Services and Potter’s Place Community Services Society.

<sup>15</sup> SINDA offers consultation sessions in both English and Tamil.

<sup>16</sup> Various mosques organise CLCs focusing on Syariah law matters, including the Al-Iman Mosque, Darul Arqam, Darul Ghufuran Mosque, Malabar Mosque and Sultan Mosque.

<sup>17</sup> Indranee Rajah SC, Senior Minister of State for Finance and Law, “Speech at the Launch of Law Awareness Week @CDC 2017 and Memorandum of Understanding Signing Ceremony” <<https://www.mlaw.gov.sg/news/speeches/speech-by-ms-indranee-rajah--senior-minister-of-state-for-minist/>> (28 September 2017) at [6]. The Senior Minister of State for Law, Ms Indranee Rajah, reported on 28 September 2017 that more than 146 law firms and 2052 lawyers had volunteered at the Community Legal Clinics.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid* at [11]–[12].

of Law, which offers legal consultation sessions to the members of the public by appointment.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the NUS Law Centre for Pro Bono and Clinical Legal Education was set up in October 2017 by the National University of Singapore's Faculty of Law, creating a "focal point under which both the *pro bono* and legal education programmes will be further developed" as well as "opportunities for NUS law students to learn their craft and advance the law, while supporting the community they live and work in."<sup>20</sup>

However, these law-school based *pro bono* work opportunities are not offered to specific geographical or sector-specific communities. It should also be noted that the current *status quo* comprises a large proportion of the law students participating in *pro bono* activities as volunteers in different legal clinic settings, primarily to satisfy a prescribed minimum number of *pro bono* hours as part of the law degree requirements, rather than being enrolled in structured clinical programmes that earn them academic credit for their law degrees. Furthermore, law students from these institutions are also able to meet their mandatory *pro bono* contribution targets outside of legal clinic settings, such as by volunteering at the organisations listed in Annex A which have inked various co-operative arrangements with the local law schools.

### III. *PRO BONO* WORK AT A COMMUNITY LEGAL CLINIC

CLCs are natural settings for clinical legal education programmes to operate within if the volunteer lawyers involved are prepared to take on the supervisory functions of clinical legal instructors. Participating in the *pro bono* activities of CLCs can expose law students to a broad range of legal issues connected to the substantive areas of law that are part of their core curriculum, while giving them opportunities to interact with a broad cross-section of the public who make use of CLCs.

This section aims to illustrate how the *pro bono* work of CLCs can provide a conducive learning environment for law students in which they get exposure to the real-world applications of substantive law as well as the framework of accompanying practical skills they need to exercise when dealing with "clients". Between 2013 and 2018, I had the opportunity to volunteer at a CLC in my neighbourhood. It was run by the Community Centre ("CC") of constituency X, with the administrative support of CC staff members, grassroot leaders and other non-legally trained volunteers. The demographic profile of constituency X was very diverse, with significant

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<sup>19</sup> The SMU Pro Bono Centre Legal Clinic conducts weekly consultation sessions at the SMU Law School's downtown campus on Friday evenings, over 10 months in a year, for about 300 applicants based on the following eligibility criteria: (i) the legal issue cannot relate to a "business, corporate or investment matter"; (ii) the applicant "must not have sought legal advice on the same matter before" and (iii) the applicant "must be from the low income or disadvantaged group". Applicants must not have already engaged a lawyer to act for them and "will not be able to return for a follow up consultation on the same matter" after their consultation session. Legal consultations are conducted with volunteer lawyers with the assistance of SMU law students. See <<https://pbc.smu.edu.sg/legal-clinic/about>>.

<sup>20</sup> Indranee Rajah SC, Senior Minister of State for Finance and Law, "Speech at the Launch of the NUS Law Centre for Pro Bono & Clinical Legal Education" <<https://www.mlaw.gov.sg/news/speeches/speech-by-ms-indranee-rajah--s-c/>> (31 October 2017) at [15].



proportions of its residents living in both public and private housing, ranging from rental flats to private dwellings and landed properties. The CLC was conducted once a month, with two volunteer lawyers meeting three to six registered attendees in one evening; each legal clinic session was conducted in a private space within the CC. During this period, we were regularly assisted by volunteer law students from the National University of Singapore (“NUS”), whose contributions to the running of the clinic included:

- (a) conducting pre-consultation interviews with the attendees, recording down in written form key factual details surrounding the relevant legal issues for which advice was sought;
- (b) presenting a summary of the case to the volunteer lawyers at the start of each consultation session;
- (c) assisting with online legal research, including locating digital resources relevant to the subject matter of the consultation session; and
- (d) managing printed legal resource materials (*ie*, pamphlets, guides, brochures) issued by various legal organisations in Singapore, and distributing them to attendees where appropriate.

Before each legal consultation session, the registered attendees completed registration forms on which key details of the legal issues they faced were recorded. Attendees did not have to disclose their income levels and were not subjected to means-testing, nor were they restricted to raising only personal legal issues for discussion with us. They were also required to sign against the following declaration printed on each registration form:

#### **DISCLAIMER OF LIABILITY**

I agree that the free legal counselling which I am about to receive is provided as a community service by the lawyer and is based on information given by me and believed by your Counsellors to be accurate and up-to-date.

I shall not hold the lawyer in any way liable whatsoever for any information or advice given to me. I confirm that I have not appointed any lawyer to act for me.

The main objective behind this disclaimer notice is to protect the volunteer lawyers from negligence liability against CLC attendees, though its efficacy would necessarily depend on whether or not it satisfies the statutory reasonableness test, an untested issue.<sup>21</sup>

#### *A. Empirical data from volunteering at a Community Legal Clinic (2013–2018)*

Data from the completed registration forms over the six-year period was anonymously extracted and analysed for this article with a view to capturing the

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<sup>21</sup> See the Unfair Contract Terms Act 1977 (2020 Rev Ed) at ss 2(2) and 2(3).

demographic profile of the laypersons who made use of the CLC’s legal consultation sessions, as well as to identify patterns of usage and the types of legal problems that the volunteer lawyers had to address.<sup>22</sup>

1. *Legal clinic attendees and “repeat visitors”*

Figure 1 summarises the number of legal clinic sessions that were conducted between 2013 and 2018, as well as the number of consultation sessions carried out in each year. The right-most column indicates the number of occasions when the attendee at a legal consultation session was a “repeat visitor”, meaning that they had spoken to us at least on one prior occasion that year.

**Figure 1:** Total legal clinic sessions and legal consultation sessions (by year)

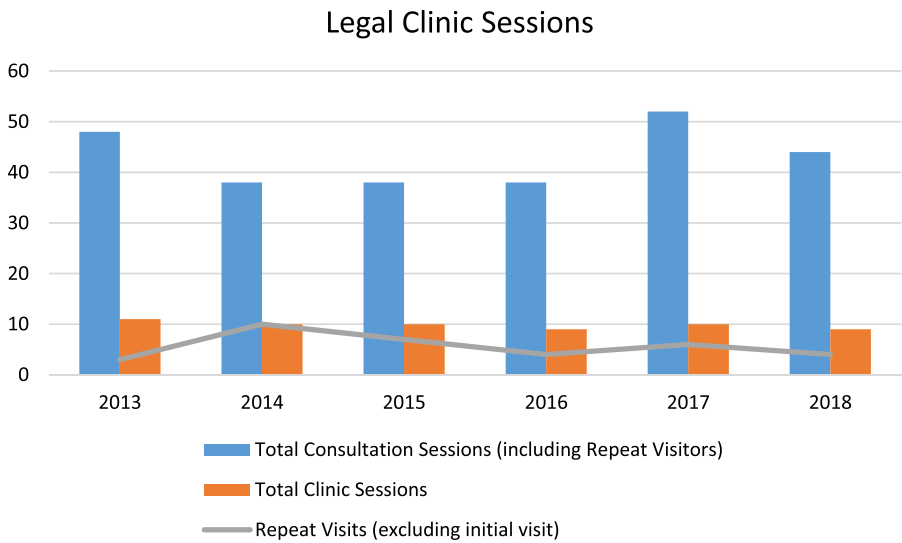
Year	Total Clinic Sessions	Total Consultation Sessions (including Repeat Visitors)	Repeat Visits (excluding Initial visit)
2013	11	48	3
2014	10	38	10
2015	10	38	7
2016	9	38	4
2017	10	52	6
2018	9	44	4
Total	59	258	34

The number of “repeat visitors” is not negligible and was relatively stable over the years. These are individuals with persistent legal issues who return to the CLC to seek advice on how to proceed with ongoing legal matters, such as accident claims, civil disputes and other drawn-out proceedings. Figure 2 provides a graphical representation of this phenomenon, which illustrates how some attendees are reliant on the guidance they receive from the CLC, possibly because of their familiarity with the volunteer lawyers (who were the only two providing *pro bono* legal services to this CLC during the entire time period). Over the six-year period analysed, there were 19 individuals who made repeat visits to the CLC, out of a total cohort of 224 unique individuals who registered for these sessions during this time period, a proportion of about 8.5% as illustrated in Figure 3 below.

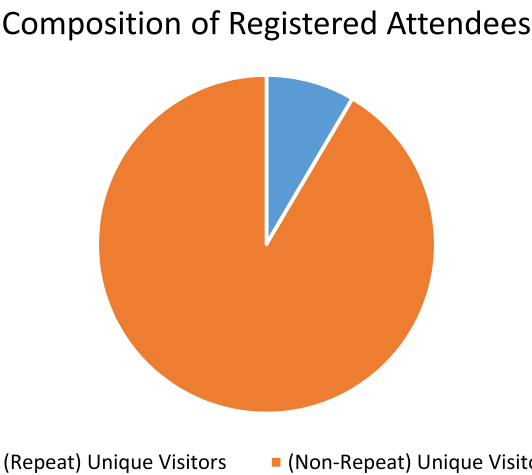
<sup>22</sup> My thanks to the organisers of the CLC in Constituency X for giving me access to, and allowing me to use and publish, the data (and descriptions of their operations) presented below for the purposes of academic research and analysis. To the best of the author’s knowledge, no comparable data about the *pro bono* work done at CLCs in Singapore is publicly available. Less granular aggregated data on the user profiles of another established legal clinic, which operates out of the SMU Pro Bono Centre rather than serving a specific geographical constituency, can be accessed from its 2019–2023 Annual Reports at <https://pbc.smu.edu.sg/about-us>.



**Figure 2:** Total legal clinic sessions and legal consultation sessions (bar graph, by year)



**Figure 3:** Numbers of unique visitors compared (collectively, between 2013–2018)



The phenomenon of “repeat visitors” may indicate the favourable perceptions of these attendees towards the legal consultation sessions they had previously attended. These individuals could have sought out professional legal representation from elsewhere to handle their legal affairs after their initial CLC session but chose to return for follow-up consultations at the CLC instead. Alternatively, these repeat visits might be motivated by economic considerations given that the legal counselling services provided at the CLC are free of charge. The law students who interacted with these “repeat visitors” were given a glimpse of the real-life trajectory of the legal issues encountered by these members of the public and the practical impact of the consultations they had with the volunteer lawyers.

2. Profile of attendees

The demographic profiles of the CLC attendees over the period studied were broadly consistent in some respects, but quite divergent in others. In terms of nationality, the vast majority were Singaporeans or Permanent Residents, with only a handful of foreigners registering for the CLC during this period, as shown in Figures 4 and 5 below. In terms of languages spoken, while the majority were conversant in English, a substantial number of attendees chose to communicate in Mandarin or one of the Chinese dialects, as shown in Figure 6. This created a language barrier for the volunteer lawyers who were not proficient in these languages, who had to rely on multi-lingual grassroots volunteers and student volunteers to provide *ad hoc* translation services when the attendee was not accompanied by a translator.

Figure 4: Nationalities of attendees (by year)

Year	Singaporean	PR	Foreigners
2013	41	7	0
2014	36	1	1
2015	36	2	0
2016	35	3	0
2017	47	3	2
2018	42	1	1
Sum total	237	17	4

Figure 5: Nationalities of attendees (collectively, between 2013–2018)

Nationality (Cumulative)

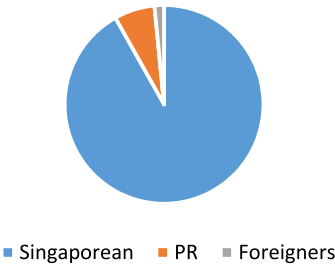


Figure 6: Languages spoken by attendees (by year)

Languages Spoken*	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
English	38	26	25	27	36	26	178
Chinese	14	11	9	11	14	17	76
Malay	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Tamil	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hindi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chinese Dialects (Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew, etc)	2	2	4	0	2	1	11

Greater variations were observed in three other aspects of the attendees’ profiles. Firstly, in terms of their age, there were representatives from all age groups, with some degree of concentration amongst the middle-aged, as shown in Figures 7 and 8. Secondly, in terms of their occupation, there was a mix of employed professionals, homemakers and retirees, as shown in Figures 9 and 10. Thirdly, in terms of their housing, while the majority of attendees lived in public housing, there were also significant numbers of private housing residents who registered for the legal consultation sessions at the CLC, as shown in Figures 11 and 12. Private property owners who registered for these legal consultation sessions instead of engaging their own legal counsel were possibly in the “asset-rich but cash-poor” class, or perhaps seeking preliminary views (or second opinions) on the legal merits of their case before deciding how to proceed with their respective legal matters.

Figure 7: Age of CLC attendees (by year)

Age Range	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Under 30	2	2	2	2	2	2
30-39	5	2	6	7	4	3
40-49	16	5	10	9	18	4
50-59	14	15	9	7	8	15
60-69	4	8	4	8	8	9
70-79	4	5	3	3	7	9
80-89	2	1	3	1	3	2
Unspecified	1	0	1	1	2	0
Total	48	38	38	38	52	44

Figure 8: Age of CLC attendees (collectively, between 2013–2018)

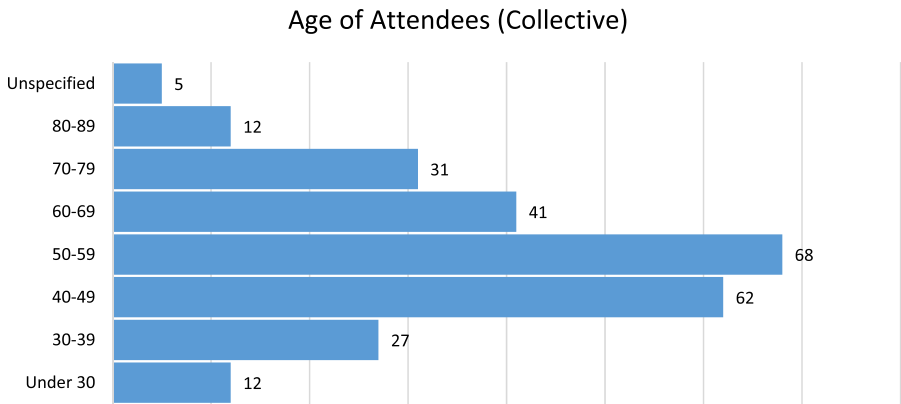


Figure 9: Occupations of CLC attendees (by year)

Occupation	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
PMET <sup>23</sup>	16	7	13	13	13	7
Homemaker/Unemployed	15	13	11	11	12	13
Civil Servant	6	2	1	2	4	2
Retiree	4	8	9	6	11	12
Employee	3	5	1	3	4	6
Self-employed	2	2	1	3	6	1
Student	1	0	0	0	0	0
Directors	0	0	0	0	2	0
Hawker	0	0	1	0	0	0
Part-timer	1	1	1	0	0	3

Figure 10: Occupations of CLC attendees (collectively, between 2013–2018)

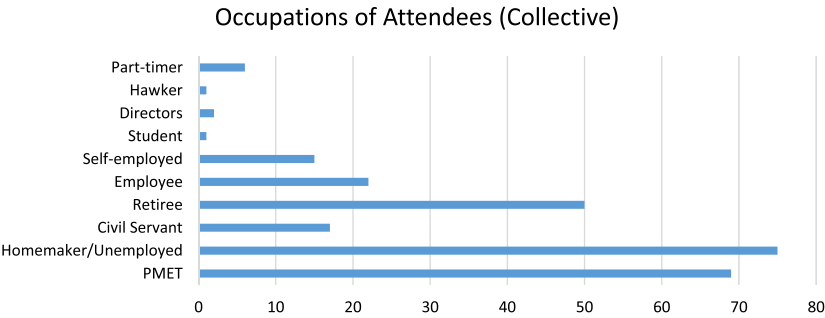
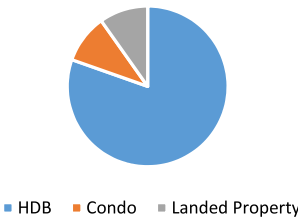


Figure 11: Housing types of CLC attendees (by year)

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Housing Development Board flats	36	29	35	28	41	36	205
Condominium	6	6	2	4	5	2	25
Landed Property	5	3	1	6	6	4	25
Overseas*	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Invalid Data*	1	0	0	0	0	1	2

Figure 12: Housing types of CLC attendees (collectively, between 2013–2018)

Housing Type (Collective)



<sup>23</sup> Professionals, Managers, Executives and Technicians.

### 3. Types of legal issues encountered

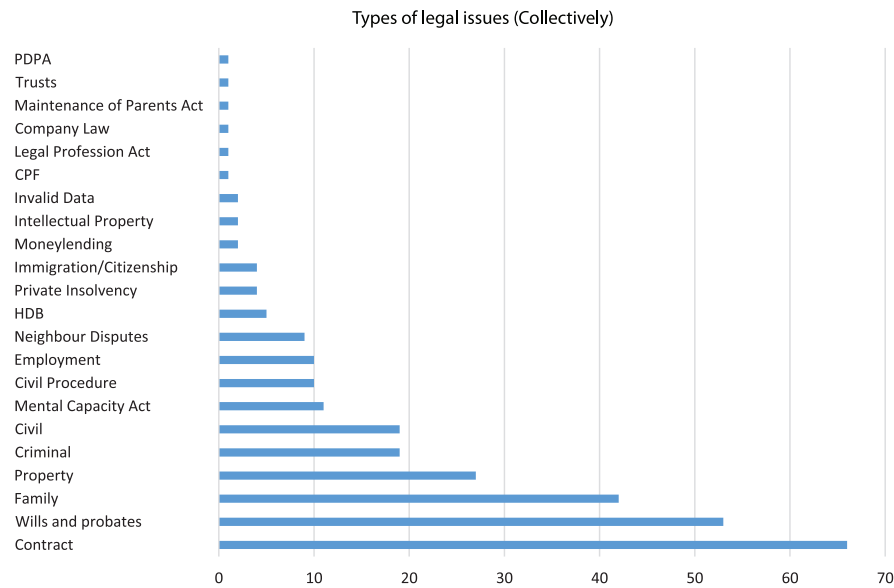
While there is a common perception that the majority of attendees at CLCs seek advice on matters relating to criminal law or family law, an analysis of the records from Constituency X reveals otherwise. The most frequent type of legal issue for consultation had to do with contract law matters. This spanned employment contract-related disputes, goods and services contracts, tenancy contracts and so forth. Attendees facing such issues sought guidance during the legal consultation sessions in the interpretation of their contractual terms, as well as information on the consequences of a breach of their contracts. Another trend observed at this CLC during this time period was the prevalence of property-related legal issues, where rising prices in the housing market also gave rise to family conflicts related to the occupation and ownership of family homes. Figures 13 and 14 capture this data below.

Another factor which influenced the type of legal issues raised by CLC attendees was the organisational links between those providing administrative support for the clinic and the grassroots volunteers running the constituency's "Meet-the-People Session" ("MPS") with the elected Member of Parliament ("MP") at a nearby location. When the MP's constituents sought help for problems that could not be resolved by sending letters to government agencies, but required legal advice or guidance, the MPS volunteers would arrange for these constituents to attend the CLC instead.

**Figure 13:** Types of legal issues raised for discussion by CLC attendees (by year)

Issues	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Contract	11	8	11	15	13	8	66
Wills and probates	7	11	9	9	12	5	53
Family	10	5	9	3	6	9	42
Property	3	4	7	5	3	5	27
Criminal	4	4	1	1	5	4	19
Civil	3	3	0	4	6	3	19
Mental Capacity Act	0	1	0	0	5	5	11
Civil Procedure	0	4	1	0	3	2	10
Employment	6	1	1	0	1	1	10
Neighbour Disputes	2	2	1	1	1	2	9
HDB	2	0	0	0	1	2	5
Private Insolvency	1	1	0	1	0	1	4
Immigration/Citizenship	1	0	0	0	2	1	4
Moneylending	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Intellectual Property	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Invalid Data	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
CPF	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Legal Profession Act	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Company Law	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Maintenance of Parents Act	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Trusts	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
PDPA	0	0	0	0	1	0	1

**Figure 14:** Types of legal issues raised for discussion by CLC attendees (collectively, between 2013–2018).



With contract law and criminal law as foundational subjects in the first-year core curriculum of all of Singapore’s law schools, the data suggests that many of the legal issues encountered in the course of the *pro bono* work of CLCs would be at least familiar to the average Singapore law student. This would strengthen the view that there is a clearly suitable environment for clinical legal education programmes to take root if law schools were minded to collaborate more closely with the organisations running CLCs and their volunteer lawyers. However, the nature of the interactions between CLC attendees and volunteer lawyers is likely to be more superficial than other settings where *pro bono* legal services are provided, possibly limiting the depth of the learning opportunities that law students assisting at CLCs might have as compared to other clinical legal education opportunities involving a smaller number of longer-term attendees. Unfortunately, Singapore’s legal and professional regulatory framework create challenges for volunteer lawyers to do more than just providing general information or legal advice to CLC attendees. This will be explained further below.

IV. REGULATORY CONSTRAINTS ON LAWYERS ENGAGED IN *PRO BONO* LEGAL WORK AT COMMUNITY LEGAL CLINICS

While there are no specific legal frameworks that govern the activities carried out at CLCs, the operation of statutes that regulate the Singapore legal profession, as well as the rules of the professional body that apply to legal practitioners, introduce significant limits on which lawyers may volunteer and what kinds of *pro bono* legal work they can engage in at these clinics.



Under the Legal Profession Act,<sup>24</sup> only lawyers who have been admitted to the rolls of the Supreme Court of Singapore and have been issued practising certificates are permitted to “practise as ... or do any act as an advocate or solicitor”,<sup>25</sup> which includes providing representation to any party in legal proceedings and preparing certain types of legal documents. Section 33 prohibits unauthorised persons from acting as an advocate or solicitor unless they can prove that their actions were not done for or in expectation of “any fee, gain or reward”. Specific acts prohibited by this provision include sending a “letter or notice threatening legal proceedings other than a letter or notice that the matter will be handed to a solicitor for legal proceedings”<sup>26</sup> and negotiating “in any way for the settlement of ... any claim arising out of personal injury or death founded upon a legal right or otherwise”.<sup>27</sup> Many of the types of legal issues raised by CLC attendees would entail such actions, which qualified volunteer lawyers are, in theory, permitted to assist with but – for the reasons described below – in practice are not able or willing to provide.

Volunteer lawyers with practising certificates are bound by professional rules which make it practically difficult for them to take on CLC attendees as fee-paying clients, even if these attendees want to engage them. Professional conduct and publicity rules<sup>28</sup> issued under the LPA restrict their ability to act for CLC attendees beyond their verbal consultation sessions. Rule 47(1) states that “[a] legal practitioner may give free legal advice to any person at or through any facility established with a view to providing legal assistance to members of the public” but Rules 47(2) and 47(3) restrict the lawyer’s ability to disclose information pertaining to their legal practice, prohibiting the distribution of business cards and any law firm publicity material to CLC attendees. More specifically, Rule 47(3)(b) states that “a legal practitioner must not in the course of giving free legal advice... act for any person to whom the legal practitioner has given such free legal advice, unless the legal practitioner acts for that person in a *pro bono* capacity.” Even if the matter was relatively straightforward and these lawyers were prepared to accept very modest fees to cover their costs, and even if the CLC attendees were prepared to pay such fees, the legal framework disallows such engagements.

Volunteer lawyers without practising certificates, but who are qualified solicitors under the LPA, such as in-house counsel and teaching faculty, have a special dispensation to engage in *pro bono* work under the Legal Profession (Pro Bono Legal Services) Rules 2013. These “non-practising solicitors” are exempted from the Section 33 LPA prohibition to the extent that they provided “permitted *pro bono* legal services”, which is defined as any legal service that a solicitor can perform

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<sup>24</sup> Legal Profession Act 1966 (2020 Rev Ed) [LPA].

<sup>25</sup> See *ibid* at ss 32(1) and 32(2). Unauthorised persons are prohibited from acting as advocates and solicitors under Section 33(1) of the LPA, *ibid*, which encompasses suing out “any writ, summons or process”, commencing or defending “action, suit or other proceeding ... in any of the courts in Singapore” or preparing “any document or instrument relating to any proceeding in the courts in Singapore”.

<sup>26</sup> LPA, *supra* note 24 at s 33(2)(d).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid* at s 33(2)(e).

<sup>28</sup> Legal Profession (Professional Conduct) Rules 2015. The guiding principle in Rule 37 is that the legal practitioner “must not engage in publicity, or procure any work or engagement for himself or herself, the law practice in which he or she practises or any other person, in circumstances which affect the dignity and standing of the legal profession.”

under the LPA apart from making appearances before the courts and tribunals, and “which are not provided for or in expectation of any fee, gain or reward.” However, this exemption from Section 33 LPA only applies to the provision of permitted *pro bono* services in any of the following circumstances:<sup>29</sup>

- (a) The services are provided under schemes “administered by” the Law Society, the State Courts or the Family Justice Courts;
- (b) The services are “provided directly to, or for the benefit of” any registered or exempt charities under the Charities Act;
- (c) The services are “provided directly to, or for the benefit of” any institution of public character;<sup>30</sup>
- (d) The services are “provided directly to, or for the benefit of” any voluntary welfare organisation that is a member of the National Council of Social Services.

The scope of this exemption for “non-practising solicitors” volunteering at CLCs could be more generous. While it covers CLCs “administered” by the Law Society and the courts, it does not apply to CLCs facilitated by other organisations in the same way except to the extent that the *pro bono* services are “provided directly to, or for the benefit of” the identified institutions. The real beneficiaries of *pro bono* work done at CLCs are the individual members of the public who attend these clinics, rather than the institutions organising them or providing administrative support. A less restrictive definition of the places where this group of volunteer lawyers can do *pro bono* work would make it easier for them to contribute to a broader range of CLCs. This would in turn create more opportunities for the development of clinical legal education programmes within grassroots-level CLCs if, for example, more Singapore law academics could serve at legal clinics that are not “administered by” the Law Society or the courts.

As a practical matter, both groups of volunteer lawyers may not be prepared to go beyond the provision of verbal advice or general legal information to CLC attendees because they are unwilling or unable to take on the latter as “clients”. The first group of volunteer lawyers are unlikely to take on cases from CLC attendees without the ability to collect any fees even where the latter are interested in engaging their services; that would financially prejudice their law practices. The second group of volunteer lawyers are limited to doing *pro bono* legal work within the strict confines of the exemption defined above and do not have professional liability insurance to protect themselves. Liability-conscious lawyers are likely to be particularly wary of exposing themselves to potential civil liability that might arise if their interactions with CLC attendees evolved into a lawyer-client relationship, given the possibility

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<sup>29</sup> Legal Profession (Pro Bono Legal Services) Rules 2013 at r 3(a)–(d).

<sup>30</sup> Institutions of Public Character (“IPCs”) are charities enjoying a special status for a period of time. In addition to the income tax and property tax benefits enjoyed by registered charities, IPCs are authorised to issue tax deduction receipts for qualifying donations received but are required to conduct activities that exclusively benefit the local community and are not confined to sectional interests or groups of persons based on race, belief or religion (unless this requirement is waived by the Minister of Culture, Community and Youth).

that an implied retainer could very well arise between them or affected third party family members.<sup>31</sup>

These *status quo* limitations on the nature of the *pro bono* work that can take place at CLCs diminish the attractiveness of these settings as platforms for clinical legal education. If volunteer lawyers are discouraged from going beyond, or are unable to go beyond, “legal counselling” or “advice” functions and do not follow up with document-drafting or client-representation activities, then volunteer law students will only be exposed to a very small slice of the work done by legal professionals and will not get the chance to assist with cases in a more meaningful way.

Based on my experience volunteering at constituency X, examples of scenarios where the constraints described above may frustrate the efforts of volunteer lawyers at CLCs to do “more” to help in cases they encounter from legal consultation sessions are summarised below:

- (a) Attendee A wants to prepare a simple will and grant a Lasting Power of Attorney to their spouse. Can, or should, the volunteer lawyer assist with these tasks beyond telling the attendee to look up the Law Society’s directory of lawyers and approach another lawyer to take instructions? Can the volunteer lawyer and the other volunteers in the clinic, who have already spent time with A to understand their surrounding factual circumstances, produce draft text for A or help A complete the relevant online forms?
- (b) Attendee B wants to file a divorce petition. Can, or should, the volunteer lawyer prepare a written statement summarising the relevant facts which B can use as a litigant in person, or should they simply be given information on the relevant substantive and procedural aspects of Singapore’s Family Law system?
- (c) Attendee C has received a letter of demand which they believe is unmeritorious. If C lacks the ability to communicate his position clearly in writing, can or should the volunteer lawyer – who has already spent some time figuring out the facts surrounding C’s situation – draft a couple of paragraphs of text in plain language for C to use as part of their correspondence with the other side?

#### V. OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE THE *PRO BONO* WORK OF COMMUNITY LEGAL CLINICS THROUGH CLINICAL LEGAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

Despite the challenges discussed above, there are plenty of advantages associated with the participation of volunteer law students in the *pro bono* work of CLCs, particularly if this involvement is formalised through the systematic integration of clinical legal education programmes.

Firstly, the addition of these law student volunteers to the manpower team could substantially alleviate the time constraints surrounding each legal consultation

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<sup>31</sup> See Leong, Loke & Ong, “The Conceptual Basis of the Solicitor’s Liability to a Third Party related to the Client: reconstructing the *White v Jones* principle in Singapore” (2016) 32 Journal of Professional Negligence 30.

session. If adequately trained, these volunteers would be well-placed to conduct pre-consultation interviews with CLC attendees before they meet with volunteer lawyers. If appropriate facts are extracted from these interviews by discerning law student volunteers, then less time needs to be spent diagnosing the legal problems with the volunteer lawyers and more time can be spent exploring possible solutions. This could enable the organisers of CLCs to make these *pro bono* legal services available to more attendees.

Secondly, having law student volunteers with a wider range of language skills could be a valuable asset to the work of CLCs. Language barriers between volunteer lawyers and attendees are a frequent occurrence, particularly when the latter are from minority communities (including the elderly and foreigners). Many laypersons seeking legal advice are unable to communicate, or are uncomfortable communicating, in English and are not accompanied by trusted individuals who can provide them with accurate translations. This can be remedied by identifying the languages spoken by the attendees at the pre-registration stage and arranging for student volunteers with the appropriate language skills to be present at the relevant legal consultation session.

Thirdly, volunteer law students can contribute substantively to the legal consultation sessions to the extent that they may be more familiar with the current state of the law, unlike the volunteer lawyers they are assisting who may not have kept up with the latest developments. Law students may also have sharper research skills that enable them to find the information necessary to facilitate a resolution of the case being reviewed by a less technologically-savvy volunteer lawyer.

These different contributions can be packaged together within a clinical legal education programme which provides law students a structured framework within which they can provide facilitative support to the *pro bono* work of CLC sessions, drawing upon their legal knowledge and skillsets in the process. The growth of the CLC ecosystem in Singapore in the last decade opens up the possibility of significantly increasing the number of clinic-based learning opportunities for interested law students in Singapore, building on the existing programmes currently run in our law schools.

At NUS, formally structured clinical education modules are implemented through faculty-led legal clinics with very low staff-student ratios. NUS has collaborated with the Singapore government's Legal Aid Bureau ("LAB") since 2008 through a formalised arrangement where specifically appointed faculty members are authorised to supervise law students enrolled in an elective module, which enables them to earn academic credits for working on LAB cases under the staff member's close supervision. The curriculum of this clinical legal education collaboration between NUS and LAB is primarily skills-focused, with law students taking part in client meetings, drafting attendance notes, affidavits and submissions, and attending court hearings; in the course of their work, they would be exposed to the less privileged segments of society while being "exposed ... to the possibilities of doing community-based lawyering ... beyond the glamour of high-end litigation and international corporate deals".<sup>32</sup>

Unlike the NUS-model for clinical legal education, which is centred around individual clients and cases, the approach taken at the Singapore Management

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<sup>32</sup> See Lim Lei Theng, "NUS Law @ LAB – Clinical Legal Education in Singapore", Law Gazette <<https://lawgazette.com.sg/news/updates/nus-law-lab/>> (October 2018).

University's Yong Pung How School of Law ("SMU") is to operate its own in-house legal clinic, run by the SMU Pro Bono Centre since 2013 and staffed by a roster of external volunteer lawyers, where law students can volunteer to be paired with attending volunteer lawyers to assist with "taking instructions from the client, providing research, performing note-taking, and so forth."<sup>33</sup> In preparation for their service at this school-based clinic, students receive training in "particular legal skills such as fact investigation, client interviewing, negotiation, mediation, problem solving, counselling, ethics and professional values", and have access to a comprehensive student manual covering the different aspects of the clinic's *pro bono* work.<sup>34</sup>

Both the NUS and SMU clinical legal education models are viable starting points for tailoring a more ambitious programme which integrates this pedagogical approach into the operations of the wider national network of CLCs across Singapore.<sup>35</sup> In the last decade, hundreds of law students have already contributed their time to, and benefited from volunteering at, many of the legal assistance schemes listed in Annex A below. The way forward would be to build on these experiences and bring the institutional relationship between the organisers of CLCs and the law schools to the next level, where suitable volunteer lawyers at CLCs are concurrently appointed as clinical instructors to execute clinical legal education programmes on behalf of the law schools at these legal clinics. This will require volunteer lawyers at CLCs to take active supervisory roles over the contributions of law students to the *pro bono* work of CLCs: the latter are not just there to shadow the former, but should also receive "hands-on training" that involves the practical application of their legal knowledge and skills to the legal problems of those who attend these legal clinics. This sort of mentorship relationship reinforces one of the most cherished features of the legal profession, where current commercial realities facing law firms make "formal structured mentoring ... challenging to implement".<sup>36</sup>

Making it possible for law students to earn academic credits for their contributions to the *pro bono* work of CLCs would thus alter the nature of the law students' participation in these clinics, with the focus shifting away from altruistic volunteerism to a model of service-based learning.<sup>37</sup> Learning objectives can be pre-defined by the volunteer lawyer cum clinical instructor and strategies for their

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<sup>33</sup> See Koman & Whalen-Bridge, "Clinical Legal Education in Singapore", in Sarker eds. *Clinical Education in Asia: Accessing Justice for the Underprivileged* (United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan New York, 2015) 137 at 145.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid* at pages 145–146.

<sup>35</sup> The approach taken at these two law schools is quite different from the organisational framework of the *pro bono* programme at the third law school, the SUSS School of Law, which is executed by a Pro Bono Student Committee ("PBSC"). Under this model, in order to ensure that SUSS law students perform the prescribed "20 hours of approved *pro bono* work as part of their graduating requirements", the PBSC matches law students with *pro bono* volunteering opportunities at various legal clinics – including the Catholic Lawyer's Guild Legal Clinic, the Migrant Workers' Legal Clinic, the Queenstown CC Legal Clinic, and the Frontier Community Legal Clinic. See <<https://susschooloflaw.com/probono/>>.

<sup>36</sup> Aurill Kam, "Mentoring", *Law Gazette* (August 2021) <<https://lawgazette.com.sg/feature/mentoring/>>.

<sup>37</sup> Service-learning, which incorporates elements of community service and community engagement, has been implemented at the Pre-University level across Singapore's schools since the 2000s. See Chua, "Rethinking Community-Service Education in Singapore Schools", (2010) *Social Space* 94 <[https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?params=/context/lien\\_research/article/1047/&path\\_info=Chua\\_Cheng\\_Chye\\_Rethinking\\_Community\\_Service\\_Education\\_in\\_Singapore\\_Schools.pdf](https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?params=/context/lien_research/article/1047/&path_info=Chua_Cheng_Chye_Rethinking_Community_Service_Education_in_Singapore_Schools.pdf)>.

achievement may be consciously pursued to ensure that enrolled students actually achieve desired milestones over the prescribed duration of the module.

The *pro bono* activities of CLCs become more sustainable with the support of an integrated clinical legal education programme. Enrolled students commit themselves to contributing to the legal clinic over a clearly specified period of time, providing CLC organisers and volunteer lawyers with more manpower certainty, which could then lead to an increase in the number of legal consultation sessions being made available each time the clinic is open. Furthermore, law students who have earned their stripes from completing such a programme, and who go on to become qualified lawyers further down the road, may well be recruited to serve as volunteer lawyers at other CLCs later in future.

## VI. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article has sought to explain some of the more obvious synergies that can be reaped by integrating clinical legal education programmes into the *pro bono* activities of CLCs. All the relevant stakeholders stand to benefit from such cooperative arrangements. Volunteer lawyers and CLC organisers can benefit from the time-saving efficiencies arising from the students' supporting contributions to the legal consultation sessions. CLC attendees can benefit from the students' help in succinctly presenting their cases to the volunteer lawyers. Students can benefit from their exposure to a broad range of community law issues and opportunities to exercise client interaction skills that are relevant to their future professional careers. Organisations responsible for running CLCs and law schools just need appropriate encouragement and incentives to realise these benefits.

Any attempt to develop clinical legal education programmes to support the *pro bono* activities of CLCs must be bolstered by concurrent efforts to enhance the operational success of CLCs. The higher the quality of the *pro bono* legal services offered to clinic attendees by volunteer lawyers, the more conducive the learning environment for law students who participate in such clinics. A way forward is suggested in the following three recommendations.

Firstly, statutory reforms to the *Legal Profession Act* and its subsidiary legislation should be made to reform the scope of the *pro bono* work that volunteer lawyers can do at CLCs, clarifying, for example, the settings in which volunteer lawyers can give legal advice to individual members of the public and carving out the possibility of fair remuneration for such services. Liability-conscious members of the legal profession are also likely to greatly appreciate some form of limited legal immunity when making *pro bono* contributions to CLCs.

Secondly, the Law Society of Singapore could introduce more detailed ethical guidelines to explain how the *Legal Professional Conduct* rules ought to be applied within the specific context of CLCs, providing, in particular, more concrete guidance on the extent to which volunteer lawyers may give assistance to attendees beyond simply giving them verbal advice or pointing them in the direction of other professional legal advisors. Guidelines should also be available to the very sizeable



population of non-practising qualified lawyers who might want to contribute to the *pro bono* work of CLCs.

Thirdly, PBSG should develop a comprehensive clinical legal education programme in partnership with the local tertiary educational institutions, building on the existing programmes that have already been established at their law schools, that enable law students to fulfil their academic credit requirements while making valuable contributions to the *pro bono* work of Singapore's Community Legal Clinics.

### Annex A

Scheme	Agency/ Organisation	Eligibility Criteria	Allocation of Lawyer
Legal Aid Bureau (LAB) <sup>38</sup>	Ministry of Law	Singapore Citizen or Permanent Resident Average Per Capita Gross Monthly Household Income (PCHI) ≤ \$950 for the last 12 months prior to the application The Annual Value of applicant's place of residence owned by the applicant ≤ \$13,000 Savings and non-CPF investments ≤ \$10,000 (if applicant is younger than 60 years old) Savings and non-CPF investments ≤ \$40,000 (if applicant is aged 60 and above) Applicant must not own any other property besides his/her place of residence	Legal aid recipients are assigned either an in-house LAB lawyer (known as a Legal Officer) or a private practitioner (known as an Assigned Solicitor). <sup>39</sup>
Family Justice Support Scheme (FJSS) <sup>40</sup>	Pro Bono SG	Foreign spouses with Singaporean children ( <i>pro bono</i> legal representation) Monthly per capita income ≤ \$950 Single place of residence, annual value ≤ \$13,000 Savings and non-CPF investments ≤ \$10,000 (\$40,000 for elderly applicant aged 60 and above) Singaporeans/Permanent Residents (referral to FJSS Panel Lawyers, representation at reduced charges) Rejected by LAB due to marginal means (letter provided) Monthly per capita income ≤ \$1,400 Single place of residence, annual value ≤ \$21,000 Savings and non-CPF investments ≤ \$12,000 (\$12,001-\$14,000: subject to Committee approval if exceptional circumstances exist)	Eligible applicants are assisted by lawyers from a panel of approximately 60 family lawyers either on a <i>pro bono</i> basis or at discounted rates. <sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Legal Aid Bureau, "Taking the Means Test" <<https://lab.mlaw.gov.sg/legal-services/taking-the-means-test/>>.

<sup>39</sup> Legal Aid Bureau, "After Aid is Granted" <<https://lab.mlaw.gov.sg/legal-services/after-aid-is-granted/>>.

<sup>40</sup> Pro Bono SG, "Legal Representation" <<https://www.probono.sg/get-legal-help/legal-representation/>>.

<sup>41</sup> Selina Lum, "Foreign spouses, sandwich class get legal aid in new scheme", *Straits Times* (19 October 2022) <<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/foreign-spouses-sandwich-class-get-legal-aid-in-new-scheme>>.

Scheme	Agency/ Organisation	Eligibility Criteria	Allocation of Lawyer
Criminal Legal Aid Scheme (CLAS) <sup>42</sup>	Pro Bono SG	Residing in Singapore (locals / foreigners); Annual disposable income and disposable capital < S\$10,000. Charged in Court for offence(s) under statutes covered by CLAS (most common offences are covered)  Note: With effect from 1 December 2022, all Singaporean/Permanent Residents (“SGPR”) seeking to apply for criminal legal aid may do so through the Public Defender’s Office (see below). CLAS will no longer be accepting any new applications for criminal legal aid from all SGPR applicants, but will continue to accept new applications for criminal legal aid from Foreign Applicants (based in Singapore) who meet the requirements stipulated. <sup>43</sup>	Lawyers are assigned to eligible applicants to represent the latter in court proceedings. <sup>44</sup>
Primary Justice Project (PJP) <sup>45</sup>	Community Justice Centre	Criminal matters Annual disposable income of not more than S\$12,000. Plea bargain only (i.e. pleading guilty) at \$1,000 fixed fee up to 3 hours  Fixed fee; legal advice and amicable settlement of disputes Case involves: (i) Settlement of matrimonial ancillary matters (ii) Monetary claims below S\$60,000 (iii) Harassment and Neighbour disputes. 1st appt: \$300 legal fees + \$100 admin fee; 2nd appt: \$1,500 (\$300/hr capped at 5hrs)	Eligible applicants are assigned to lawyers who provide basic legal advice and facilitate the settlement of disputes. <sup>46</sup>
Public Defender’s Office (PDO) <sup>47</sup>	Ministry of Law	Singapore Citizen or Permanent Resident; Applicant must not own more than one property, and the annual value of the property ≤ \$13,000 Average monthly per capita household income (PCHI) ≤ \$1,500 Savings and investment ≤ \$10,000 (if applicant is below 60 years old) Savings and investment ≤ \$40,000 (if applicant is 60 years old and below)	Eligible accused persons will be assigned to a Public Defender or referred to Pro Bono SG who will then assign a volunteer private lawyer to the accused person. <sup>48</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Law Society Pro Bono Services, “Criminal Legal Aid Scheme” <<https://www.lawsocprobono.org/Pages/Criminal-Legal-Aid-Scheme.aspx>>.

<sup>43</sup> CLAS Application Form <<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=2SIByMB8W06hRKsXHMIqYjaiKTZQ7t1MhWjY6SxQC9pUNTQ4TVc1WEIIVFpBODBMTFZUNjY5V0FCTyQlQCN0PWcu>>.

<sup>44</sup> Singapore Courts, “Seek help for a criminal case” <<https://www.judiciary.gov.sg/legal-help-support/criminal-case>>.

<sup>45</sup> Community Justice Centre, “Primary Justice Project” <<https://cjc.org.sg/services/legal-services/primary-justice-project/>>.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Public Defender’s Office, “Qualifying for help” <<https://pdo.mlaw.gov.sg/criminal-defence-aid/qualifying-for-help/>>.

<sup>48</sup> Public Defender’s Office, “Scope of Assistance” <<https://pdo.mlaw.gov.sg/criminal-defence-aid/scope-of-assistance/>>.