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2024 Cape Town ProBono.Org Awards

By Masi Ncube, Regional Manager



L-R: Candice Pillay, Vuyani Lallie, Judge Siraj Desai, Shafie Ameermia, Igshaan Higgans and Andries Vermeulen

2024 Cape Town ProBono.Org Awards

The Cape Town office of ProBono.Org celebrated its Annual ProBono.Org Awards on 13 November 2024 to commend the outstanding pro bono work done by its volunteer legal practitioners and partners in 2023 and 2024. The Awards Ceremony celebrates the contributions of attorneys, advocates, Non-Profit Organisations, Community-Based Organisations and public servants as it recognises the multi-stakeholder approach required to achieve access to justice for all. Oftentimes, the downtrodden, marginalised and vulnerable are left to struggle alone when facing seemingly insurmountable legal disputes which may lead many people to believe that the enforcement of constitutional rights (especially in civil matters) is a pipe dream. This belief is further perpetuated by the increasing inequalities in our society coupled with the high cost of legal services. However, the everlasting hope burns within each and every winner awarded during the ceremony that compassion and justice are still alive.

Judge Siraj Desai, the Legal Services Ombud, delivered a riveting keynote address that made clear that South Africa's hard-earned triumph against the apartheid regime could not have been achieved without pro bono legal assistance. Judge Desai emphasised that although we are 30 years into our constitutional dispensation, pro bono legal assistance is needed now more than ever considering the vast socio-economic disparities found in our society. Judge Desai urged legal practitioners to relook at their fee structures and to render their services ethically in order for all seeking legal assistance to be treated fairly no matter their economic background.

ProBono.Org awarded those who went above and beyond to volunteer their time, efforts and expertise to uplift and empower. Attorneys, advocates and mediators on ProBono.Org's panel take on matters, present workshops, staff legal clinics as well as present webinars for the benefit of those in need. In doing so, people who once did not have access to justice get an opportunity to engage meaningfully in our legal system.

The legal practitioners who were acknowledged as part of ProBono.Org's appreciation list are as follows:

1. Trudie Broekmann from Trudie Broekmann Attorneys
2. Advocate Mthunzi Baba
3. Trinka de Vos from de Vos Attorneys
4. Advocate Joseph Swanson
5. Gillian Erasmus from Gillian Erasmus Attorneys
6. Andrea and Mpho from Goliath & Co
7. Matthew Coetzee from Robert Charles Attorneys & Conveyancers
8. Natalie MacDonald-Spence from Spence Inc
9. Dr Ashraf Booley and Prof Muneer Abduroof from the University of Western Cape
10. Elke Herbst from Bissets Boehmke McBlain
11. Lawrence de Swart and Bridget Henry from LDS
12. Kirsten van der Walt from Combrink Attorneys
13. Byron O'Connor, Ugendran Odayar, Gary Rademeyer, Brent Botha, Heinrich Nienaber, Malcom Hartwell, Sa'ood Lahri, Felix Le Roux and Sarah- Jade Mckillop from Norton Rose Fulbright

Awards were also made in specific categories:

1. Law Firm Staffing the Most Legal Clinics: Langehoven Attorneys Inc
2. Law Firm Accepting the Most Pro Bono Matters: Debra Gouws Attorneys Inc
3. Most Active Newcomer: A Fotoh Attorneys
4. Most Active Community Development Worker: Bukelwa Hendry
5. NPO Hosting the Most Legal Education Workshops: Saartjie Baartman Centre for Women and Children
6. Law Firm Staffing the Most Virtual Legal Clinics: Norton Rose Fulbright
7. Most Active Labour Law Firm: Colin Geoffreys Inc
8. Law Firm Presenting the Most Webinars: Norton Rose Fulbright
9. Law Firm Staffing the Most Refugee Legal Clinics: Bowmans
10. Law Firm Accepting the Most Wills Instructions: BVPG Attorneys
11. Community-Based Organisation Facilitating the Most Legal Clinics: Bonteheuwel Walking Ladies

Congratulations to all the winners and thank you to all who contribute to the realisation of access to justice. ProBono.Org is also very grateful to Norton Rose Fulbright and Briefco for sponsoring the event.

A message from the National Director, Mohamed Shafie Ameermia

On behalf of the Chairperson of the Board, Meluleki Nzimande and all board members (past and present), we take this opportunity to express our heartfelt appreciation and gratitude to all our donors, staff members, volunteers, interns, clients and members of the organised legal profession, who have contributed to the immense success of our organisation in 2024.

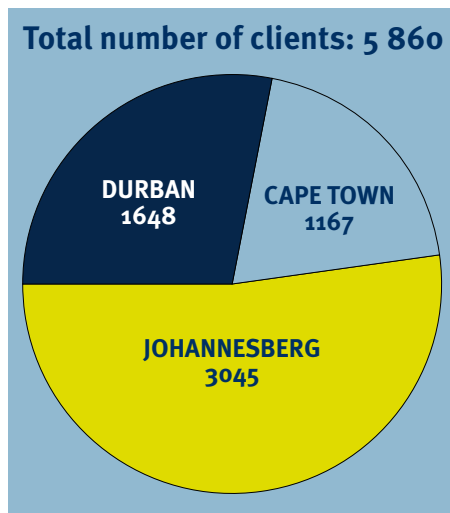
Through our three regional offices, in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, together with our 30 staff members at ProBono.Org, and with our network of Community Advice Centres (CAOs), we attended to 5,860 cases, serving marginalised and indigent clients.

Our strategic collaboration partnership initiatives with civil society, aimed at facilitating positive impactful relationships with various stakeholders across the board, yielded excellent benefits for ProBono.Org and its constituent stakeholders. In this regard, we would like to thank Ashraful Aid for their magnanimous and continued generous support in ensuring that all our poor and indigent clients are provided with tea, coffee and biscuits. This initiative has been supplemented by generous donations from Spiritual Chords, a local NGO, who provide all our walk-in clients with free sandwiches whilst they wait for their consultations.

A heartfelt appreciation and a special thank you to the Empire Partner Foundation (EPF) for their donation of a world class innovative IT case management system to upgrade the IT platform at ProBono.Org. They also hosted our podcast series at their offices on various legal topics to inform the community about the services that we provide

and to encourage legal practitioners to sign up to do their pro bono hours through ProBono.Org.

I would be remiss if I did not thank Mr. A.B. Moosa, CEO of the Avalon Group of Companies, who provided ProBono.Org free use of all their countrywide cinemas to all ProBono.Org patrons and donors, to enjoy some insightful social justice impact movies.



Since my appointment as National Director, we have embarked on some public interest law litigation. We used our clearing house model to engage the legal services of Norton Rose Fulbright SA Inc., the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) and the Office of the Presidency of the Republic of South Africa, to assist Caster Semenya, our iconic athlete, to access her rights and be properly represented in the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France, on 15 May 2024.

Later in the year, ProBono.Org once again helped to provide the 77 victims of the fire at the Usindiso building in downtown Johannesburg with legal assistance from Norton Rose Fulbright SA Inc. Grateful thanks to Andy Chinnah, a civil

rights activist, and the Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALs), who made the facility at the University of the Witwatersrand available for consultations for these victims who later appeared before the Khampepe Commission of Inquiry which eventually held the City of Johannesburg liable for the disaster.

Once again, our strategic partner Ashraful Aid generously provided food to the Usindiso fire survivors for the duration of this long and difficult case.

Despite a successful outcome in favour of the victims, they continue to face hardships to vindicate their rights. For the victims and their loved ones, the road ahead is unfortunately a long one, but we continue with fortitude and fervour to secure their rights to live in equality and dignity.

We look forward to the new year and beyond, alive with its challenges and opportunities. We are hopeful that in the strides we have made in 2024, the organised legal profession, the diplomatic and the donor communities will actively support ProBono.Org and join hands with us to make Access to Justice for all a lived reality.

A special thank you to all the staff, interns and volunteers at ProBono.Org for their selfless contributions. Your efforts help to make us successful in serving humanity with dignity to live in freedom and equality.

We wish everyone a wonderful, restful and safe festive season.

EVENTS

International Children's Day

By Daphne Makombe, Legal Consultant, OCAY and Refugee Project



International Children's Day is a global celebration recognising the rights and well-being of children worldwide. In South Africa, various organisations, communities and government entities come together to commemorate this special day, emphasising the country's commitment to its youngest citizens.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), sets out the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of children. South Africa is a signatory to the CRC. The South African Constitution also enshrines the rights of children, including the right to dignity, equality, and protection from exploitation.

On 2 November 2024, the One Child A Year (OCAY) Project at ProBono.Org Johannesburg collaborated with Constitution Hill and LALELA Life Changing Art to commemorate International Children's day under the theme "One child at a time, each child matters all the time."

The celebrations kicked off with a fun-filled tour of Constitution Hill,

giving children and their parents a unique opportunity to explore this iconic site and learn about its importance in South African history.

We were thrilled to have Nonala Tose Dagada, a celebrated radio personality, participate in our celebration, bringing joy and motivation to the children who attended. She added a sparkle to our event, interacting with the children and parents and leaving a lasting impression. Ms Dagada provided a thought-provoking presentation on the sensitive topic of sexting among children, sparking discussions and raising awareness about online safety and digital responsibility.

With her infectious passion for empowering young minds, the charismatic Selokela Slu Molamodi, a household name in radio broadcasting, led an interactive discussion on menstruation, breaking down stigmas and fostering inclusivity among the children, including enthusiastic participation from the boys.

The OCAY staff shed light on the often-overlooked issue of undocumented children, informing parents about the laws and policies governing their right to education and encouraging advocacy for their educational rights.

The event included a fun and interactive art crafting workshop, where parents and children worked side by side to create colourful and innovative art pieces. LALELA facilitated the delightful session, where the parents and children explored their creativity together and produced beautiful and meaningful works of art.

The celebrations served as a poignant reminder of the importance of protecting and promoting the rights of children. As we move forward, let us continue to prioritise the well-being and development of our youngest citizens. Every day is an opportunity to make a positive impact on the lives of our children. The true spirit of this day was about creating a world where every child can grow, learn and thrive.

Birth Registration Workshop in Musina

By Aphiwe Nonyukela - Staff Attorney, and Daphne Makombe - Legal Consultant

On 5 November 2024 ProBono.Org hosted a workshop on birth registration in collaboration with the Messina Legal Advice Office (MLAO) and CoRMSA. It was a successful awareness workshop. We wish to express our gratitude to the officials from the Department of Home Affairs Musina, who took time to educate the community on the birth registration process.

After the workshop MLAO expressed their appreciation in a thoughtful letter. Here is an extract:

“Thanks to your support, we were able to reach a wider audience, facilitate meaningful conversations, and develop actionable strategies that will



continue to drive progress in birth registration across our communities. The workshop has truly laid the foundation for a more informed and engaged society, and we are grateful for your partnership in this important initiative.

We look forward to continuing our collaboration with ProBono.Org as

we work together toward a brighter future for families and children.

Once again, thank you for your generosity, dedication, and the difference you are helping to make in the lives of citizens and the migrant community. James Chirwa”. ●

Public Interest Law Gathering 2024

ProBono.Org was honoured to be a part of the Public Interest Law Gathering (PILG) 2024. The theme: The New Possibilities & Challenges presented by a GNU World, covered a range of topics in relation to the work of the civil society sector. This varied from issues on climate justice, shrinking funding in the sector, access to justice and the importance of mental health for human rights defenders.

Our legal team organised a panel discussion on the impact of the new Minister of Home Affairs on refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented minor policies in South Africa. Grateful thanks to Thifulufheli Sinthumule from CoRMSA and James Chapman from the Scalabrini Centre of Cape Town for contributing to an interesting discussion. A special thanks also to our interns for assisting with the registration process. ●



16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children



ProBono.Org Durban commemorated the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children from 25 November to 10 December 2024, with several impactful activities aimed at raising awareness and providing support.

On 27 November the Durban office hosted a special help desk at the Point Magistrates' Court, focusing on assisting clients in the domestic violence section with legal support. Additionally, the team conducted radio

interviews to discuss the socio-economic impact of gender-based violence and the legal avenues available for survivors.

Further community engagement took place on 5 and 6 December. ProBono.Org Durban hosted seminars at a women's shelter and in the semi-rural area of KwaNdengezi to educate and empower local communities, raising awareness about the importance of combating gender-based violence and the resources available for those affected. ●



Maintenance help desk opened at Cape Town Regional Magistrate's Office

By Siphokazi Mlindazwe, Staff Attorney

In alignment with the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign, ProBono.Org is proud to announce the launch of the Maintenance Help Desk at the Cape Town Regional Magistrate's Court which took place on 5 November 2024. This helpdesk aims to provide much needed legal assistance to individuals navigating maintenance related challenges, ensuring greater access to justice, especially to the most vulnerable members of our society. Moreover, this initiative addresses a critical yet overlooked form of abuse - financial abuse - which is a prevalent aspect of Gender-Based Violence (GBV).

Financial abuse occurs when abusers control or withhold financial resources, leaving victims trapped in cycles of dependence unable to break free from abusive relationships. For many of the help desk clients securing maintenance orders for themselves or their children, maintenance is not just a legal battle but a vital step to reclaiming their dignity and financial independence.

The Maintenance help desk provides the following assistance to those affected by financial abuse:

- Assistance with drafting and filing maintenance applications
- Guidance on enforcing existing maintenance orders on non-compliant parties
- Other legal advice and support to clients navigating the legal system where maintenance and gender-based violence is concerned.

By empowering our clients with the legal tools and



knowledge to secure financial support, this help desk plays a pivotal role in breaking the cycle of abuse in Cape Town and surrounds. It also ensures that parents, guardians and dependants have the opportunity to build safer and stable lives.

We commend the legal practitioners who have staffed this help desk by volunteering their time to this cause and the Cape Town Magistrate's Court for its collaboration in making this service a reality. Together we are working towards a society where legal assistance and justice is easily accessible, and financial abuse is no longer a barrier to freedom for survivors of GBV. ●

Community Advice Offices Come Together

On 21 October 2024, the Johannesburg team met with the six partner community advice offices, namely the Dobsonville Human Rights Advice Office, Orange Farm Human Rights Advice Centre, Thusang Morwalo Advice Centre, Ntsu Advice Office, Kempton Park/Tembisa Advice Office and WATLA. The purpose of the meeting was to check in on the implementation of programmes and to discuss challenges and opportunities, particularly within the context of the GNU. The meeting was incredibly insightful and fruitful. ●



Letters of Appreciation

Varsity College

As our partnership with Varsity College comes to an end, they have expressed appreciation for the opportunity given to their law students to get a taste of working in a law firm.

“We deeply value the relationship we have built with Probono.Org over the years. It has been an enriching journey for our institution, and we truly appreciate the dedication and effort you have invested in equipping our students with essential skills and attitudes for a successful legal career.”

Sharna-Lee Clarke, Deputy Dean - Faculty of Law

A happy client writes:

“This mail serves to appreciate and commend the good work done by the staff, from the foyer to the offices at your company.

I cannot say enough how much you guys have created hope in us from nothing to something after such an odyssey we travelled due to institutions of power who are determined to maintain the status quo of taking advantage of the illiterate and poor masses of this country without mercy.

I have been noticing without fail, that when we visit your offices we are treated with respect and dignity, starting from the lady at the front desk to the senior staff personnel who is handling our matter. The smile which is worn by the staff to greet clients makes one to feel important and alive again, something I have never seen in a while especially from some of our public servants.”

B. Limba (Ed. This letter has been shortened)

Extract from the SA Human Rights Commission, Kwa-Zulu Natal

Theresa Moodley vs Damelin Correspondence College & 3 Others
- Case Number: D9475/2023

“I would like to sincerely thank you and ProBono.Org for the support that you provided to the Commission in securing Counsel to defend the Commission in the above-mentioned matter... wherein she successfully had the application against the Commission dismissed.

Adv Russo was excellent in her work, and she went well and beyond to assist the Commission.

We are extremely grateful to ProBono.Org for your continued support and collaboration with the Commission.”

Pavershree Padayachee, Provincial Manager

A Success Story

A mother reached out to our ProBono.Org offices in Johannesburg to seek assistance in relation to a notice of birth for her child. The mother’s asylum seeker permit had expired at the time she gave birth. She informed the hospital that she had applied to renew her permit but the hospital would not give her the notice of birth/proof of birth. When her asylum seeker permit was renewed, she went to Home Affairs to register the child’s birth. They requested the proof of birth. The mother went back to the hospital to request the proof of birth. She produced the renewed asylum permit and they asked her to pay a fee of R15 000.

The mother approached ProBono.Org for assistance. Our staff attorney, Aphiwe Nonyukela, wrote to the hospital for the proof of birth which the hospital gave her. ProBono.Org is relieved to have assisted the mother to obtain this important document. Hopefully this will assist the mother to register the child’s birth at Home Affairs. ●



STAFF NEWS

Welcome to Ofentse Maoto – Legal Intern, Johannesburg Office

Ofentse has a BA Law degree from North West University and an LLB from the University of the Witwatersrand. “I am excited to be part of ProBono.Org and contribute to its mission of ensuring equitable access to justice for all. I have always been passionate about promoting justice, particularly for marginalised individuals, through legal support and education”. As a recent graduate, he is eager to provide effective support to the legal practitioners while collaborating on initiatives that advance human rights. “Joining ProBono.Org marks a significant step in my career, as it aligns with my commitment to making a meaningful impact through public interest law”. Congratulations to Ofentse, who is attending his graduation on 10 December 2024!



Farewell to Hellen Motau – Communications Intern 2024

Hellen’s internship comes to an end in December and we are most grateful for her invaluable assistance, particularly with improving our social media presence. She has been most helpful to all department across the organisation. We hope that Hellen has learnt useful skills that will stand her in good stead in her future career. All the best Hellen.



Grateful thanks to the Raith Foundation for the grant for this internship.

*Holiday
Closure*

Our offices will close on 20 December 2024 and reopen on 6 January 2025.

We wish all our clients, partners, colleagues and donors and restful and peaceful holiday season and all the best for 2025.



VISIT OUR WEBSITE AND FACEBOOK PAGE
WHERE YOU CAN READ MORE ABOUT OUR
WORK

www.probono.org.za

JOHANNESBURG: 1st Floor West Wing,
Women’s Gaol, 1 Kotze Street, Braamfontein 2017
telephone: 011 339 6080 fax: 086 512 2222

DURBAN: Unit 310, 3rd Floor, Cowey Park, 91-123 Problem Mkhize
Rd, Morningside, Durban 4001
telephone: 031 301 6178 fax: 031 301 6941

CAPE TOWN: JDN House, 26A Shortmarket Street
Cape Town 8001

telephone: 087 470 0721 fax: 086 665 6740