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Launch of the Collaborative Western Cape High Court Help Desk

By Masi Ncube - Regional Manager, Cape Town



WC Judge President Mabindla-Boqwana opens the High Court Help Desk

The Cape Town office took part in the launch of the Western Cape High Court Help Desk on 6 August 2025, which aims to give effect to access to justice for the indigent and marginalised. The project has been spearheaded by Judge President Mabindla-Boqwana who has shown a keen interest in ensuring that unrepresented litigants are provided with quality pro bono legal support.

The unfortunate reality is that many South Africans are denied justice due to exorbitant legal fees, complex legal procedures and the lack of legal knowledge. These systemic barriers dissuade ordinary people from seeking legal assistance and representation to resolve the issues they may be facing. To overcome these barriers, the High Court Help Desk allows members of the public to consult with private legal practitioners for free with the help of the ProBono.Org team. The help desk ensures that whilst those on the margins of our society are being provided with much-needed legal assistance, legal practitioners are able to complete their 40 hours of community service and candidate legal practitioners are able to complete their 8 hours of community service as required by the Legal Practice Council.

The High Court Help Desk will take place on Wednesdays and Fridays from 09h00 – 12h30 between courtrooms 17 and 18 at the Western Cape High Court. With ProBono.Org facilitating the help desk itself, consulting legal practitioners have been mobilised from the National Association of Democratic Lawyers, Advocates for Transformation, South African Women Lawyers Association, Black Lawyers Association, Legal Aid, the Cape Bar, the Cape Town Attorneys Association and the Legal Practice Council. Together, the collaborative aim is to uplift and empower. We encourage all legal practitioners and candidate legal practitioners to contribute to upholding our nation's constitutional values by staffing the High Court Help Desk. **To sign up and make a difference, please click on the following link:** https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Hx-R8RBKxS_bvymuScU-qGvTeimrpiSAB8F6Lodhkj8/edit?tab=t.0

Milestones

Reflecting on 40 Years of Street Law and 50 Years of Clinical Legal Education

By Nicole Laljit - Regional Manager, Durban

From 25 – 28 September, ProBono.Org had the privilege of attending the CLEA-SAULCA International Conference hosted at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College. This year's gathering was especially significant as it celebrated 40 years of Street Law and over 50 years of Clinical Legal Education—two cornerstones of advancing legal awareness and access to justice. The event brought together a dynamic range of legal professionals, academics and students, offering a rich platform for dialogue, learning and collaboration.

We extend our congratulations to the organisers on an excellently run conference. The programme was filled with inspiring speakers whose insights provided both professional development and fresh perspectives on critical issues in law and access to justice. In addition, the event created valuable networking opportunities, enabling meaningful connections across diverse sectors of the legal community.

A special highlight of the opening day was the keynote address delivered by Retired Chief Justice Sandile Ngcobo. His inspiring words left a lasting impression on all in attendance, reminding us of our Constitutional obligations and the importance of dignity, integrity and service in the legal profession.

We were also honoured that our National Director, Shafie Ameermia, delivered the keynote address at the gala dinner. In his remarks, he encouraged attendees to embrace strategic collaboration and partnerships as a way to address the pressing needs of vulnerable communities collectively, emphasising that such efforts can create a meaningful and lasting impact.

We are grateful to have been part of this milestone event and look forward to contributing to the conversations and collaborations that it has sparked.



Left to Right: Daven Dass, Dr Janine Hicks, Retired Chief Justice Ngcobo, Prof McQuoid-Mason

Yakha Isizwe Business Help Desk Celebrates 10 Years of Empowering Entrepreneurs

By: Aphiwe Nonyukela - Staff Attorney, Johannesburg

This year marks a decade since the establishment of the Yakha Isizwe ('Building a Nation') Help Desk, an initiative that has bridged the gap between small businesses and vital legal services.

The idea was born in 2015, when it became clear that many township entrepreneurs such as hairdressers and sole proprietors faced barriers in accessing affordable commercial legal support. Recognising this need, the Centre for Small Business Development (CSBD) at the University of Johannesburg's Soweto campus, ProBono.Org and Fasken joined forces to launch a dedicated legal help desk. The initiative was then formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding, creating a platform for small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) to access legal services.

From its inception, the help desk offered entrepreneurs not only individual legal consultations but also educational seminars covering essential topics such as forms of business entities, contracts, employment law, and tax. Over time, these efforts expanded to include tailored webinars, the need for which grew during the COVID-19 pandemic. The webinars/seminars presented on topics such as commercial lease agreements, procurement processes and key contract provisions.

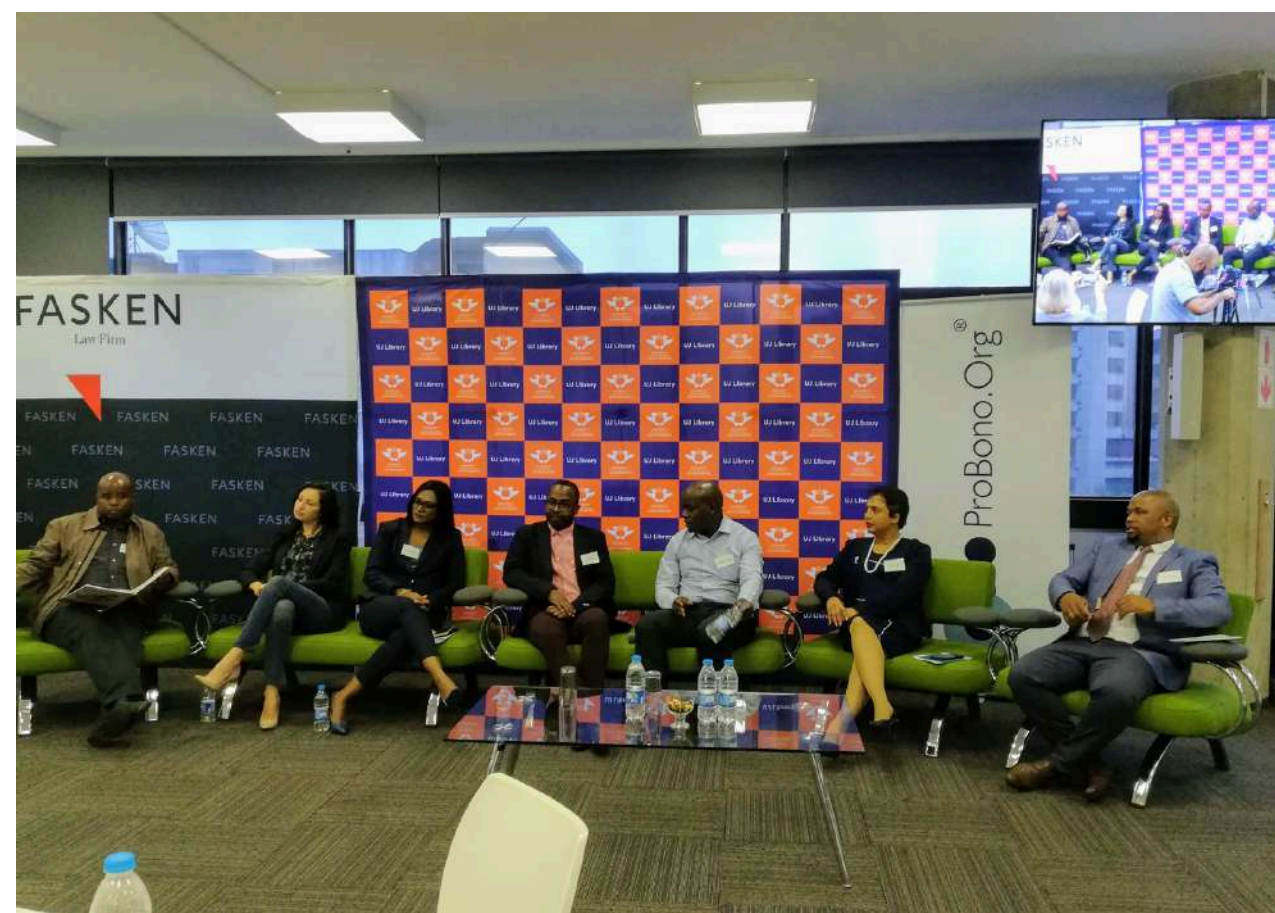
In 2018, the Yakha Isizwe Help Desk hosted its first Entrepreneurial Fair, bringing together role players such as SARS, CIPC and other partners to connect directly with entrepreneurs. These collaborative efforts, paired with inspiring keynote addresses from business leaders, strengthened the support network for SMMEs.

Over the last 10 years, the Help Desk has continuously evolved, adapting its services to meet the changing needs of entrepreneurs. Most recently, commercial legal presentations were extended to paralegals throughout 21 legal advice offices across Gauteng, capacitating rural entrepreneurs and communities with the knowledge they need to sustain and grow their businesses.

The Yakha Isizwe Help Desk stands as a testament to the power of collaboration and the belief that access to legal services can transform communities. As we celebrate this milestone, we recognise the commitment of our partners, legal practitioners and entrepreneurs who have built a legacy of empowerment.

“This initiative reflects Fasken’s ongoing commitment to empowering entrepreneurs with essential legal knowledge. With high unemployment rates in the country the growth of small business remains pertinent in promoting economic growth” – Sushila Dhever, Partner and Pro Bono Head at Fasken’s Johannesburg office.

We look forward to the next decade of building a nation, one entrepreneur at a time.



Panel at SMME event

ProBono.Org’s Labour Clinic Assists Elderly Worker with a COIDA Claim

By: Jonathan Malatji - Johannesburg Intern

At ProBono.Org we believe that access to social justice should be extended to all individuals, taking into account their socio-economic and personal circumstances. On 29 April 2025, our Johannesburg Labour Law Clinic consulted with an elderly client who had been employed as a bus driver by the City of Johannesburg.

In 2016, the client was involved in a motor vehicle accident while on duty, resulting in a dislocated hip and a spinal injury, conditions that significantly impaired her ability to perform her job. Following the accident, she was reassigned to lighter duty due to her ongoing pain and limited mobility.

By 2024, her condition had deteriorated, and the pain became unbearable. After consulting a medical practitioner, it was determined that she required a hip replacement, a costly procedure. The doctor recommended that she submit a Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act (COIDA) application to the Department of Labour to seek financial assistance for the surgery. She submitted her application on 10 August 2024, along with all required supporting documentation, but the application was not processed. Despite her persistent follow-ups with the Department of Labour, her application remained unprocessed for several months.

During her consultation at our Johannesburg office, she met with one of our legal interns, Jonathan Malatji. The client expressed her desperation, noting that her surgery was imminent and that she was considering using her personal savings to cover the costs due to the severity of her pain. Upon review, we noted that the client’s income exceeded our financial means test threshold of R7,500. Ordinarily, this would have resulted in the closure of her file, as our limited resources are reserved for those who cannot afford legal services. However, given the urgency of her medical needs and the Department of Labour’s inaction, our team felt morally compelled to intervene.

The Labour Clinic drafted and emailed a formal follow-up letter to the Department of Labour on 13 May 2025, requesting that the client’s COIDA application be processed.

On 29 July 2025, we received a positive response confirming that the application would be processed, ensuring that the client would not have to pay for the surgery out of pocket.

As Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” In line with the spirit of Ubuntu, “I am because we are”, ProBono.Org remains committed to advancing social justice, even when it means going beyond our formal criteria. This case serves as a reminder that compassion, persistence, and a willingness to go the extra mile can make a real difference in people’s lives.



EVENTS

Mandela Day: Access to Justice in Action - Deceased Estates Help Desk

By: Siphokazi Mlindazwe - Staff Attorney, Cape Town

On Mandela Day, 18 July 2025, ProBono.Org Cape Town hosted a Deceased Estates Help Desk at the Cape Town Master's Office, a collaborative effort aimed at honouring Madiba's legacy by serving those most in need. With the support of attorneys from the Cape Town Attorneys Association (CTAA), as well as other dedicated attorneys and advocates from across the legal profession, we ran the help desk from 9:00am to 1:00pm, focusing on deceased estates and succession matters.

Throughout the morning, attorneys volunteered their time in approximately 67 minute shifts, with two legal professionals consulting at a time. In just four hours, we assisted roughly 20 indigent clients where legal guidance and support was provided in navigating the often-daunting Master's Office processes. We were also fortunate to have Ms Adonis of the Cape Town Master's Office present and engaging directly with members of the public, closing the gap between state services and the people they serve.

This initiative reaffirmed how access to justice is made real through collaboration, generosity, and a shared commitment to community. A heartfelt thank you to every attorney, advocate and Master's Office representative who joined hands with us to make a meaningful difference.



Stakeholders at the text book handover at UWC on Mandela Day

All Women's Assembly - ProBono.Org Cape Town

By: Corinne Baron - Cape Town Intern

ProBono.Org in Cape Town hosted an event on 15 August 2025 in celebration of Women's Month titled 'An All-Women's Assembly'. A panel was made up of a group of dynamic women in law who are all making an impactful difference in what remains a very patriarchal society. The topic of the day addressed 'Access to Justice Through a Gendered Lens' and made for riveting engagements amongst women at various stages of their careers, from emerging young professionals to seasoned experts.

The panel consisted of Natasha Wagiet (ENSAfrica), Abigail Peters (Black Sash), Brigitta Mangale (Cliffe Decker Hofmeyer) and Advocate Bernadine Bachar (Saartjie Baartman Centre for Women and Children). These trailblazers in law highlighted the importance of ensuring that women feel safe and secure within the legal system through the prevention of re-traumatisation by the system. Advocate Bernadine Bachar, Director of the Saartjie Baartman Centre for Women and Children, highlighted the fact that women have tremendous power, especially once they decide to join forces in the fight against systemic oppression. Brigitta Mangale, Director of the pro bono department and human rights services at CDH, placed emphasis on the importance of always speaking out, confronting systematic barriers head on and encouraging women to speak out against injustices and violence committed against them.

The question-and-answer session that followed the panel discussion offered profound insights. Ms. Bongiwe Adonis, Assistant Master of the Western Cape High Court, highlighted the emotional burden carried by female legal practitioners in South Africa. She spoke of the grieving mothers and wives who often approach her office, who must confront the daunting legal intricacies of administering a deceased estate alone. She emphasised that clients may not remember what was said or done, but they remember how officials in the system make them feel. This was a poignant moment and hit home for many legal professionals in the room as it highlighted the weight of what they do and how they can ensure that women are treated with care and compassion during difficult legal processes.

Former Magistrate, Pritima Osman, emphasised that ensuring women's safety cannot be an individual struggle. While the Department of Justice is tasked with promulgating legislation to protect women, she stressed that various other departments, such as the South African Police Service, carry the responsibility of implementing these laws effectively. She stressed that all relevant departments must be held accountable, as meaningful change can only occur once they are actively engaged in finding solutions for the various barriers women face in South Africa.

The discussions and insights provided during this event reminded the attendees that the law does not only revolve around complicated legislation and difficult procedures, but also the people, their emotions and their lived realities. One thing remains certain: the pursuit of justice requires bravery and collective effort. Women in law can be agents for change as they know the struggles women face daily in South Africa. In the end, access to justice cannot be achieved through a one-size-fits-all approach. When we look at access to justice through a gendered lens, we can clearly see the barriers women face, and the paths we are entrusted to carve out to overcome them.





Course

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WILLS WEEK 2025

Will Power

By: Lethiwe Ngubane - Staff Attorney, Durban

Every September, National Wills Week reminds us of the importance of planning for the future and protecting our loved ones. Having a valid will is one of the most effective ways to ensure that our clients' wishes are honoured and their families are cared for.

ProBono.Org Durban commemorated Wills Month with a series of initiatives aimed at promoting access to free will-drafting services and raising public awareness about estate planning.

We kicked off Wills Week with several radio interviews to highlight the importance of having a valid will and the risks of dying intestate.



Help desks were hosted at Chatsworth Court, Merebank Library, and the Master's Office, where a total of 137 wills were drafted. In addition, we held a seminar in Umlazi in partnership with the Association for the Physically Challenged, focusing on the importance of estate planning and ensuring legal protection for vulnerable groups.

These activities were made possible through strong collaborations with our stakeholders, including panel attorneys and colleagues from DUT and UKZN. The month's initiatives underscore our ongoing commitment to meaningful legal outreach and public legal education.

Cape Town Wills Week 2025 Initiative



The Cape Town office of ProBono.Org spearheaded a number of Wills Month initiatives, which included an in-office legal clinic collaboration with Ikamva Labantu where senior citizens were prioritised and consulted with on 8 September and 29 September. ProBono.Org also collaborated with Varsity College Law Clinic, UCT Law Clinic and People's Law Centre during Wills Week in order to draft 63 Wills for the elderly residents in Khayelitsha.

My Work Experience at ProBono.Org

By: **Acacia Kitoko**

From 8 to 19 September 2025, I had the privilege of completing the ProBono.Org two-week workplace experience programme in Johannesburg. This experience was enlightening! The staff were welcoming throughout my time there. Thanks to their willingness to teach me, I completed the programme with many valuable insights.

My first one-on-one discussion with the National Director, Adv. Shafie Ameerma, summarises these insights. He encouraged me to consider deeply my vision for my legal career and the responsibility to use my legal expertise to contribute to South Africa. He stressed that the law serves real people by solving their genuine issues. Reflecting on this, I am amazed to have witnessed how ProBono.Org realises its vision. ProBono.Org aims to provide sufficient free legal aid to all who need it. According to Section 34 of the Constitution, everyone has the right to resolve disputes through the law, with decisions made in a fair and public hearing by a court or an independent tribunal. This right means little if one cannot afford legal representation, which is the reality for most South Africans. It was eye-opening to see how the staff consistently treated clients with dignity from entry to exit, ensuring this vision becomes a reality. When Adv. Ameerma concluded his reflection on his legal career, he remarked that the human spirit is unbreakable. Difficulties drive humans to stay focused, learn, persevere, overcome, and assist others in doing the same.

During my time, I shadowed the office's three legal interns to observe how they conducted legal consultations with clients during the various legal clinics.



Firstly, Ms Tiisetso Maleke, who is responsible for family law and refugee law. Due to the personal nature of her clients' matters, she emphasised the need to use her legal mind rather than her emotional mind to ensure she can advise clients as effectively as possible. Moreover, she stressed the importance of staying up to date with case law and legislation, as well as thoroughly fact-checking all legal advice she provides with the legal clinic coordinator, Ms Lesego Vakalisa.

Secondly, Mr Jonathan Malatji, who oversees labour law and housing clinics. During his consultations, he evaluates the strengths of labour disputes to advise clients on the best course of action. He explained that his personal test for a skilled legal practitioner is their ability to negotiate and settle cases outside court.

To him, passing this test saves parties both time and money. I also visited the Labour Court with Mr Malatji for the first time, and it was inspiring to observe his passion for labour law as we discussed court documentation and filing. Regarding housing, he highlighted the problematic history of South Africa's land system, from housing permits to title deeds, which currently hampers previously disenfranchised citizens who seek housing today.

Thirdly, Mr Ofentse Maoto, who is responsible for deceased estates and deeds. During his consultations, he assesses the validity of wills, letters of authority, and other documents to ensure the transfer of immovable property to beneficiaries. Mr Maoto and I also attended ProBono.Org's webinar focused on the Expropriation Act. This webinar was hosted by staff attorney Ms Aphiwe Nonyukela and presented by guest Mr Jacques Marais, a partner at Fasken. I enjoyed engaging with Ms Nonyukela and Mr Maoto to reflect on aspects of the Expropriation Act that we learned about during the webinar.

Furthermore, I shadowed Adv. Elsabe Steenhuisen and Ms Daphne Makombe, who oversee the One-Child-a-Year Campaign (OCAY) that aims to obtain legal representation for children in need. They are responsible for monitoring legal practitioners and non-legal participants to ensure that all aspects of cases are handled in the best interests of the child.



I assisted OCAY in preparing case memoranda and organising court files. Adv. Steenhuisen, Ms Makombe and I visited the Children's Court to attend a seminar on Family Housing led by David Dickson from Lawyers for Human Rights. It was exciting to be inside the Children's Court for the first time and observe magistrates discussing the challenges families face when transferring family houses due to bureaucracy and costs.

Our second visit to the Children's Court involved attending a family court case flow meeting. I gained insight into the difficulties of integrating systems among legal practitioners, judicial officers, SAPS, Child Welfare, and others. It was interesting to see all different parties acknowledge that mediation is an increasingly popular and preferred solution for family court matters. I also had a brief one-on-one conversation with Magistrate Natasha Mukoli, where we discussed her professional and personal views on safe and unsafe child abandonment in preparation for the University of Pretoria's Centre for Child Law Moot Court Competition. She stressed the importance of personalising my approach to every administrative problem I face, especially when considering solutions for abandoned infants in research. Lastly, Ms Makombe and I attended the University of Pretoria's Centre for Child Law Moot Court Competition. I enjoyed supporting Ms Makombe with her research, which she used to evaluate the competitors. It was wonderful to see competitors share their understanding of the law and suggest their solutions to child abandonment.

What Adv. Steenhuisen, Ms Makombe, and I discussed during our excursion continues to resonate in my reflection. They emphasised the importance of visualising what personal and professional success mean for me, staying curious and asking questions of those who came before me, and ensuring that my presence is felt to influence all environments positively. This experience has not just equipped me with legal knowledge and skills, but also instilled a sense of responsibility in me and a deep understanding of the power of the law to bring about meaningful change. I am now more determined to accept my responsibility to contribute to South Africa's legal system.