

A moment with: Stephen Forster

July – August 2013

In the spirit of the Holy month of Ramadan, we focus on charity, goodwill and the need to help those less fortunate than ourselves. Stephen Forster, Head of Al Tamimi's Pro Bono Committee, talks about the importance of giving back to the communities in which we operate and having a positive impact on those we are able to help.

The Al Tamimi Pro Bono Committee was formed in November 2011 and was the brainchild of Founding Partner Essam Al Tamimi. Both Essam and Managing Partner Husam Hourani are driving forces behind the initiative and their vision of providing legal services to disadvantaged individuals and charitable organisations is one that Stephen wholeheartedly believes in.

To establish the programme, a committee was formed comprising of lawyers in the firm with an interest in pro bono work with Stephen as its Chairman. "We recognise the positive benefits not only to those receiving our help but also to the personal and professional development of the lawyers involved," says Stephen. Al Tamimi lawyers see it as both their responsibility and a privilege to be able to use their skills, training and experience to provide legal services to those whose interests would otherwise remain unrepresented and this is something the firm is keen to support.

"We actively encourage our lawyers to become involved in pro bono initiatives" says Stephen, "We see it as an essential part of our professional responsibility and it allows them to work together while making a difference to the communities in which they live and work."

Al Tamimi lawyers have donated and devoted their time to approximately 20 pro bono projects across a number of practice areas including employment, arbitration and IP in the past 18 months, acting for disadvantaged individuals who would not otherwise have access to legal services. However, the firm is still keen to do more and has a targeted plan to raise awareness of the services on offer and help ensure that the programme reaches even further to those in need.

"The Pro Bono Programme is also designed to help charities and institutions whose aim is to help the disadvantaged, particularly if the institution is not very wealthy and/or tries to distribute as many of its funds as possible to help the disadvantaged," explains Stephen. "We are therefore putting together a list of such organisations with a view to going to visit them to make them aware of our services."

In addition to the firm's own pro bono work, Al Tamimi lawyers from the firm's litigation department are also actively involved in the pro bono programmes run by Dubai Courts, the Abu Dhabi Courts and the DIFC Courts, whereby they provide free initial counsel to individuals before proceeding with litigation. Ahmed Allouz, Partner and Head of Litigation (Dubai), says it is an "honour" to be of service to the community in this way.

"A man's true wealth is the good he does in this world."

— Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)

It is said that one of the most meaningful forms of giving is the giving of our time and our talents. It is with this in mind that Al Tamimi is proud of our pro bono programme and our commitment to improving the lives of individuals in our communities who are in need. The Holy month of Ramadan and all it teaches about charitable giving serves as a reminder to us all of the importance of helping others.

If you know of any organisations that may need our services or an individual in need of legal assistance, please do contact us. The Pro Bono Committee looks upon all applications sensitively with a view to trying to help if it falls within the terms of the programme.