



the jeanie project
access to justice through active goodwill

In conversation with **Richard Miller**, Head of Justice at the Law Society of England and Wales and Trustee of The Jeanie Project



22nd October 2018

As Pro Bono Week 2018 launches, The Jeanie Project talked to Richard Miller, **Head of Justice at the Law Society of England and Wales and Trustee of The Jeanie Project**, to discuss his role in the new ground breaking initiative, The Jeanie Project.

Tell us more about your role of Head of Justice at the Law Society of England and Wales and what that entails?

I oversee the Society's work on a range of justice-related issues. These include legal aid, the HMCTS Court Reform programme, and our work supporting current and aspiring solicitor judges and those doing advocacy work. I also oversee our work on pro bono issues, and on how technology is being used to enhance access to justice.

It's pro bono week this week (22nd – 27th October). As the Head of Justice, how important is pro bono in helping the Law Society achieve its objectives and maintaining our justice system?

It has always been a matter of professional pride for lawyers that they undertake some work pro bono. For example, when I was in practice, I used to attend a monthly advice clinic at the local psychiatric hospital, helping patients address issues to do with housing, family matters, benefits and other legal problems they were facing.

For many years, the Law Society has celebrated National Pro Bono Week. This year, we have both Pro Bono Week and Justice Week, giving us two opportunities to celebrate the work done by lawyers in the public interest, and its role in helping to ensure justice for all. It must always be recognised that pro bono can never be a substitute for a properly funded legal aid system. Nonetheless, it has an important role to play in providing people with the support they need.

Solicitors and barristers can gain a lot from undertaking pro bono work. It gives them new and different experiences that they may not gain from their normal daily work. It can give an enormous sense of satisfaction when you know you have made a genuine change for the better in someone's life. It is one of the distinguishing features of being a profession, in which many lawyers take professional pride.

You recently took on the role of Trustee of The Jeanie Project. Can you tell us more about the ambitions of the project?

Many people do not even realise that the problems they are facing might have a legal solution. The DWP may have been wrong to refuse your benefits. Your sacking by your employer may have been unfair. Your landlord may be legally required to repair your home. The Jeanie Project aims to get legal help to people who don't even realise their problem is a legal one.

The technology The Jeanie Project uses will package up the case, with the help of a non-lawyer adviser, in a way that gives a legal adviser the key facts and documents they need in order to advise quickly if the case would benefit from some form of legal intervention. This has the potential to increase the number of clients who can be helped from a given number of pro bono hours. The IT may also serve to enable lawyers who do not have access to local organised pro bono projects to take on cases, thus also increasing the number of pro bono hours the profession is able to offer.

In my view, this will help to strengthen the Law Society's arguments on legal aid. If we can demonstrate that we have done what we reasonably can, and that there is still a vast need out there that cannot be met through pro bono, it is that much easier to demonstrate that there is no realistic alternative to the Government stepping in to guarantee justice for all.

How can solicitors/barristers get involved with The Jeanie Project and what benefit they would gain from doing so?

The Jeanie Project is currently recruiting a bank of lawyers who are willing to take on pro bono cases. Your commitment can be as great or as small as you feel able to commit to. If you would like to find out more or register your interest in participating, please visit www.thejeanieproject.org.uk/probono.

Why does the success of the JP matter to you?

It answers a question I have asked about every legal tech project I have seen: "Yes, but how do those who need this service find out about it?" The prospect of providing much needed help to some of the most marginalised and vulnerable people in the country, resolving their housing needs, overturning wrong benefits decisions, holding bad employers to account, giving the poor and weak a chance of justice against the rich and powerful, is a goal worth fighting for.

To volunteer as a pro bono legal adviser or to find out more about The Jeanie Project, see <https://thejeanieproject.org.uk/probono>.