

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

National campaign week recognizes lawyers ‘who put something back’.

Bury Law Centre has just recorded it's 200th client for the free advice offered by volunteer lawyers through pro bono clinics, the first of which began in June '06. And this week, the Law Centre is joining with legal service providers across the country to highlight the work done by lawyers offering their time 'for the good'.

Development Worker, David Wildman, explains: This is 'National Pro Bono Week' and we wanted to take the opportunity to publicly thank our volunteer lawyers for all their help – given at no charge and in their own personal time.

This year, according to the Law Society, pro bono work has been worth £338 m nationwide and we estimate that to date our lawyers have 'put back' around £14,180 worth of professional legal help in Bury.

We get consistently good feedback from customer satisfaction sheets – 60 people have taken the trouble to reply so far. Many say how much they appreciate the clear, straight forward and independent advice but by far the most common comment we get from clients is how they felt at ease talking through their legal problem with the pro bono lawyer.

Although they only see the lawyer for 20 – 30 mins, the guidance given can make a real difference. One lady rang back to thank us and say she had found a solicitor to act for her after 2 years of looking for the right help.

When the Project began, the question people asked me was 'How do you intend to get a load of lawyers to volunteer their time for free?' But, as the national figures show, there is a strong tradition of pro bono in the legal profession and the results in Bury speak for themselves. We're very grateful to the legal executives, solicitors and barristers who came to us as volunteers and have been thoroughly professional and reliable throughout.'

Clinics in National Pro Bono week are already fully booked at time of writing but appointments for later clinics are available by calling Helpdesk (0161) 272 0666

*General legal guidance @ Bury Law Centre – weekly on Weds eves
Outreach legal guidance @ ADAB, Heywood St – 2-weekly on Thurs am
Employment advice @ Bury Law Centre – 2-weekly on Tues eve*

For info on **National Pro Bono Week** see link: <http://www.probonouk.net>

ENDS

PHOTO: Shysta Habib, barrister, who advises monthly at ADAB, is one of 8 pro bono lawyers who provide their time for free at Bury Law Centre clinics.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

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About Bury Law Centre:

- offers its services free to those who are most in need, through government Legal Aid funding. It currently has quality-marked advice and casework services in employment, housing and immigration law.
- acts as a 'friendly first port of call' for anyone needing guidance on other legal problems and to 'signpost' them to solicitors or other agencies which can offer what they need.
- an independent local charity, set up in 2003 and managed by a committee made up of representatives from most of Bury's advice agencies, along with individual solicitors and other local people with an interest in ensuring there is access to justice for all.
- made national news with its pioneering work on asylum law, challenging the government's pilot scheme (Section 9) to remove the rights of failed asylum seekers to housing and welfare benefits.
- won a Big Lottery grant of £294,000, for a 3 year project, to develop volunteer opportunities. Currently has 7 volunteers and 6 pro bono advisors.
- received the Guardian Public Service Finance Award in November 2005, for its sound financial business planning.

The Big Lottery Fund distributes half of all National Lottery good cause funding across the UK. The Fund aims to enable others to make real improvements to the lives of disadvantaged people and the wellbeing of communities, through fair and open funding of people, projects and programmes.

Big Advice Line (public enquiries) 0845 4 10 20 30



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