

# Volunteer with VAS



The Voluntary Assistance Scheme continues its work providing *pro bono* legal assistance to those who need it, and the Scheme needs your help.



Libby Charlton BL

It has been an eventful year since I became the Co-ordinator of the Voluntary Assistance Scheme (VAS). As always, there are several branches of the VAS that run concurrently.

## Requests for assistance

The first branch and the everyday work of the VAS is considering requests that we receive from charities, NGOs and civic organisations seeking *pro bono* assistance for themselves and their clients. On a daily basis, the VAS facilitates *pro bono* advice on issues as diverse as corporate governance, landlord and tenant law, employment law and probate. As always, the organisations that benefited were most grateful and impressed with the barristers who so willingly and selflessly offered the benefit of their knowledge and expertise. Since my inaugural article in the July 2016 *The Bar Review*, the VAS is providing or has provided assistance in over 40 matters. It is such a great honour to witness the generosity and kindness of our colleagues.

## Publicising the VAS

The second branch is the ever-present need of the VAS to publicise its existence and resources to those who could benefit most from it, but are unaware of it. To that end, Shirley Coulter of the Communications and Policy Division of the Bar and members of the VAS committee, in addition to myself, will once again be attending The Wheel's Annual Conference & Expo in the Conference Centre in Croke Park on

June 28, 2017. This is Ireland's largest annual gathering for community, voluntary and charity organisations. Last May, the VAS exhibited a stand where we informed over 50 charities of the resources available to them through the VAS and formed lasting connections with them. Indeed, many of these same charities and NGOs took part in the advocacy training offered by esteemed colleagues through the VAS.

## Speaking for Ourselves

This creates a stylish segue into the third branch of the Scheme. In the past, the VAS has co-ordinated and facilitated the 'Speaking for Ourselves' advocacy workshop for charities. This is where The Bar of Ireland provides *pro bono* oral and written advocacy training to charities and NGOs, and exceptionally talented barristers run workshops for their chosen representatives on all the elements of effective advocacy. We will be hosting the event again in 2017, and hope to host more similar, though perhaps not identical, events in the near future.

## The VAS needs you!

The fourth and final branch of the current workload is to update and improve the current barrister database. Barristers email [vas@lawlibrary.ie](mailto:vas@lawlibrary.ie) daily expressing their wish to assist, but we can never have enough to call upon. In my previous article, I implored my junior colleagues to get in touch. You did in your droves and we are most grateful. I would now ask our more senior colleagues, senior juniors and senior counsel to put their names forward, so that charities, NGOs and civic organisations can benefit from their profound knowledge and extensive experience. As you read, many of you will resist the urge to contact me today as you are tied up with the obligations of your practice and fear that you cannot assist immediately upon request. Fear not, we understand, but it would still be of huge service to know that we may call upon you, and any specialist knowledge that you possess, when there are fewer demands on you in the future. So, paraphrasing absolutely nothing at all, the VAS has done a lot, but has an awful lot more left to do.