

Lawyers open their hearts

ADELAIDE lawyers have shown their compassionate side, donating \$1 million in free legal services to disadvantaged South Australians.

The \$1 million milestone was reached through JusticeNet, SA's "clearing house" for pro bono legal help.

Launched in 2009, JusticeNet matches low-income and disadvantaged clients with member lawyers, who provide free legal advice and representation. In SA, JusticeNet has 20 member firms, with more than 500 lawyers available to provide free help to those who need it and cannot find



**ALEXANDRA
ECONOMOU**
Legal services

aid elsewhere. More than 95 per cent of Adelaide barristers participate in its pro bono referral service.

JusticeNet executive director Tim Graham said this showed an exceptional commitment to helping those who were less well off.

"Legal problems can ruin the lives of

those who cannot afford a lawyer," Mr Graham said. "Publicly funded legal aid is largely unavailable for civil disputes. Yet it is acknowledged that legal problems tend to impact more seriously on those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage and can initiate and reinforce poverty, homelessness and social exclusion."

The legal profession has a proud history of performing pro bono work.

Lawyers increasingly regard it as a professional obligation, while also reaping the personal rewards.

Commercial law firm Kelly & Co is among JusticeNet's member organis-

ations. Its chief executive Stuart Price said pro bono work was extremely popular with its employees.

"Not only does it allow us to provide real benefit to those in need within the broader community, but it also delivers a high level of personal satisfaction to our lawyers taking part," he said.

"JusticeNet provides a fantastic service to all participating legal firms across the state and we congratulate them on achieving this outstanding milestone."

Mr Graham also stressed JusticeNet was not a substitute for legal aid.

"We do not replicate services pro-

vided by legal aid and other excellent services such as community legal centres," he said. "But without JusticeNet, there are people with civil law issues who would have nowhere to go for assistance. We provide a safety net – JusticeNet helps when no one else can."

"This would not be possible without the commitment of our member firms, solicitors and barristers."

JusticeNet is mainly funded by membership fees and community support. It receives no state or federal government funding.

For more information, go to www.justicenet.org.au