

Law students offer free legal advice

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WHILE the average South African in an urban environment will require legal guidance at least once in their lifetime, the sobering reality remains that scores are simply unable to afford access to what is seen as a costly luxury.

It is in light of this truth, and also in an effort to provide law students with as much practical experience in their field as possible, that the South African Law School in Cape Town has intensified its drive to offer legal advice without charge to an extended range of communities. Attorney Brett Herron, who took over the school in 2002, is pleased with its recent growth sparked by greater interest from candidates for employment in the field. He cites a substantial increase in student enrolment in the school's paralegal and conveyancy (property) law courses.

Having worked in local firms and as a legal advisor abroad, Herron believes it is important for the 130 part-time and full-time students currently enrolled to gain hands-on, practical experience to complement their year-long study period. In order to graduate, students are

expected to offer at least 85 hours of their time up to voluntary service to the Community Law Centre at the school in the Absa Building in Wale Street, Cape Town.

The centre provides services that include advice, referrals to other attorneys or related organisations, letter writing, telephone calls, advocacy, negotiation and form completion. Herron promises that no one visiting the office will leave without being helped with their

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problem or without being referred to an appropriate source of assistance.

"We are also able to put clients in contact with attorneys who do work on a *pro bono* basis, depending on their needs," he says.

Where labour and employment disputes, domestic violence issues, family problems including divorces

or housing and unlawful evictions are concerned, Herron says the team is more than capable to meet the demand for legal assistance.

"To make sure that the advice we offer is accurate, we have employed a team of legal supervisors who are qualified attorneys. They monitor and assist our students, who interact with clients coming in for advice every day," he says.

Although the advice centre is currently based in the centre of Cape Town, Herron says the school is willing to take free legal services to communities where the need is especially great, possibly in the form of satellite advice centres.

"We must warn clients, though, that we do not see anyone without an appointment being made first. We also do not offer advice over the telephone – people must come into the office and see us personally," he stresses. Clients should also bring along all the relevant documentation pertaining to their legal matter when visiting the office.

The SA Law School Community Law Centre is open from Monday to Thursday, from 08:30 to 16:30. To schedule an appointment or for more information phone (021 422-5610).