

Pro bono with humanitarian bang for buck

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JOBWATCH



TO make a difference to humanity you need to get out of your comfort zone, according to Melbourne lawyer Kim Lovegrove, who has put his philosophy into practice with an alternative form of pro bono that stretches to Ethiopia.

The partner at boutique firm Lovegrove & Lord has established a strong relationship with Ethiopian charity Hope for Children, which works to help children affected by HIV/AIDS.

The firm sponsors a full-time legal advocate to work for the charity and act for vulnerable children on a variety of legal issues.

Lovegrove said that by sponsoring advocate Rahel Berhanu, the firm was embarking on a more tangible form of pro bono than that traditionally offered by Australian firms. "Pro bono for an hour or two here and there, well, I don't really know how much that achieves," he said.

"Whereas underwriting the costs of a legal advocate who will appear in court to protect the fundamental legal rights of children, like Rahel does, that is a serious endeavour where one is getting a lot of humanitarian bang for one's buck. There's nothing esoteric about it; it's real and it's tangible."

Lovegrove said he was not demeaning traditional pro bono work undertaken by many Australian firms but argued that the work his firm sponsored was far more powerful and was helping a country that was too often "out of sight, out of mind".

Hope for Children estimates there are about 4.6 million orphaned children in Ethiopia, with many of those having lost their parents to HIV/AIDS.

The firm has sponsored Ber-



Ethiopian advocate Rahel Berhanu and Lovegrove & Lord's Kim Lovegrove

hanu for three years and Lovegrove said she had defended the rights of orphaned children in a number of ways, such as ensuring they received inheritances or were protected from abuse.

He said one example involved Berhanu taking on the case of a nine-year-old girl whose mother had died of HIV and whose father was sexually abusing her. Berhanu successfully prosecuted the father and helped find the girl a new adoptive family.

"Rahel did receive death threats from him (the father) but

the fact was, he was ultimately jailed — it's very, very challenging work, it's terribly confronting."

Lovegrove's links to Ethiopia stretch back to his childhood. He spent time in the country because his grandfather Norman Lovegrove was UNESCO chief of mission.

Lovegrove has since married an Ethiopian woman and he recently visited the country with his filmmaker friend David Lawn to make a documentary about Hope for Children.

He said his visits to Ethiopia

had changed his value system and opened up his world view.

"It takes one away from the myopic approach and the billable hours obsession that we as lawyers sometimes suffer from," Lovegrove said.

The documentary, which was fully funded by Lovegrove and his firm, will be launched on March 18 at Melbourne's Eureka Cinema.

• THERE'S been a shakeup of the judiciary on the west coast in recent weeks following a number of retirements.

District Court judge Peter Martino will become chief judge of Western Australia's District Court from July 1, following Antoinette Kennedy's retirement.

District Court judge Robert Mazza and barrister Michael Corboy SC have been appointed judges to the Supreme Court after justices Geoffrey Miller and Christine Wheeler retired.

Judge Mazza will begin his appointment next week and Corboy will start in April.

Barrister John Gerard Staude will replace Judge Mazza.