

Q&A with Seung Youn, Public Defence Service lawyer

Seung talks about what excites him working with the Public Defence Service, in the community, and away from work, and who has inspired him professionally.

This is the seventh in a series of Q&As with winners of the CLANZ Wigley + Company award for contribution to the community.

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● **What attracted you to the legal profession?**

I wanted to work in a profession dealing with people, working to help people with issues they face and being able to make a difference for them. I started my career with two years in the Crown Solicitor's office in Invercargill, and for the past three years I've been with the Public Defence Service in Auckland.

● **What excites you about your work now?**

It's the new challenges you have every day – researching the law and applying it to issues that can very directly affect a person's life, which is the case with criminal law. Our job is to help our clients make informed decisions, to speak on their behalf in their best interests.

● **Who has inspired you in the profession?**

A lot of people have inspired and helped me through my studies and my career and I wouldn't want to single out any one in particular. I've been inspired and supported by my colleagues and by my family and friends.

● **Work / life balance – how do you achieve that?**

I think it's very important to get involved in activities away from work, whether its community engagement, sporting or cultural pursuits.



● **How do you enjoy spending time away from work?**

I like to spend time seeing the country. My family came to New Zealand from Korea when I was nine years old and I grew up in Christchurch. While I studied in Hamilton, I hadn't seen much of the North Island until I began work in Auckland, so I make the most of weekends and other times to see as many places as I can. I have been focussing on family commitments and expecting a baby in July, so that is definitely changing my priorities.

● **What prompted you to get involved in community work?**

I realised that with my legal training I could help people in community organisations, to fulfil a need they had for legal assistance. In Invercargill

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I got involved in the multicultural group there, which supports people from different ethnic backgrounds and new migrants when they arrive – with social events, employment matters, and other issues they face, helping them settle into Invercargill. I became a committee member and worked with the youth group. I served as the secretary of the New Zealand Federation of Multicultural Councils.

● **What community work has given you the greatest satisfaction?**

I like helping groups with their organisation and governance, to ensure they are functioning well. I can use my legal skills for this. The greatest satisfaction you get is seeing how much impact you can make by doing quite small things for people – it might only be small for you, but it can make a great difference to them and to their lives.

● **What do you get out of it?**

I really enjoy the interesting people you meet who are involved in community groups. They are really great people, and they share the same goals and interests as I do in working together to achieve things that make a difference for people.

● **What's the best piece of work advice you ever received?**

"There is no such thing as a stupid question". People without legal knowledge are sometimes shy about putting their hands up and asking about things they don't understand, but they shouldn't be.

● **What advice would you give to young lawyers?**

The advice I would give to everyone is to get involved in your community, to volunteer and help out. The experience you gain from dealing with people through community groups is very valuable, because no matter what type of law you're practising you need those people skills. It also helps to build your confidence when you're starting out.

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