

# Pro bono is on the agenda from outset

**E**RN PHANG IS A “GOOD bloke”, says Law Society pro bono solicitor Nerida Harvey of the Parramatta solicitor who last month received the Law Society President’s Award as part of the 2010 Justice Awards.

Ern Phang, of Phang Legal, is 34 and, says Harvey, unusual in that people don’t generally take on pro bono until their later years.

He had made it something for his firm to do from the start, and it was also not often that small firms such as his were so active in pro bono, Harvey said. At short notice, he was prepared to take on really hard family law matters, involving “spend time with” and “live with” issues, which a lot of people don’t want to touch. His clients always gave positive feedback about him.

Phang told *LSJ* that while he did network in the local community, he didn’t network much with other lawyers, and the recognition from his peers was “quite an honour”. His main area is property and commercial law, but, aside from the Law Society pro bono, he also does work for the not-for-profit sector and local churches. He has, he says, a passion to contribute to the community.

“I am making money to pay the bills, support the family and feed the kids, and I can buy a new car every couple of years ... I assume I am not doing as well as some of my colleagues in the eastern suburbs, but at the end of the day [with pro bono], I am legacy building.

“When my kids saw this, and I said ‘That’s an award because papa helps people’, they said, ‘What are you, a doctor?’

“The perception is that doctors help people, but what do lawyers do? Kids don’t have any perception that lawyers help people.”

In his home town in Malaysia, Phang says lawyers are just members of the community.

“If someone needs something, who do they go to for help? The lawyer. You see that



**Ern Phang, who received the Law Society President’s Award for his pro bono work, says God has blessed him with a special purpose – to help other people.**



**Recipient of the 2010 Justice Medal, Rachael Martin, has worked at the Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women’s Legal Centre in Marrickville for more than a decade.**

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with country lawyers.”

Phang says he comes from a modest background. His parents migrated to Australia with very limited funds, and worked day and night to put him and his brother through school

and university.

“I have an opportunity to help people, I am in a position to help other people. God has blessed me with a special purpose, not for my own good but to help other people. That’s my

**“The perception is that doctors help people, but what do lawyers do?”**

conviction, and what drives me.”

## **Justice Medal to Rachael Martin**

The winner of the 2010 Justice Medal, presented at the same time at Parliament House, is Rachael Martin, Principal Solicitor at Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women’s Legal Centre in Marrickville.

With its annual Justice Awards, the Law and Justice Foundation aims to recognise the contributions of individuals and organisations to improving access to justice in NSW, particularly for socially and economically disadvantaged people.

Martin, whose work at the centre has spanned more than a decade, has worked tirelessly to increase access to justice for Aboriginal women and children, particularly in relation to victims of violence and sexual assault, who often face increasing isolation, disadvantage and discrimination.

She has also worked to engage community legal centres and government organisations to meet Aboriginal women’s legal needs, and to be more inclusive of and sympathetic to them. She has, in particular, worked to make legal services and victim’s compensation more accessible.

Martin is the convener of the CLC NSW Law Reform working group on domestic violence and victim’s compensation, the state representative on the Apprehended Violence Legal Issues Committee, a member of the NSW Police Sex Crimes Unit and the NSW Department of Justice and Attorney General’s Victims Services Interagency Committee, and a member of the Inner West Violence Network.

Martin says her area of work is like an onion: “The issues are layered and make you cry.” □

*The full list of 2010 Justice Award winners is available at [www.lawfoundation.net.au/justice\\_ awards](http://www.lawfoundation.net.au/justice_awards).*