

## Community Matters



by **Anna Cope** and  
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On Monday morning, the local community café opened for its first day of trading. On Tuesday, a

housing charity finally finished negotiations on its lease, moved into bigger premises, and is now able to provide more community support. On Wednesday, a community organization took on a new employee because an ongoing unfair dismissal case was settled, freeing up funds to expand their charitable services. Although all seemingly unrelated issues, these are just some of the many queries and issues Dechert volunteers for the Community Matters scheme have assisted with since the scheme's commencement in April 2007.

Community Matters, a joint project between Dechert's London office, the National Federation of Community Organisations (Community Matters), and LawWorks, was established for the purpose of benefiting community organizations by, among others, Kristen E. Uhl during her secondment to London. Too often, local community organizations do not have adequate funds to afford the legal advice they need to handle simple matters such as incorporation, day-to-day operations, and a variety of property, intellectual property, and employment issues. When they are also not eligible for funding under the government legal aid scheme, pro bono projects such as the Community Matters scheme are essential to filling the void.

Involvement in Community Matters allows Dechert attorneys with the relevant expertise and experience to take on pro bono matters that interest them. Information and pertinent documents are provided in advance of the initial meeting so attorneys have the opportunity to research and prepare advice. This system removes the "fear factor" sometimes experienced at walk-in clinics where advice is given off-the-cuff and on topics outside the attorney's comfort zone. Advice sessions are generally 30 minutes or

more and allow the attorney to learn more about the client as well as the charitable organization and its goals, and to ascertain the real issues affecting charitable organizations in today's social and political climate. For the attorneys, who range in levels of qualification, the advice sessions provide the opportunity to meet face-to-face with the client, provide practical advice, and apply their communication, negotiation, and diplomatic skills. The scheme allows them to take part in interesting, fulfilling, and intellectually challenging legal matters on topics not typical of the average working day at Dechert.

For clients, participation in the Community Matters scheme can mean the resolution of matters that have put them under increased emotional and financial pressure, the chance to expand their charitable services, or even just the peace of mind that someone is there to listen to their problems, confirm their thinking, and provide advice and support.

Dechert attorneys who have kindly volunteered to assist under this scheme are: Ruth Abernethy, Reema Ashraf, Chris Burniston, Jason Butwick, Angela Coote, Krysia Cywinski, Patrick W. Dennis, Jennifer O. Epstein, Karen Ferries, David Gervais, Daniel P. Hawthorne, Bindya Hindocha, Kate Holbrook, Dominic M. Hulse, James Kaufmann, Alison Lympny, Alan Meehan, Jodie Valler-Feltham, and David Willbe.

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