

Pro Bono: Is It Worth It? By Andy Woolford

That is a question I have asked myself many times since the start of the W360 course, which included an Open Justice activity. Initially this was due to be a prison project, however, due to unforeseen circumstances this was modified into presentations at St Giles in Cardiff. It involved making a legal presentation to an audience provided by St Giles, on a topic of their choosing and normally myself and my colleagues had two weeks to research, write, have it proof-read and present. This may seem plenty of time, but this work was not only alongside other studies, but also needed the co-operation of other students to ensure there was no cross over in the work being delivered as well as engaging with tutors to ensure we were legally factual.

Presentations and reflections

I was not nervous about conducting the presentations, having conducted many in my professional career, however there is something unique in delivering information that will help change someone's life for the better. Up to this point I could not see why the legal industry felt so passionate about pro bono work, my initial thoughts being 'why would someone give something valuable away for free?', but then I saw how the people absorbed the information, asking questions that were pertinent to their own experiences. At that point, something changed in my mindset, in all honesty, something very profound - I actually got it. The reason why pro bono is such a valuable gift to give freely is that it actually matters, not in some tangible way, although it may take that form, but in that moment of sharing information so often deemed sacred to the legal profession, you can change someone's life. I spent many hours contemplating what this felt like and the nearest I could get was the feeling you get when you give a loved one a gift at Christmas, seeing their face light up once they have unwrapped it. In many ways, this ideology has similarities with Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarianism moral theory as it is not the actual act that inspires the legal industry to complete pro bono work but more the consequence of those actions, which I wrote about in [Woolford, A. (2019) 'Extract 1', originally written 8 November 2019]. The topic, legal ethics and values, was covered early on in the W360 course, and will come as no surprise that completing the work and actually

understanding the implications of it were separate entities (The Open University ('OU'), 2019, 3.2). This was comparable with learning to drive, as at the start you are totally unaware of the skills required to drive but have the confidence to achieve it, however as you start to learn, you realise the complexities and how inadequate you are. It is not until you have mastered driving that you are able to unconsciously control the vehicle.

Progressing development

To anyone contemplating studying W360 in the future, I say to you 'Do it'. It has possibly been one of the most rewarding and insightful things I have completed for many years. It has enabled me to develop my self-management, in particular my reflective skills which were a little rusty. However, the main reason that this module should be taken is that it bridges the understanding between the theory of pro bono and its reality. If taking a law degree is a steppingstone on the path to working in the legal profession, then the only decision you should be making is not which modules to take but ensuring that all the modules are as rewarding as this.