

The importance of making a difference through pro bono volunteering

Prior to studying the module W360 Justice in action, I was not sure what to expect, apart from I was extremely excited for what might come. My core project was the Open Justice Law Clinic, which involved working in a team with other fellow students under the supervision of qualified solicitors with the aim to provide free legal advice to the members of the public. I also undertook an extra curriculum activity '*Open Justice Digital project*' with the Open Justice, which involved creating a web and app-based solution addressing different issues of employment law.

For each step that I took in the law clinic and the digital project, I have gotten incredible support and encouragement to keep on going by my W360 tutor and the Open Justice supervisor. During my participation in the law clinic, I have carried out different roles such as being a client contact person, an interviewer, a researcher, and as well as drafting the proof of evidence and letters of advice. Through the Open Justice Digital project, I have learned how to use a simple website to create an Android app and made different decision trees. I have gain truly invaluable experience through these past four months, and I have been able to network with other students whilst improving my ability to work with different people. The teamwork has its challenge, but I have learned how important it is to work in groups because you truly cannot get far alone. We have supported each other in achieving our tasks and appreciated each other's opinions.

I can reassure you that W360 will enrich your life whilst gaining relevant professional skills as I have mentioned above. Throughout my law degree, I have attended many legal and networking events, and so far, I have only heard about the importance of gaining legal work experience. If we could not get relevant legal work experience through, for instance, open days, vacation schemes, mini-pupillages, marshalling and so forth, then we should gain the relevant practical experience through pro bono volunteering because it would boost our CV and make us stand out. However, there is no mentioning whatsoever about the difference that we would make through pro bono

volunteering. I will be completely honest that I chose this module sincerely to gain more employability skills. I wanted to gain practical legal experience to improve my prospects of obtaining a training contract at the end of my studies, just like I have been told all these years how important this is.

My first time I heard of the term '*pro bono*' was in my first year of law school. I learned that it stands for '*for the public good*', however, I did not know the importance of it until I have actually taken this module and completed my first case. I recall my team and I put our time and efforts in solving different legal issues. It was not easy and at the time very frustrating, but the moment when we sent the final letter of advice to the client and we knew that we have solved their issue, that feeling cannot be described. We just made a difference for someone else's life, by using our legal knowledge to help a complete stranger in need without getting paid.

Through this module, I learned about the consequences of the legal aid cuts and different terms such as pro bono, social justice, professional identity, and legal ethics and values. I have also gotten the opportunity to attend the Open Justice Street Law orientation in October 2018 and learned how to carry out a productive yet fun presentation with the focus on providing the members of the public with awareness, knowledge and understanding of different legal rights and issues through public legal education.

I have always thought that by volunteering I could make a difference for someone else's life, but I never thought that through volunteering it has given my life more meaning. I have become more confident in different aspects of my life and, developed personal and professional skills. The value of pro bono legal work developed in the light of my participation in both the Open Justice activities has been vital and beyond my expectation. As Mahatma Gandhi once said: '*the best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.*' I truly believe in those words. My desire to help people in need and the commitment to social justice has exceeded the desire to gain employability skills. I will definitely be involved in pro bono volunteering in the future because the experience will contribute to my further development and personal growth, which is considered as a great asset!

This journey has genuinely been personally fulfilling and rewarding.