

Lucy

Throughout March and April, we attended HMP Oakwood to work with prisoner mentors and the St Giles Trust to research any legal issues the mentors suggested. This included joint enterprise, the imprisonment for public protection sentence (IPP's), racial profiling within the criminal justice system and the destruction of court transcripts amongst other smaller topics.

Prior to our first visit, I believed that all prisoners deserved to be in jail and that they should 'do the time' for the crimes they've committed. However, I tried to keep an open mind upon arrival at the prison and form an educated opinion after meeting the mentors. Which is exactly what they were, not prisoners, mentors. I've never met such polite humans! The second they entered the room they introduced themselves and shook your hand and offered you a cuppa and a biscuit... amazing! Instantly you forgot you were in a prison and it felt like you were in their home (which is technically true!) and this made the discussions we had over the next two visits so much easier, even when we were feeding back negative findings. Very quickly we discovered some of the mentors we spoke to were serving life sentences without even committing any crimes, which further proved my point of not judging a book by its cover. The mentors were a credit to HMP Oakwood and the St Giles Trust.

Working with the St Giles Trust was brilliant. I had no idea that they existed until working on this project with them, and I'm very glad I got the opportunity to do so. Steve and Tammia were very welcoming and ensured that we didn't just see the good side of the prison but also the not so good side when taking us on tours of the prison, which I really appreciated. During the tours, many of the prisoners that Tammia helped rehabilitate greeted her with such respect just passing by and this triggered my interest in wanting to work with St Giles Trust (specifically wanting Tammia's job!). It must be so fulfilling to be able to see your hard work walking about the prison and this made me appreciate the work St Giles Trust do even more.

Although we didn't necessarily better the prison mentors' legal knowledge, I'm very grateful to have had this experience and it's something I can take with me to job interviews because I feel I gained so much knowledge and practical experience. It was so fun researching topics like joint enterprise, especially as it is currently in the news, but I was also bettering my legal knowledge on topics I was unaware of. I'll miss our visits to HMP Oakwood, after every visit I was bursting with excitement about what I'd experienced throughout my 'days in prison'.

Big thanks to the Open University for creating this pilot project, enabling us to gain such valuable experience which will help in so many ways in our future endeavours. Also thank you to the St Giles Trust, specifically Steve and Tammia for letting us be a part of your team and taking time out of your busy days to accompany us and unlock and lock again every door we walked through! HMP Oakwood, thank you, it's been a pleasure and the best experience I've had so far!