

## **Pro Bono's true value- Absolutely priceless.**

I was thrilled about choosing my open justice project for W360 as it was a chance to embark on a proactive part of my studies and finally I was given the choice to be able to work with others face to face. The STC (Support Through Court) was one of the projects able to offer this. Although to my dismay, they did not provide legal advice.

Immediately I began making judgment about the possibilities of carrying out pro bono work, aiding individuals who found themselves in positions surrounding legalities without providing legal advice, embarking on my pro bono project with an underestimation of the value of pro bono. Extract 1 from my portfolio was written before starting with the STC highlighting how narrow my definition of the value of pro bono was "Pro bono can be best described as free legal advice given in any area of law to those who have no means of being able to obtain this due to financial circumstance".

I remember my first day volunteering with the STC thinking how wrong I was to have thought that the true value of pro bono had to be based on providing legal advice. I underestimated the demand for people from all walks of life wanting to access these services, the selflessness and dedication of the individuals involved in carrying out pro bono work. The supportive side of pro bono work deep-seated in the value of pro bono and the impact pro bono has on clients and volunteers' lives.

I believe my naivety may have had something to do with the lack of hands on experience I had with the world of pro bono; this being said I worked with the witness service for two years with no idea that I was carrying out pro bono work due to my academic based value of pro bono being based solely on providing legal advice.

After volunteering with the STC and in preparation for TMA3 I wrote extract 2 "Pro bono's true value cannot be endured through any amount of academic text or research. The real value can only be felt from the experience that comes from actively participating in pro bono work such as the STC". I came to realise that the STC did not

need to provide legal advice. The support it provides goes way beyond belief, playing a huge part in contributing to social justice.

Preceding volunteering with the STC I couldn't envision how social justice fitted alongside a charity such as the STC, I associated social justice with charities such as Citizens Advice Bureau who are able to advise on legal issues, filling the gap legal aid cuts have left.

What an oversight! I have provided emotional support for litigants in person to feel empowered in accessing justice, supported individuals in initiating legal proceedings by helping to locate and fill out forms they may otherwise not have been able to due to the fees they would have had to pay solicitors. I have been able to provide referrals to agencies that can help with legal queries. Support alone can in fact bridge the way for social justice particularly those effected by legal aid cuts, the support enables fair distribution of access to justice and provides guidance for those who are unable to obtain representation for whatever reason.

It goes without saying that upon reflecting, I have learnt not to be so judgmental and to embrace new experiences with an open mind as this has enabled me to now understand the value of pro bono work – a service money cannot buy; Absolutely priceless.

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