

Finding the professional “me”

My eyes burned as flicked to another page of evidence. I spent many hours poring over the evidence held within Clio. Everything I have done so far was in preparation for this moment. However, nothing can really prepare you for pro bono work except pro bono work!

As stated in Extract 13, my upbringing, unfortunately gave me my first experience of the law. I witnessed my family go through court proceedings on numerous occasions and legal aid was a saviour. Without it, I am sure my family would have struggled to navigate the criminal proceedings. My family and I were not aware of pro bono but that changed once my passion for the law developed into what can be described as an obsessive addiction, the result of true crime documentaries and films. Pro bono publico means "for the public good;" It is providing free legal help to those who need it.

When I chose this module, my main motivation was to help others, especially those who experienced the same struggles that my family did. To keep social justice intact and maintain the backbone of our legal system, the rule of law, I knew it is vital for pro bono to play a key role in a legal professional's work. I already valued pro bono work, but I underestimated the work and collaboration required and how quickly the costs in paid work could quickly escalate to be unaffordable and result in social injustice. However, I only really considered the effect on those in need and not the impact it would have on legal professionals. The impact on my professional identity and how this affects pro bono has developed significantly.

Interviewing the client in the clinic helped me develop my professional identity. It allowed me to be empathetic with client, develop my active listening skills and control the interview to remain structured to obtain all relevant information.

I did, however, have preconceived judgments about the case which I suppose was an unconscious bias. I questioned internally whether the complaints were warranted and whether the other party's actions were going to be good enough for the client. Here is where I saw a change in my professionalism, I reflected, I thought about the

client's complaints and how they were significant to her and was not unreasonable and following legal research, she absolutely had a case. I learnt that having awareness of both sides can make you a better legal professional, more so by having the self-awareness to identify and reflect which can help you thrive (Extract 12).

I have grown professionally and now know my professional growth can be hindered by listening to negative preconceived judgements. Reflection was key to my professional growth and performance in this task. By asking questions, actively listening and being openminded I will continue to grow professionally for my future clients. Feedback from the client was positive and I will use this as the fuel that will advance my pro bono work.

Pro bono work is embedded into the professional "me", now part of my DNA. It will form a valued role in within my legal career and I will endeavour to encourage legal professionals around me to embrace this too.

Having the honour to take part in pro bono, has reaffirmed my understanding of the value of pro bono has on social justice and has helped me to significantly develop professionally. As stated in Extract 13, "the impact of pro bono work on legal professionals can be far more rewarding than remuneration - professional and skill development, experience, reputation, and that warm fuzzy feeling". The Open Justice Clinic has been the vehicle in my journey to finding the professional "me".

References

Butler, D. (2023) 'Extract [12]', originally written 7th March 2023

Butler, D. (2023) 'Extract [13]', originally written 11th April 2023