

## **From Student to Supporter: How pro-bono has shaped my own professional legal identity**

As *W360: Justice in Action* draws to an end, my reflection is becoming increasingly more substantive to identify how my views on pro-bono have developed and how this connects with my own professional legal identity.

I entered the project with pre-determinations around pro-bono; my view was almost cinematised, shaped by Hollywood court-room dramas depicting low-budget law clinics or students providing pro-bono to disadvantaged individuals (and normally at a somewhat lower quality). Initially I thought participation in pro-bono primarily had intrinsic motivations, as I noted back in October; 'I am keen to use pro-bono work to gain experience for my legal career, which will elevate my CV' (Extract 1). However, my subsequent participation in the Global Witness project has altered these misconceptions.

The main project activity was to prepare a group report on the disclosure and witness protection processes within Uganda. We had a meeting with Global Witness who described the importance of their work, the impact they have on vulnerable individuals and how they challenge big corporations regarding human rights abuses. I entered the project with ulterior personal motives; I was so in awe of their work that my main goal was to impress them with my research skills, enhancing my own CV. What I have realised upon reflection is that whilst I was working intrinsically, I completely overlooked the sole purpose of pro-bono; to provide legal services free of charge to those who really need it (Law Society, 2019). Whilst I focused on researching for personal gain, I disregarded the *effect* of this research; I was more concerned with brushing up my own skills than providing information to protect vulnerable witnesses from harm...and even death! I should have focused on tailoring my research to the client's needs, not my own. Interestingly, this contradicts my earlier skills audit; I resonated with being 'client-focused, empathetic and ...able to adapt to my audience' (Extract 2). Whilst this was not dishonest, from another's viewpoint it appears I drifted from my strengths during the task.

Before the project, I would have seen personal gain as an adequate objective, but since delving into Global Witness' work and evaluating the impact our research could have, would I have chosen to enter the project with different intentions? Absolutely.

This therefore made me question my own professional legal identity; ‘the personal view you have of yourself as you undertake a specific job or role’ (Open University, 2021a, 1). If I so easily parted from my values, will I ever have a *fixed* professional identity, or will it alter dependant on my circumstances? My reflection has challenged me to think about what values and beliefs I want for myself in my legal career. Unlike my earlier stance, I want to ‘part from wholly intrinsic motivations...pushing to centre my work with my client always in mind...(and) empathise with the outcome my client wants and tailor my work to try and achieve that’ (Extract 3).

The report is not yet finalised; so going forward, putting aside personal gain will allow me to prepare a more client-focused report. I can centre my research around what Global Witness will *actually* find valuable and how that information can be translated into vital help to those who really need it. My earlier assumptions around pro-bono have subsequently shifted; by reflecting and considering the impact on the client, I can see how the value of pro-bono extends from personal gratification to genuine help someone who really needs it can receive. Not only have I further understood the value of pro-bono and the vital effect it can have, but my own professional legal identity has become clearer.

## References

### Module materials

The Open University (2021a) *W360 Unit 2: Professional identity and pro bono*, [Online]. Available at <https://learn2.open.ac.uk/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=1811566> (accessed 17<sup>th</sup> April 2022).

### Portfolio

Jenner, J. (2021) ‘Extract 1’, originally written 29 October 2021.

Jenner, J. (2021) ‘Extract 2’, originally written 2 November 2021.

Jenner, J. (2021) ‘Extract 3’, originally written 15 April 2022.

## **Other sources**

Law Society (2019) *Introduction to pro bono*, [Online]. Available at <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/en/topics/pro-bono/introduction-to-pro-bono> (Accessed 16th April 2022).