

What is the value of words? Pro Bono work and using interviews to understand a legal situation.

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Pro Bono work is considered an excellent means to help those who cannot afford legal advice (Bee, 2018), a paragon of pride for the legal community. I am unsure where I got the notion that Pro Bono work was only meant for criminal law to help those wrongly accused, but that's where I started before my work in the Open Justice Policy Clinic. I may have had a strange notion that "lawyers decided arbitrarily to aid someone." [Extract 1] I do not think I truly understood the value of pro bono work in other areas of law to help the advancement of social justice.

My group was tasked with interviewing an advocacy group attempting to help end violence against women to research how the current legislation was used. I did not know what I was expecting. "The interview was pretty stressful" [Extract 2], maybe because of the topic or because I have never done an interview like this before. I attended tutorials to improve my skills before the interview, but this was a part of the law I had never considered. "I felt out of depth" [Extract 3] as I worked with my group to create a series of 13 questions to try and extract information from the interviewee that would help our group in the recommendations we would provide to our client.

The practice of law is rooted in conversation, though it is easily forgotten as a core skill needed to be successful as a lawyer, shadowed by legal prowess or charm. Popular media likes to create this persona around lawyers as someone that knows what to do in each legal situation but never really discusses how they got to that point. I never realised how much speaking to others could benefit your understanding of the issue. I underestimated how much of your professional identity can be reflected by your interpersonal skills within an interview. How you speak to an interviewee can show the positives and negatives of your personality as you attempt to grapple with difficult social questions with your colleagues and clients. The questions you ask and your response to the answer really can affect how the interview helps or hinders your initial research.

Interviewing people gave our group a first-person account of how victims and professionals were able to use the law and move throughout the legal system. We found that there were more factors in determining what was affecting the implementation of the law that my group had not considered, such as legal guidance on using a piece of legislation. It helped me understand that legal work needs a human connection to those affected by the law to understand its limitations. Interviewing individuals affected or connected to the issue is a powerful tool for social justice because it can help you ensure recommendations are targeted to the right people. It highlighted the value of connecting to the individuals in completing pro bono legal work and research that directly improved the scope of social justice.

The interviews directly affected the final report for our clients and helped develop ideas we did not expect, such as the lack of professional awareness of legislation. In addition, conducting an interview was an experience that better developed my understanding of pro bono legal work by illuminating the personal connection these cases have with the client and the possibility of aiding society through first-person accounts. Finally, my interviewing work in the Policy Clinic made me realise that pro bono legal work benefits not only those dealing with the criminal system but can affect change through research conducted on current legislation.

## **REFERENCES**

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