**Why should I work for free?**

I chose to do a law degree as I have always wanted to help people, but like many I had a view that Pro bono was a way for “scroungers” (Extract 1, Begum. M (2023)) o obtain free legal support because they did not want to pay for our services. The legal identity of a solicitor being academic, and well off in society should not mean I am “forced to give a free hand out” (Extract 2, Begum. M (2023)). I was somewhat of “an individualist” (Extract 3, Begum, M. (2023)): I had a sense of annoyance about the concept, thinking “why should I work for free?” (Extract 4, Begum. M (2023)) I worked hard to get where I am! I deserve to be paid…right? Wrong

My first Pro bono project was advising a client on a divorce proceeding. Whilst a role play, “this opened my horizons” (Extract 5, Begum. M (2024)) having a huge impact on my understanding of the need for Pro bono work, “far from trying to take advantage of my legal knowledge and hard work” (Extract 6, Begum. M (2024)) the client “needed genuine support” (Extract 6, Begum. M (2024)) on her financial legal stance as she had been a home maker for over 20 years and dependant on partner to provide. This was “a realisation that my current mindset was ignorant and influenced by neoliberalism (Extract 7, Begum. M (2024)).

My societal views shifted further as I moved on to working with a charity, ‘Prison Advice and Care Trust’ (PACT), to support their clients with understanding a form required for child access arrangements (C100). As “a law student, the form seemed simple, almost like filling a car tax form” (Extract 8, Begum. M (2024)). However, I realised that the people requiring this support may have “low literacy skills” (Extract 9, Begum. M (2024)) yet have a legal obligation to submit the form should they wish to see their child. This highlighted a barrier to accessing justice which could have a catastrophic impact on a parent/guardian and their child’s life. How did this fit with my desire to help people?

“I wanted to overcome this barrier to accessing justice by making the information more accessible” (Extract 10, Begum. M (2024)). I researched what people found challenging about the form – mainly the legal jargon - and overcame this by simplifying the information and condensing it in a leaflet. My views started to broaden, leading to a “deontological approach deriving from my ethical and moral values”. (Extract 11, Begum. M (2024)). I now find it immoral that there are people in serious need who cannot afford legal representation. How can that be fair? It isn’t. We are supposed to have access to justice for a fair society. My previous perspective of Pro bono work as giving my expertise away for free to “undeserving” people changed completely.

I have also gained a great deal: skills in using an online legal system (Clio); identifying and dealing with vicarious trauma; making information accessible; confidence with interviewing clients and management of my emotions, particularly my own anxiety as “the client will not respect a representative that is overly empathetic, you need to be their strength.” (Extract 12, Begum. M (2024)).

Overall, this experience has given me insights into the ambiguities within the justice system. “I realised that my work is people-based”: (Extract 13, Begum. M (2024)) Pro bono work has taught me to keep an open mind. I will have a sense of pride when undertaking cases, with an ethical, naturalistic view rather than a societal one. As advocated in the utilitarian principle of *felicific calculus*, “ethical action should seek to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number” Jeremy Bentham, (1918).

**References and Bibliography**

Open justice portfolio:

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