**Students: The Vanguard of Pro Bono**

**4th November 2020**

**Violeta Stancheva**

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One of the most interesting and important themes of Pro Bono Week 2020 was 'Students: The Vanguard of Pro Bono'. The session started with student volunteers from various university law clinics. After they shared their beneficial experience with the audience, the session progressed with some special guests working as professionals in the legal industry. These guests included: Solicitor Chris Lake from Anthony Collins Solicitors LLP, Former Legal Recruitment Manager Lucy Dolan from Gowling WLG UK and Corporate Partner at Eversheds Sutherland Catherine Eley. The guests shared how their professional experience was benefitted and amplified by undertaking Pro Bono work.

**Jessica- BPP University Student**

As the main purpose of the session was to highlight the importance of students engaging with Pro Bono work, the session started with Jessica’s experience as a student volunteer. She explained what her Pro Bono work entailed and the skills she gained from it. This work included drafting legal documents such as post interview letters and letters of advice for her clients. In doing so, she was directly connecting with clients during appointments and conducting legal research. Her Pro Bono work helped her with building a better sense of commercial awareness due to her involvement in the Enterprise Law Clinic. This helped her gain a wide range of skills, such as understanding her client issues by working with real clients. She also improved her interviewing and letter writing skills, which could be further assessed in her LPC application. This will help her further legal studies as she can put the legal skills she gained into practice while completing her LPC.

**Melisa Oleschuk- Birmingham City University Student**

Melisa had one of the most fascinating and emotional stories. She volunteered to do Pro Bono work at an immigration clinic, which was supported by exceptional aid funding. Each client of the law clinic needed to go through a long process when applying for these funds. Melisa helped her clients with the applications to help them prove that their financial background does not allow them to cover their case costs. One of her clients, who was a victim of human trafficking and had his rights breached, needed exceptional case funding for the additional costs of the case. She helped him to apply for that by gathering evidence for her case from bundles and organising them in chronological order, careful to not miss any time gaps and identifying any conflicts with other financial statements. Her client spoke very little English, so she had to overcome a language barrier when communicating with the client. She said that it was very hard for her to keep her professional tone whilst dealing with such an emotional case. After her interviews, she double-checked the information, prepared a statement of her client’s words and kept his expenditures at a minimum. She explained that she decided to volunteer at a law clinic which helps with immigration issues because she wanted to gain practical experience. She is particularly interested in human rights area of law which was connected to the immigration laws.

**Nickolaus Ng- Birmingham University Student**

Nickolaus shared his Pro Bono experience by talking about his environmental case. The case included environmental law claims arising from pollution affecting the water quality of a river. He was conducting further research into statutes and case law to support his case. He said that his Pro Bono experience persuaded him to seek a career as a solicitor and he reinforced that a student who is volunteering for a first time at a law clinic should be open-minded and friendly. The client should feel comfortable to share what upsets him, therefore students need to help their clients to understand that we are on their side to help them with their legal matters.

**Kiefer- University of Law Student**

I believe that there was one very special student- Kiefer. Kiefer highlighted the importance of client care in disabilities and learned how to be a better member of society through providing legal help. “While doing a Pro Bono I learnt that you can be the light of someone’s life, without imagining that helping other people even with the smallest issue could be so much useful to somebody.’’

**Amir Al-Monsur- Aston Law Clinic Legal Assistant**

Amir Al-Monsur presented the importance of his work within the Aston Law Clinic. He explained that the clinic offers free legal advice and engages with client work. He works with a team of other two students which gives them the opportunity to learn from each other, allows them to understand better each part of the process and conduct case research faster. He recommends doing Pro Bono work as a student because it is a relevant legal experience, which will help you to develop legal skills and improve your professional experience.

**Chris Lake- Anthony Collins**

Chris shared his experience of applying for training contracts and said that a Pro Bono experience will be an advantage in your application. He thinks that Pro Bono expands your commercial awareness, helps you to link law to reality, gives you confidence from the exposure to the real work and will make your CV to stand out from the other students who have not previously volunteered.

**Lucy Dolan- Gowlings**

Lucy advised that students put their Pro Bono experience into practice. For example, we can write down what we gained from that experience, in order to reinforce the importance of these skills and to demonstrate how we implemented these skills in a job interview. By doing so, we can show an understanding of what skills we have and how they will benefit the firm as an employer.

**Catherine Eley- Eversheds Sutherland**

Catherine Eley outlined that Pro Bono helps us to think more broadly about the legal world. As a corporate partner, she explained that Pro Bono is embedded in their firm culture and mission. They encourage their trainees to get involved in different local charities and Pro Bono work.