



BCLS Volunteer Profile:

Jack O'Neill

How long have you been with BCLS and what drew you to want to volunteer in the community legal sector?

I've been volunteering with BCLS since November 2018 - which has gone quickly when I think about it.

I began volunteering as part of the Duty Lawyer program at the Geelong Magistrates Court and then also jumped at the opportunity to be part of the Family Law program shortly after. I wouldn't say I was drawn to the community legal sector when I first applied - it wasn't a sector that I was overly familiar with at the time! I wouldn't change the past now, even if I could - it's been great!

What is the best aspect of your role and what is the most challenging?

The best aspect of the role is being able to help people. Quite often the people who I interact with are individuals who need help, and if it weren't for CLCs like Barwon, they probably wouldn't be able to get the help they need.

At the same time this can present challenges. Language barriers are one of the greatest challenges - not just for clients where English isn't their first language, but also 'legal speak'. Just trying to explain phrases such as a 'conflict check' can at times be difficult.

Why did you decide to pursue a legal career?

I've had an interest in 'the law' since I was quite young. Growing up, this initially began with an interest in wanting to join the Police Force. Since then, I've grown to have an interest in the law - not just from the perspective of a lawyer, or the court - but also from a political angle.

I completed my Year 10 work experience with the Geelong Magistrates Court and from there I undertook Legal Studies as a VCE unit and then onto study Law at Deakin University post-high school.

Now in my fourth year of a double degree, I am beginning to look at what my career will look like at the end of next year. I do want to pursue a legal career though, ideally as a practicing lawyer. I like to leave my options open as to what type of law this might be.

Tell us one of the highlights of your time at BCLS so far.

The Cake! Yes, lawyers are real people and they celebrate birthdays! Eating cake is always a highlight, right?!

The people are also great. Whether it's the lawyers, admin staff or other volunteers and students. I've certainly made some good friends just from volunteering. I'm thankful the Court volunteers have put up with me for as long as they have!

What do you wish other people knew about volunteering in a CLC?

There's probably a couple of things to know about volunteering in a CLC. The opportunity to be able to help those that really need help stands out the most. However, the opportunities that present themselves within a CLC - whether it be as a volunteer, intern or PLT student are invaluable and often greater than what you might be exposed to elsewhere.

It's also not just the opportunities - it can be the people you meet. I think some people may be surprised how many private lawyers/firms you deal with.

If you weren't going to be a lawyer what would you be?

There are quite a few occupations that I really want to (or have wanted) to pursue. It would probably be quicker to list those that don't interest me.

If I wasn't going to be a lawyer, I'd probably look to a role within the legal system first. I've had an interest in working within the court system. I did want to join the Police Force whilst growing up, so that's another option. While at Court I've seen other Victoria Police roles as well which are appealing.

I find politics quite interesting, so that presents as another option. I'm studying journalism as well at university and have been writing for a number of years now too, so I'd like to think I have a few options.

When you're not volunteering where can we find you?

At work. I love working - and keeping busy more generally. On the weekend, I'll be running around on a football field umpiring. I'm on the Board and am the Treasurer of our association.

When I'm not working though, I'm sleeping (or drinking coffee!). With COVID-19, I've dedicated a little more time to something I discovered called 'university'!

What is the best piece of advice you have ever been given?

I think there's probably been quite a lot of advice that is worthwhile sharing. One of the most important things though is: experience. You can never have too much experience. Keep putting your hand up and taking opportunities that come your way. Even if you're not successful, don't let that stop you from trying. Always say yes!

What have you learnt at BCLS that you will take into your future legal/non-legal career?

I think making time to help people is important. It may take some of your time that could be used to do something else, but I think it's worthwhile. Taking time to have a conversation with people - whether it be work related or not, to find out how they're going, and offering them help (with anything) will go a long way.