



VOLUNTEERING WITH A LEGAL CHARITY

Links to the main opportunities on offer

[Abstract](#)

Provides an overview of the activities in which legal charities support their clients and which provide valuable work experience for the CV of those progressing with a legal career

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Context of volunteering in the legal sector

Opportunities to volunteer exist in a wide variety of environments, activities and communities. Fundamentally someone wishes to volunteer, to provide freely of one of the most valuable assets at Cambridge, their time, for a cause or purpose in which they believe. Volunteering allows someone the experience of expressing and articulating their own values in working for the benefit to others. As such its an important statement of motivation which will often be described and discussed in interview situations...when your audience wants to get to know the “real you.”

Where that activity incorporates a skill or knowledge relevant to a career in the legal sector it can become an important part of an application for a role or more fundamentally the focus for a whole or part of a career. Because an understanding of the law and the delivery of a legal service is complex, expensive, and often despite all best intentions non inclusive there exists a huge, growing and enduring need for support for disadvantaged groups. This service is underpinned by a large network of charities, volunteer groups and pro bono activities. Some

Benefits of volunteering

Volunteering can be an expected and necessary part of gaining work experience for those pursuing a career in public interest law. Without such experience it can be difficult to qualify especially if supported by a relevant organisation. This is because such volunteering:

- Shows early on the sort of personal commitment and value driven motivation that adds credibility to your profile and puts you in a more competitive position with other applicants. It may well be that more than one volunteering position will be needed on your CV over a period of 1-2 years.

- Provides an insight into the experiences of the clients validating a career choice and adding weight to any motivational argument or statement at interview. It is tangible evidence of acquiring a realistic insight into the difficulties, stresses and challenges of a professional life doing this kind of work

- Volunteering can be extremely valuable for individuals looking at even the most corporate or commercial legal careers. Many if not most law firms, chambers, in house legal departments and other regulatory or professional services organisations provide their staff with opportunities to offer pro bono time. You are quite possibly likely to meet these qualified individuals and perhaps work alongside them when volunteering. They will be well trained and extremely knowledgeable and could easily offer insights and a “networking” opportunity. And as organisations profess the values of supporting and putting back to those less fortunate they recognise a similar drive in applicants.

- Volunteering environments are pressurised. They can expect resilience, open mindedness, stamina, an ability to learn quickly, be organised, communicate effectively and be imaginative. All of these strengths and skills, and more, are transferable to most subsequent work environments and can highlighted in application and assessment material

Sourcing opportunities

Some organisations can only survive and resource their work for clients because of having a large and steady flow of volunteers. These organisations will have “Get involved” sections on their websites and may even have regular seasonal recruiting rounds with application deadlines much like in the commercial world. The need of other organisations might be more occasional where they expect those interested to send a CV which will keep handy in case an opportunity arises. Finally, there are organisations which won’t usually advertise for volunteers but will respond to a speculative approach from someone who is already perhaps connected with their work or supportive of their ethos. It’s always worth writing to enquire of any charity or cause with which you admire.

Volunteering organisations

The list below represents a few of the better known organisations which will use volunteers in their work. It covers the main UK national legal charities and law centres. Many, many more will exist at local levels which can be uncovered by a little research.

Access to Justice Foundation

The [Access to Justice Foundation](#) works at a strategic level to improve access to justice in the UK. It receives and distributes financial resources to help get free of charge (pro bono) legal assistance to those who need it most. They occasionally offer unpaid internships during the summer months.

Advice UK

[Advice UK](#) is the largest UK network of advice-providing organisations. Its website has links to organisations working in advice areas including legal, immigration, debt, education and family. Their site also hosts a [jobs board](#) for advice related jobs.

Advocates for International Development (A4ID)

[A4ID](#) facilitates legal assistance to civil society, developing country governments, social enterprise and bar associations to help achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It works with law firms, barristers, legal academics and members of the judiciary willing to share pro bono expertise and involves individual lawyers and development professionals in projects and working groups that promote the achievement of the SDGs. A4ID may offer unpaid internships throughout the year in their London office, work undertaken could include research, writing articles and assisting with newsletters, conducting due diligence on new partners and coordinating the online forum.

Advocate

[Advocate](#) acts as a clearing house, matching barristers prepared to undertake pro bono work with those who need their help. Advocate receives applications for assistance through advice agencies and solicitors. It aims to help in cases where the applicant cannot afford to pay for the assistance sought or obtain public funding, has a meritorious case, and needs the help a

barrister can provide. Their website provides an overview of the areas of law still covered by legal aid. They have [casework volunteers](#) in the office every day via the: Academic Year Programme, volunteers commit to one day a week for four months; and the Summer Casework Volunteer programme, which lasts for one month between June and August and is a commitment of four days a week. Volunteers are the first contact for Advocate applicants, they also prepare case summaries for reviewing barristers.

APPEAL

[APPEAL](#) is a charity made up of investigators and lawyers working on carefully selected cases that can be brought before the Court of Appeal in order not just to achieve justice for the appellants, but also to bring the system face to face with its flaws. It advertises [volunteering and job opportunities](#) from time to time.

British Red Cross

The mission of the British Red Cross is to help anyone, anywhere around the world get the help they need when crisis strikes and that includes delivering extensive support services in the UK. As such BRC offers volunteering roles to support Refugees and Asylum Seekers which are often based locally around the country. They have a [database](#) of extensive volunteering roles across the organisation as a whole so using “refugee” as a keyword in your search will help you retrieve appropriate current opportunities. Researching the legal context for asylum seekers and refugees in the UK in advance would be desirable. There is a great deal of material online from the likes of the [Refugee Council](#) and [Refugee Action](#).

Cambridge University Pro Bono Society

[CU Pro Bono Society](#) exists to facilitate voluntary work by students for legal charities, and to raise awareness about current issues of human interest.

Child Rights International Network

CRIN is a creative think tank that produces new and dynamic perspectives on human rights issues, with a focus on children’s rights. We challenge the status quo because the norms that dictate children’s place in society need radical change. We press for rights - not charity - and campaign for a genuine shift in how governments and societies view and treat children. Through research, artwork and our vision for the future, we encourage people to think critically about the world. They occasionally have [opportunities](#) for volunteers

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

The [CAB](#) has over 20,000 volunteers in locations across the UK. Debt, benefits, housing, employment, consumer issues, family matters and immigration are the most commonly raised problems. Volunteers work in a variety of capacities, e.g. administration, reception, marketing, campaigning and, as Advisers in the areas of welfare, consumer and employment. All [volunteering opportunities](#) can be searched online by location.

The **Royal Courts of Justice Citizens Advice Bureau** is a unique Citizens Advice service covering legal services in the Royal Courts of Justice and Central London Family Court and deliver Citizens Advice Islington. They recruit and train [volunteers](#).

Community Links

[Community Links](#) is an east London charity, running a wide range of community services and projects for all ages. Through their national work, they share lessons with government and community groups across the country to achieve social change. They have an ongoing need for [volunteers](#).

Consonant

[Consonant](#) provides help and support for those seeking to establish themselves in their local community including legal advice about their immigration status and rights as asylum seekers. They occasionally [recruit volunteers](#) as legal administrators who help with casework management and triaging those needing access to qualified lawyers.

Free Representation Unit (FRU)

The [FRU](#) provides legal advice, case preparation and advocacy in tribunal cases for those who could not otherwise obtain legal support, for want of personal means or public funding. To provide this service they train volunteer law students and legal professionals in the early stages of their career in the skills required to give support for the rights of others. The FRU only operates in and around London. All FRU's volunteers work under the supervision of their case workers and offer free advice and representation to clients, appearing on their behalf before employment and social security tribunals. See [Volunteering](#) for an explanation of who is eligible to apply, training, how to get ratified to act as an FRU representative or volunteer, and the type of work these get involved in.

Human Rights Watch

Human Rights Watch investigates and reports on abuses happening in all corners of the world. They are roughly 450 people of 70-plus nationalities who are country experts, lawyers, journalists, and others who work to protect the most at risk, from vulnerable minorities and civilians in wartime, to refugees and children in need. They direct their advocacy towards governments, armed groups and businesses, pushing them to change or enforce their laws, policies and practices. They have [opportunities for internships](#) in all the countries in which they operate

Independent Custody Visitor Scheme

An **independent custody visitor** is someone who visits people who are detained in police stations to ensure that they are being treated properly. Visits to police stations by custody visitors are unannounced and can be made at any time. The visitors ask the detained person whether they have been informed of their and whether they are being treated properly. Visitors also check that the facilities within the custody suite, such as the cells, toilets and food-preparation areas. The custody record, which records everything that happens to someone whilst they are in police custody, may also be examined. The visitors complete a report of each visit, which will record their finding including any issues identified during the

course of the visit. Copies of the report are sent to the Police Authority. Students may think of becoming visitors at their place of study or where they live outside of term time. There is an ongoing need for volunteers to become visitors and you can apply to become one and find full details of the scheme on the website for the [Police and Crime Commissioner](#) for the locality in which you have an interest and simply search for “ICV”

Just for Kids Law

[Just for Kids Law](#) provides advocacy, support and assistance to young people in difficulty, whether these are in care, in trouble with the law, or at risk from exclusion from school. They also campaign actively for children’s rights within the youth justice system. Volunteering roles include legal caseworkers, youth advocates and mentors and opportunities are listed [here](#).

Law Centres Network

The [Law Centres Network](#) is the national organisation of Law Centres. They provide free and independent legal advice and representation to disadvantaged people who live or work in their catchment areas. Each Law Centre (there are 41) is responsible for their own recruitment of staff and decisions about the use of volunteers and placements. Some Law Centres accept student volunteers to provide administrative support and casework assistance and you can find contact details for individual [Law Centres](#) via the LCF website. Check the list and see which centres are near to where you will be based.

Law for Life

Law for Life is a charity dedicated to ensuring that people have the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to secure access to justice. They run [Advicenow](#), an independent, not-for-profit website which provides accurate, practical self-help guides, tools and film on rights and the law in England and Wales and draws together the best information about the law and rights available. They require [volunteers](#) to review their user material for its readability and usefulness and will keep your details on file if you ask.

Law Works

[LawWorks](#) is the operating name of the Solicitors Pro Bono Group (SPBG) - an independent charity with a mission to support, promote and encourage a commitment to pro bono across the solicitors' profession. LawWorks aims to increase the delivery of free legal advice to individuals and communities in need. Students can volunteer to work in a LawWorks Clinic but only if the clinic is part of your law school pro bono scheme.

Legal Aid Agency

[The Legal Aid Agency](#) provides a [list of legal aid providers](#) (who may be open to offering work experience) which is updated monthly and covers: actions against the police; crime; prison law; clinical negligence, community care, mental health, debt, welfare benefits, housing, family, public law, immigration/asylum.

Legal Action Group (LAG)

The [Legal Action Group](#) is a UK charity and membership organisation, seeking to promote equal access to justice for all members of society who are socially, economically or otherwise disadvantaged. To this end, it seeks to improve law and practice, the administration of justice and legal services. LAG offers publications, training and policy submissions in a range of areas including: criminal justice, family, human rights, immigration, employment, legal aid, education and housing.

Legal Aid Practitioners Group

The [Legal Aid Practitioners Group](#) is a membership organisation for Legal Aid lawyers.

National Centre for Domestic Violence

The National Centre for Domestic Violence was established in 2003 to help survivors of [domestic violence](#) and abuse obtain protection against an abuser, as well as offering services to the police, probation service, domestic abuse agency workers, the legal profession and judiciary. They specialise in providing free, fast and effective support to survivors of domestic violence and abuse, usually by helping individuals [obtain injunctions](#) from their local county court. This free service is provided to everybody, regardless of their financial circumstances, sexual orientation, race, gender, age, political, religious belief or otherwise. They offer year long [paid internships](#) to law graduates

Peace Brigades Initiative – UK

[PBI-UK](#) provides accompaniment and support to organisations, human rights defenders, and communities at risk in their ongoing struggle for freedom, human rights and the rule of law (including environmental rights, women's rights, LGBTQI+, Migrant's rights and Press Freedom. Providing field volunteers is a key part of their work but there are also volunteering opportunities in the UK at their London office including advocacy work and developing information packs.

POhWER

[POhWER](#) is a charity and membership organisation. They provide information, advice, support and advocacy to people who experience disability, vulnerability, distress and social exclusion. They look for volunteers who would like [to train as a volunteer advocate](#) and help people who are disadvantaged, disabled or too distressed to make their voice heard. They also [advertise jobs](#) from time to time on their website.

Prisoners Advice Service

[PAS](#) has an ongoing need to recruit volunteers who support prisoners to access legal information and to defend their legal rights. Legal Volunteer duties include sending general information to clients and other prisoners as directed by the legal caseworkers or senior solicitor, writing to clients with information about their specific cases and responding to general letters from prisoners. Duties also include basic admin work such as photocopying, filing and typing. This role is well suited for current or recent law students seeking to gain more experience of legal work, or for experienced lawyers wanting to use their skills and

experience to help prisoners. Volunteers are expected to commit to one day a week for at least three months. An expense allowance is provided.

Refugee Action

The mission of Refugee Action is to help people who've survived some of the world's worst regimes build a safe, happy and productive life in the UK by providing them with basic but comprehensive support. They will get justice, live free of poverty and be able to successfully rebuild their lives. They are involved in many programmes and usually require a minimum part time commitment of six months so may be best suited to recent graduates. You can keep up to date with their volunteering opportunities by signing up to their [newsletter](#)

Southwark Law Centre

Southwark Law Centre continues to provide a specialist casework service, in the areas of immigration, housing employment, discrimination and welfare rights. They do not offer a service directly to the public but take referrals from partner agencies of more complex cases. Volunteers are the backbone of their operations and they provide volunteers with excellent support to ensure they get the most out of their time volunteering. They accept volunteers from universities, colleges and the local community and from individuals expressing an interest in law. Those interested become Administrative Volunteers, but there is the opportunity to be involved in the legal side of their work with supervision. You will also at some point attend court/tribunals, clerk hearings and sit in on client interviews with caseworkers where applicable. The Centre has an ongoing [need for volunteers](#) who need to be able to commit to one day a week for six months or two days for three months and they provide cover for expenses.

Support through Court

Becoming a [court volunteer](#) means providing support to those who would otherwise attend court without representation and who would find the experience overwhelming. Volunteers explain how the court works, help to complete forms, advise clients on what they need to say and attend court with them. First step is to submit an expression of interest to the locality in which you'd be keen to operate but note you have to be able to provide two days a month of your time.

Toynbee Hall

Toynbee Hall was founded on the principles of volunteering and has been placing volunteers at the heart of their work for over 130 years. All frontline services rely on volunteers. Each year they provide thousands of people with free legal assistance on a range of issues within UK law. Their volunteers are a mix of barristers, solicitors, trainee solicitors and law students. Toynbee Hall's Free Legal Advice Service (FLAC) has been running for over 120 years. It's the oldest free legal advice service in the world and serves the local and wider community. They advertise regularly for [volunteer](#) roles.

Victim Support

[Victim Support](#) is the charity for victims and witnesses of crime in England and Wales. They support people affected by crime and traumatic incidents in England and Wales, and put them at the heart of their organisation. They provide specialist services to help people cope and recover and to empower them to ensure their voices are heard individually and collectively at a local and national level.

You can register to be a [Volunteer](#) online. They usually have an interesting selection of [jobs](#) around the UK advertised on their website.

Youth Justice Board

This is a non-departmental public body responsible for overseeing the youth justice system in England and Wales. The [Youth Justice Resource Hub](#) was established in 2016 and is a platform to share practice and, where available, evidence and research. It is for youth justice professionals, academics, researchers, students and volunteers. There are [volunteering opportunities](#) at many levels and can be an ideal starting point to developing your own practice incl: becoming a mentor, youth offender panel member, appropriate adult, Independent Monitoring Board member, or a young volunteer.

Young Legal Aid Lawyers

A group of lawyers who are committed to practising in those areas of law, both criminal and civil, that have traditionally been publicly funded. [YLAL](#) members include students, paralegals, trainee solicitors, pupil barristers and qualified junior lawyers based throughout England and Wales. Their [jobs page](#) occasionally has internships, paralegal and qualified opportunities, but could also provide prospects for speculative applications for work experience.

Generating more ideas – “the golden nuggets”

One of the best ways to find great volunteering opportunities is to look at the profiles of Cambridge alumni who have themselves volunteered at the early stages of their careers or whilst students. LinkedIn not only provides you with a timeline when the alumnus had their volunteering experience but it will also usually provide a link from the record to the organisational website so you can start a search straight away for anything current. There are so many Cambridge alumni on LinkedIn its best to start searching with some relevant criteria:

Use the graduation date range to retrieve recent alumni

Use the Subject studied field to highlight those who are close to your own subject

Use the “where they live” field to create a geographically relevant

...or combine these criteria and more to sharpen the relevance of your list.

And..one more tip. When you are looking at the career trajectory of an alumnus and viewing their volunteering experience check out what they are posting about and what organisation

they are following to keep up to date. Both will provide suggestions for broadening your own activities and profile.

More Resources

[Volunteering Guide for Beginners](#) Student focussed website covering resources for the UK and abroad.

[Volunteer rights, pay and expenses](#). The Government website with links to official information and opportunities

[National Council for Voluntary Organisations](#) If the concept of supporting volunteering appeals this umbrella organisation has excellent news and jobs feeds

Volunteering experience is a particular necessity for a career either as a solicitor or barrister withing public interest law (covering civil liberties, human rights, actions against the police, housing, immigration, asylum, domestic violence, childrens rights, and much more). Three of our recent alumni talk on video of their volunteering experiences recorded recently and make the point well

[Alex Diner](#) Trainee Solicitor Bhatt Murphy

[Tayyiba Baiwa](#) Barrister Doughty Street Chambers

[Amy O'Shea](#) Paralegal Bindmans

Staying in touch

The situation of those in need of legal support is constantly changing, influenced by long and short term changes in their personal situations and the changes in the political, social and regulatory environment. Staying well informed about social issues can really help understand some of these pressures so following the reporting and opinion pieces in the broadsheet press is extremely valuable. For a more detailed understanding of some of these pressures blog sites are invaluable:

[Secret Barristers Blog](#) The Secret Barrister is a junior barrister specialising in criminal law, and part-time author and blogger. The law can often feel to the public like an alien and impenetrable world, linked to everyday life only by selective news reportage and artistically-licensed tv dramatisation. This blog aims to bridge that gap by providing a candid, and hopefully accessible, explanation of our criminal justice system, of how it works, and of how, all too often, it doesn't. It also tries to help to demystify and debunk some of the stranger or more controversial legal stories that make it into the news

[Human Rights Watch - UK](#) A high level review of the pressures on human rights by country.

Frequent questions

Can I volunteer during term time?

You will be the best judge of balancing your time and academic commitments and volunteering will need to take place alongside sport, positions of responsibility, student societies and just plain recreation and enjoyment. Your personal tutor and college guidelines may offer insight into what would be acceptable and don't forget that many organisations realise student lives are busy and can gear their volunteering activities to the vacations.

Will I be paid?

Although by its very nature volunteering is unpaid organisations representing the disadvantaged realise it would be inconsistent to contribute to the disadvantage of those who can't afford to volunteer. It's worth understanding what an organisation can do to help subsidise travel and meals and other expenses incurred in performing a volunteering activity. It is also worth approaching the college to see whether there is funding flexible enough for you to draw on.

Do I need to be studying for a law degree?

Because some of the volunteering work requires a basic grasp of legal concepts or a skill such as advocacy volunteer organisations make stipulate they would prefer applications from law students. But the vast majority are keen to utilise the main attributes of all well performing Cambridge students, namely, a capacity to work hard, be organised, be quickly and openly collaborative and produce work of a high standard.