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What's your fondest memory of PBSC as a student?

It was the first time I got to work with somebody who was self-represented as a volunteer with the Family Law Project. It was a case and there was a significant custody and access issue. The woman came to speak to duty counsel at the Court because she did not have the resources to retain a lawyer. The client had a really authentic, compelling story to tell, but did not know how to navigate the court process or how to tell her story in a way that would best communicate the facts she needed to get across. I had received really great training from PBSC and I was confident I could help this woman tell her story in an effective way. It was probably the first time I ever felt like a real lawyer, and it was sort of a watershed moment for me where I realized that going into family practice was what I wanted to do. My work with PBSC opened the door for me to my future career as a family lawyer.

What has your involvement with PBSC given you personally?

I had a budding interest in family law but had never actually worked with clients before joining the Family Law Project. A lot of the learning I did on the ground I did through PBSC. The skills of human interaction and good client service can only really be learned by doing, so those early opportunities were really valuable. When I eventually joined a family law firm, I was so much better equipped having gone through the PBSC program.

How important are the contributions of law students, in filling the access to justice gap in Canada?

PBSC volunteers are providing legal services to a lot of vulnerable people who otherwise would not have access to any support. Even more important, PBSC is training the next generation of lawyers to have a commitment to pro bono work, to see its value. It's this systemic contribution to the profession that makes me most proud of being a PBSC alum.

Is there more that law schools can do to support PBSC?

I think instilling the pro bono ethic in students early on is quite important. I'd love to see law schools implement mandatory pro bono service as a graduation requirement. There's such a wealth of talent out there and we should be working to harness it for the greater good.

Joanna Hunt,
Associate, Epstein Cole & Former PBSC Program Coordinator & Volunteer