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**The Value of Community Participation:
A Perspective of Law School
Undergraduates Involved as Community
Legal Companions**



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Overview



- Access to Justice Concerns in the UK
- CLOCK – Background
- The Community Legal Companion Role
- CLOCK in Kent (Community Engagement)
- Contextual Application
- Project Research and Findings (So far)



Access to Justice Concerns

Some Background

- *LASPO (2012)* - substantial scope cuts to civil legal aid.
- The Reality:
 - Reduction in legal aid;
 - Reduction in local authority funding of advice sector;
 - High cost of legal services;
 - Reduction in court resources (court closures), (+ higher court fees);
 - The prevailing economic situation.
- The Effect: “An Arguable Justice Gap”!



Low Commission Report 2014

- Established in late 2012 by LAG to:
 - Collate evidence re demand for advice/support on social welfare law;
 - Explore options for future provision and funding;
 - Develop a strategy for future provision and funding;
 - Make recommendations to Govt.
- The Report made 100 recommendations:
including.....

University law schools **should** [through collaborative efforts] further develop the ways in which law students can provide pro bono services, including public legal education.

See:

<http://www.lowcommission.org.uk/dyn/1389221772932/Low-Commission-Report-FINAL-VERSION.pdf>

Being a Community Legal Companion

- CLCs are collaboratively trained to support community partner services to assist in legal needs re: housing, welfare benefits, private family law.
- Through guidance in:
 - Form filling and application process;
 - Unbundling papers in formal proceedings;
 - Note taking;
 - Assistance in legal and formal proceedings;
 - Signposting/referral.
- NB Companions never give advice!



CLOCK in Kent

Setting up the scheme

- Initially driven by Kent family judges;
- Meeting with Keele, local judges/practitioners, institutional academic staff;
- Key part of legal companion role is signposting: finding legal & third sector partners essential;
- Recruiting committed students, more than CV!. Leading to Five day training: academic, legal, third sector, court;
- Structures: rota, reporting; an evolving process;

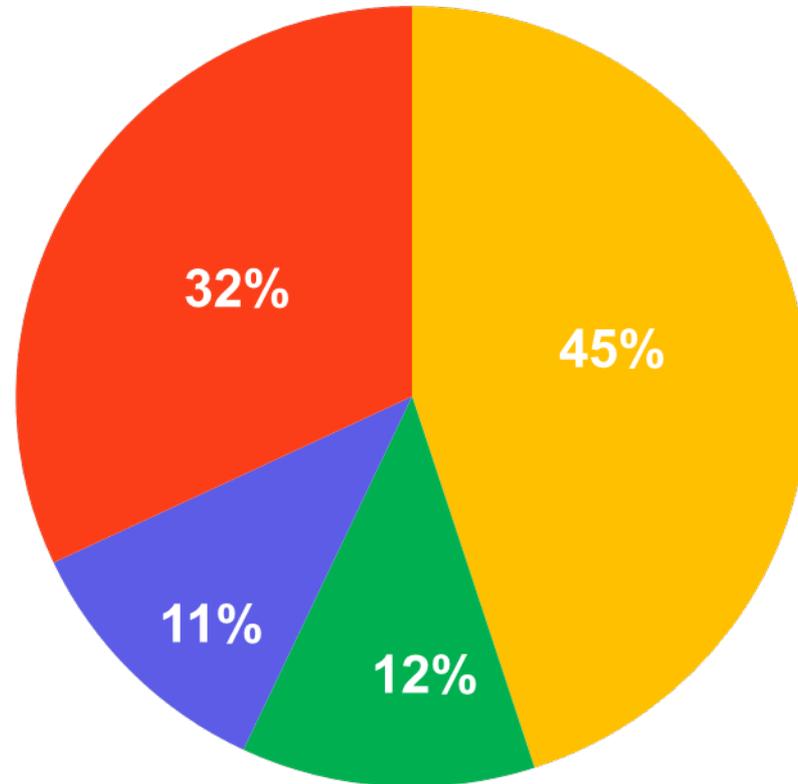


The Scheme in Operation

- CLCs are allocated to the court rota;
- Service Users arrive at Court Help Desk via:
 - Phone call/email to CLOCK. Admin notifies CLC on staff desk via email;
 - Partner provider referral;
 - Attending court for hearing.
- SUs sign a 'Community Care Letter';
- Signposting policy - to legal aid franchised firms, affordable fixed fee or pro bono services (e.g. Kent Law Clinic).
- Admin system - clock.uk.net national dataset.



Types of Companion Assistance Provided to the Community in Canterbury



■ Family ■ Housing ■ Money Claims ■ General Civil



The Research Questionnaire 1

- What does it say about experiential learning?

Responses to:

- What motivated you to apply to participate in the CLOCK scheme?
- Do you think that volunteering as a CLOCK legal companion will support your academic law studies?

- What does it say about developing law students' employability and readiness for the world of work?

Responses to:

- What are your career aspirations?
- How do you think volunteering as a CLOCK legal companion could support your future career?



The Findings

Sample Responses - Motivators

“[It’s] good experience for what I want to do once I’ve finished university. It is a great chance to gain skills that can help in the workplace.”

“One of the main motivators behind my decision to participate in the CLOCK scheme was an attempt to help those who are in need of support and guidance.”

“I wanted to participate because the programme seemed like a great opportunity to gain work experience while giving back to the community.”

“The practical skills I will learn and the experience that can boost my CV.”

“I [wanted to] get first hand, practical work experience in an area of law I would like to specialise in; family law.”



The Findings

Sample Responses – Supporting Studies

“Currently I am studying family law....and have found that a lot of family cases have been assisted by the CLOCK scheme. This has allowed me to view the theoretical teachings of this module in practice.”

“I think it will provide me with valuable experience in terms of what to expect when it comes to dealing with real life disputes as well as understanding the legal environment.”

“[Being a Companion] has provided me with knowledge of some of the legal paperwork which I will be dealing with as a solicitor, which I would not have become familiar with through the study of my degree alone.”

“It is putting what we learn about into practice.”

“I have already found that I have used skills that I learned from the dispute resolution module, such as filling out an N1 Claim Form has been useful. It is an opportunity to apply some of the knowledge I have learned to real experiences.”



The Findings

Sample Responses – Career Aspirations

“I want to be a lawyer, I am currently applying for LPC’s and having the companion scheme on my CV will be invaluable.”

“I’m looking into helping youth offenders and having practical experience with a variety of people and cases should support this.”

“I am unsure, however it is giving me experience in different areas of Law. It has actually showed me that I don’t want to go into property or the majority of the areas we work with. I want to go into criminal.”

“I would like to have a career at the Bar. CLOCK will support this by giving me great opportunity and experience which will help me to stand out for future employers, scholarship boards and law schools.”

“My career aspirations are to eventually become a practicing Solicitor.”

The Findings

Sample Responses – Future Career Support

“I believe that CLOCK will support my future career as a solicitor as it will help me stand out from my peers, help my experience in the legal sector & communication with individuals in difficult situations.”

“I believe volunteering as a CLC for CLOCK will help my LPC applications and give me something interesting and relevant to discuss in interviews.”

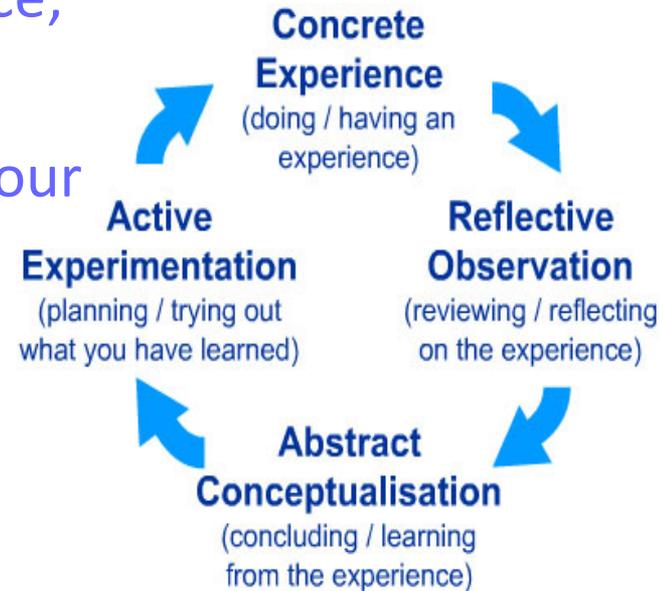
“The programme helped me to know more about the procedures when bringing a claim to court. As a solicitor, I will be talking to clients and helping them fill forms in some cases. The CLOCK programme is directly tailored to the experience I need.”

“Dealing with the service users, gaining experiences with an office environment and dealing with paper work are useful skills for me to have.”

“I’m looking to go into the police side of the Law, this has taught me how to be more personable and confident with talking to the public, as well as useful court experience.”

Contextual Application

- Of experiential (situated) learning, clinical legal education, employability and communities of practice;
- The pedagogical link. Literature grounds our theories;
 - **Kolb** (the learning cycle);
 - **Moon** (reflective/experiential learning);
 - **Dewey** (active/experiential learning).
- Employability. More recently this has attracted academic commentary;
 - **Bermingham** (University of London - what lawyers want);
 - **Dickinson/Griffiths** (Sheffield Hallam - embedding employability);
 - **Baron/Corbin** (La Trobe Melbourne - communities of practice.).





Any Questions?