

A CONVICTION TO ADDRESS POSSIBLE WRONGFUL CONVICTIONS

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My association with the innocence network began in early October 2007 as a second year LLB student. Whilst undertaking some research for a piece of work, I came across an article via *The Times*' website entitled '*The Innocence Squad*,' it described the work of law students at Bristol University, who were providing a pro bono legal clinic investigating alleged miscarriages of justice. There was something about what those students were doing that really intrigued me, so much so, that I emailed their Director, Dr Michael Naughton and expressed an interest in joining the Innocence Network. Through a brief exchange of emails, I learnt that the nearest Innocence Project to the University of Plymouth was in Bristol; regardless, I was invited to attend the Annual Innocence Network UK Training Conference the following weekend at Bristol University, with a view to discovering more about the organisation, which of course I did.

The conference was amazing and I came away both motivated and moved by what I had experienced, more than anything I found the impact statements from victims of miscarriages of justice to be quite simply, harrowing and my naïve perception of the criminal justice system, completely shaken. One of my many conversations during the weekend was with a law student from another member innocence project, who was explaining how they were seeking to judicially review, a decision by the police to withhold vital evidence from their client. While of course I knew what a judicial review was, her familiarity with its practical application was impressive, and to be honest I found myself feeling a bit envious. Somehow all these other law students seemed to be ahead of the game professionally and they had not even completed their degrees and I didn't like the sense that I had, of being on the back foot. Indeed, I could see no reason why the law students in Plymouth could not be part of this, there were so many benefits to be gained by everyone, the prisoner in having claims of innocence investigated and the law students undertaking live criminal case work. Thus, I returned to Plymouth with an agenda and absolutely convinced that we should be a part of INUK.

Of course, most students with a good idea think the whole world moves with them and change can take place overnight, when the reality is that it does not and in academia, generally, it cannot possibly. Thus began a period of persuasion, in getting the people that mattered in the law department at Plymouth onboard. These efforts were latterly aided and

abetted by my fellow LLB student Ken Lock, who was similarly enthusiastic. Between us we discussed the idea of setting up an Innocence Project with students and our tutors who provided us with a sense of perspective and much needed support in urging us not to give up. So, studies and examinations aside, we did not give up, and at a meeting with Professor Simon Payne, our inordinately busy Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Social Science & Business and the Acting Director of Plymouth Business School, I managed to put the case for the University joining INUK and was delighted when he gave us his blessing, which was vital. Thereafter, with Simon onboard, administratively things moved very swiftly, Sarah Butcher our Human Rights lecturer became the project supervisor and on the 16 July 2008, the University of Plymouth became fully paid up members of the INUK.

To date, our fledgling innocence project has 15 very motivated LLB students and we are about to receive three cases to start work upon. Evidence that a legal education at Plymouth is not simply about filling the pail, rather facilitating the lighting of a fire, which in this instance, I sincerely hope present and future students will keep burning.