



**VOLUNTEERING: A STUDENT  
PERSPECTIVE**

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**Vice-Chancellor's Student Volunteer of  
the Year 2010 and UPSU Outstanding  
Contribution to Volunteering 2010**

I first got involved with volunteering at the University of Plymouth to do something different. After sailing through a typical first year of fun and frolics, I felt as if I'd made no meaningful contribution to my University or community besides increasing profits for local hostelrys *C103* and *Jakes*, naturally. I would not regard myself as a solely academic person and realised that I could not survive my time at University simply reading black-letter law and attending lectures. I was first attracted to my course, BSc Law and Sociology because of its connotations with justice, advocacy, people (and partly because of the thrilling legal world featured in *Law and Order* and *Boston Legal*) – where was all the action?

As a student in the mid stages of my degree, I was continuously encouraged to get involved in extra-curricula activities to achieve that 'extra factor' in today's competitive job market. Volunteering because 'it looks good on the CV' can result in an unhealthy voluntary experience, attracting people who are not particularly passionate about a cause into doing things when their hearts are not really in it. Enthusiasm for the job – especially when it doesn't pay! – is a must for any volunteer.

In the second year, I still had a lot of time on my hands and took on a job as a student ambassador, giving tours of our University and helping to run CV workshops in various schools in Plymouth. I did some work as a Widening Participation mentor which involved supporting a small group of GCSE students in their year of exams and decisions about higher education. I became the Law major Course Rep by default! I also kept active through the Rowing Club and Snowriders. Finally I had a routine and felt part of both the University and the city, however, throughout my second year there was a steady progression from just wanting to meet new people, update my CV, and get that feel good factor etc. to actually wanting to make a difference.

By third year, I had taken on the roles of President of the University's Amnesty International Society; Special Events Officer for the Law and Criminal Justice Society; Youth Leader at a local church; and became a volunteer at Cultural Kitchen – run by Students and Refugees Together (START:

<http://www.studentsandrefugeestogether.com/The%20Cultural%20Kitchen.php>).

I contributed regularly to the University newspaper, *The Knowledge* on topics from current global issues to the importance of activism as a student. I was also a member and active supporter of the Christian Union, Politics and International Affairs Society and Climate Change Society – to name a few.

Amnesty International <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=10350> is an international human rights organisation with the purpose of protecting individuals 'wherever justice, fairness, freedom and truth are denied.' My role as President of the University's Amnesty International Society helped to maintain my interest and knowledge of current human rights issues as I regularly chaired society meetings, explaining current campaigns to around 150+ student members. I also chaired many of the weekly letter-writing sessions which involved researching and updating information on individuals at risk. I developed my leadership and delegation skills. With the help of my dedicated committee members, we were able to host a successful human rights film series as well as many large-scale fundraising events.

The UPSU Amnesty International Society [amnesty@upsu.com](mailto:amnesty@upsu.com) was highly commended in the category of *UPSU Society of the Year Award* and received the

*UPSU Campaign of the Year Award* 2010 for our Burma Campaign. The campaign began with a week long of petitioning around the University and events including an *AmnesTea* stall which boasted a selection of beautiful and delicious cakes. The culmination of the campaign moved and inspired all who attended with the screening of the powerful, award-winning documentary, 'Burma VJ' and a panel discussion with speakers including Susan Nash, our NUS VP Citizenship and Society, and Wai Pwint Thon – a student, refugee, Burma Campaign UK activist and daughter of political prisoner (imprisoned for peacefully campaigning for democracy in Burma see <http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/index.php/burma/about-us/about-us> ).

In my final year, I also undertook the role of Special Events Officer of the Law and Criminal Justice Studies Society. One of the events I had to organise was the annual Cheese and Wine evening held at the National Marine Aquarium and attended by 250 people. This position really helped me to gain invaluable experience in planning and orchestrating successful networking events for professionals and students in the legal and criminal justice field. Working for the Society was not just rewarding for the Law School and the members but for me too, as I learnt to develop a range of skills from the 'art' of negotiation and managing a budget to supporting students at events in networking and acquiring work experience.

All the voluntary opportunities this year have increased my self-esteem and hopefully those I work for (youth, refugees), as well as those I work with (committee members, students). Of all the voluntary work I was part of, I enjoyed youth leadership the most particularly because I could directly help people and see a positive difference. It was really important that I could be a good role model for the young people as my mentors were for me. Working with a group of dedicated leaders made the job that much more fun.

This year I have received the *Vice-Chancellor's Student Volunteer of the Year Award* 2010; the *UPSU Outstanding Contribution to Volunteering Award* 2010; the *UPSU Outstanding Contribution to UPSU Award* 2010; and the *UPSU Outstanding Contribution to Societies Award* 2010.



I graduated from the University of Plymouth in 2010 with a BSc in Law with Sociology. My academic achievements have provided me with a deeper level of understanding in Law and perpetuated my passion for Sociology especially in areas of international development and global justice – however, the learning I’ve undertaken through extra-curricula activities has taught me far more about myself and the world. My ‘achievements’ in volunteering have made a great impact on me and will be the most memorable of my whole University experience. Volunteering has taught me to really appreciate my education, the safety of our society and the opportunities available to me.

Experiences gained have led me to pursue a career in the field of human rights and development and I am currently studying for an LLM in Human Rights Law at the University of Nottingham. Although the workload is tough, modules such as ‘Post-Conflict Situations and Human Rights’ and ‘International Human Rights Field Operations’ are absolutely fascinating. Taking part in debates and discussions with people from so many different places in the world leaves me on the edge of my seat - I’m learning so much. I am regularly humbled by some of the realities of my fellow students from conflict areas, countries of immense deprivation etc.

I want to encourage other students to get involved in making a positive impact, whether it be representing fellow students as a Course Rep, in a student society or in the local community. There are so many opportunities to be part of something in Plymouth. All it takes is a few courageous people to redefine what it means to be a student.

