

Careers in Human Rights Forum

A presentation organised by the Special Institutions Careers Service, The Careers Group, University of London. Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS, March 20th 2006

Notes by Susan Goldie, Careers Adviser, The Careers Group

The forum took the form of short introductions by a panel of speakers, followed by an informal networking session.

Yasmin Qureshi

Is a barrister who is also the Human Rights adviser to the Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone. She is a trained criminal lawyer. Yasmin discussed the traditional legal and political structure and how this has developed. Yasmin's legal work encompasses both positive obligation – the wider provision of human rights within public services and in addition to this she works on political rights issues in criminal justice for example, the trafficking of women into the UK

Yasmin's tips:-

1. Be prepared for a lot of hard work. It will not be easy working in human rights and she finds it challenging on a daily basis.
2. In a practical way she highly recommended working on a voluntary basis for a NGO as this will not only demonstrate your commitment but will look great on your CV.

Sarah Cutler, Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID)

Sarah's background is in policy and research. She worked for 4 years with the 98 immigration detention centre's in the UK who are held with no legal aid entitlement. She works on a number of cases and often applies for bail on their behalf. She also tries to empower people to do their own bail for themselves and achieves this by providing training for them. Often she will be lobbying the government based on research conducted by BID, so for instance she worked recently with Save the Children to put together a campaign for pregnant women who are kept within the immigration detention centres. Sarah studied politics and her first job was within a human rights bar upholding human rights internationally.

Sarah's tips:-

1. When you volunteer really be clear on what you have to offer.
2. On a practical level think about the grass routes organisations that can help you. Becoming specialised in a field could be a good angle to approach your job-hunting i.e. through research skills and writing.
3. Remember that in your first couple of jobs don't be disheartened if the work isn't all that interesting as it will be eventually with persistence.
4. If you can take up any free training that is available. Sarah recently spent a week of business training in the Women's Resource Centre

Emma Foxall - Head of Education, Survival International.

Survival is a human rights NGO working with indigenous people who face discrimination. They achieve this on 2 levels, firstly by campaigning on their behalf and pressurising governments to take the needs of the indigenous people seriously.

Emma started her career whilst at University and wrote to the government via Amnesty International, she also worked in Shelter and for a charity in Birmingham as an interpreter.

Emma's tips

Definitely think about volunteering/internships. This could take the form of outreach work, education or fundraising. She wouldn't personally recommend the administration route in although she has seen people do this successfully. Another route would be through policy research within the local government. The softer option could be to consider working within the corporate world as a business analyst as a way into human rights work.

Adam Hunt Pierce Glynn, Solicitor

Generally speaking, Adam works within community care and general public law. Due to the changes in the law 2 years ago by David Blunkett his main client group are asylum seekers (due to a breach of article 3 of European Human Rights Law). Adam started working on a voluntary basis to really demonstrate his commitment to this side of the law. It is really important that you demonstrate evidence that you can understand a person's situation. He sees two ways into the legal sector either via the Citizen's Advice Bureau where you are given training to provide basic advice or, alternatively, through one of the Law centres which is a bit more structured. Working as a clerk could also open potential opportunities within human rights. The hardest part is obtaining the traineeship, it is really vital to know who you are applying to. It isn't a well paid part of law and involves putting in some really long hours but for Adam it is so enjoyable. Find out about opportunities through; Legal Action, Legal Aid or through the Law Monthly Journal.

Joanna Ewart-James, Sigrid Rausing Trust, Donor Relations.

One of the largest fundraising organisations of its type and is split into social, justice and environmental human rights. The Trust itself truly has a fantastic ethos. How did Joanna get there?

She started off in Central Government as an asylum case worker. When the Human Rights Act came in because of her MA this was something that she could sell to the organisation in terms of her knowledge and skill set. Worked with asylum applicants who have suffered victim torture then she moved to join the medical foundation.

Joanna's Tips:-

1. Often when you are studying you are in a catch 22 in the sense that you would love to do voluntary work but also need to have paid work to support yourself through University. She recommended really taking time to think about how the range of skills that you have can help you to progress within different fields.

Neil Sammonds Amnesty International Permanent Researcher

Human Rights Research split into - documentation, communication, teamwork and representation. Neil's area of specialism is in Libya, Jordan and Syria.

Amnesty is a movement based organisation which is accountable to its members which currently stands at 1.3m people. Within human rights areas to consider are: - civil, economic, social and political rights. It is a highly stressful job where you need to be open, honest and very diplomatic. Neil started as a campaigner at Amnesty.

How did Neil get there?

Graduates with a degree in Politics & History, then did a TEFL course and worked in Egypt, Palestine and Karachi then worked for the British Council & VSO. Neil feels that you need a bit forthright to progress in this field. He is currently working on Palestine solitary arms trade between the UK and Israel