

A HERBERT SMITH FREEHILLS LAWYER'S VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE WITH ASAP

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**Maryam Oghanna on her experience of volunteering with
ASAP**



I joined ASAP as a duty scheme advocate in August 2017. I had been interested for a long time in volunteering with people who have left their countries to try to seek asylum in the UK. My family are from Iraq, and after the first Gulf War we claimed asylum in the UK when I was 3 years old. Due to this, I have always been conscious of the rights of those seeking asylum in the UK and had been aware of the work that ASAP does for some time before I became a duty scheme advocate.

I qualified as a solicitor in 2016, working in the commercial litigation department at a city law firm; Herbert Smith Freehills. I passed my higher rights of audience qualification soon after and I immediately took the opportunity to apply to ASAP so that I could use these skills to assist in a sector I had wanted to volunteer in for so long.

The experience so far with ASAP has been fantastic. The training for duty scheme advocates was both thorough and inspiring, and it has been great to work with the dedicated, expert team at ASAP.

The experience in the Asylum Support Tribunal itself has been hugely rewarding. On a personal level, it has developed my confidence and skills in presenting a legal argument, as well as developing an ability to digest large amounts of information in a very small period of time. More importantly, it is very rewarding to feel that you have been able to prevent someone from becoming homeless and have had a positive impact in their lives. Although we don't always win the appeals, there is no doubt that the advice and listening ear that we provide to the appellants is hugely important, especially in terms of advising them of the next steps that they might be able to take to improve their circumstances.

I was lucky enough to spend a few weeks on secondment with the ASAP team last year, doing a mix of legal research and representation in the Asylum Support Tribunal. This secondment was a brilliant experience that I would be hoping to repeat again in future.

For a commercial solicitor who mainly works with companies or high net worth individuals, ASAP provides a rare opportunity to really help improve someone's life and experience in a way that my day-to-day work never would. I look forward to continuing as a volunteer with ASAP for a long time to come.