The Journey to Becoming a Barrister - The Student Experience of the Middle Temple Disability Forum

By Maddie Rudkin, Member of the Disability Forum

As a student with a long-term health condition, my disability has always been a self-defining factor. Pursuing a career at the Bar was an easy choice, but one that has come with sacrifices, self-doubt and insecurities. Diversity is crucial for the future success of the profession and is something I wish to improve, which led me to join the Middle Temple Disability Forum ("the Forum"). My student experience has been rewarding, providing encouragement and connections throughout the start of my journey to becoming a barrister.

I joined the Forum to advance its message; supporting, advising and encouraging members of Middle Temple who identify as a disabled person or have a long-term physical, sensory or mental health condition. Seeing myself fitting with the Bar has always been difficult. However, after attending an event put on by the disability forum entitled "Disability Month: Applying for Pupillage for All", my whole perspective changed. Throughout the evening, the panel consisted of successful barristers who spoke on their experiences with disability at the Bar, telling inspiring stories and setbacks, many of which I could relate to. Further, my motivation was derived from my fellow students in the room, who asked such interesting questions, highlighting barriers faced by people with different kinds of disabilities from myself. The event quietened my insecurities about my long-term health condition, and, for the first time, I truly believed the Bar is a place for me. The overarching message told us that the profession has developed significantly to advance disability inclusion, even compared to 10 years ago, but work still needs to be done. It was moving to hear the reality and reflect on how I would like to advance disability inclusion, encouraging me to join the Forum.

As part of the Forum, my goal is to advance diversity at the Bar and strengthen our core message to ensure all members have support. I have attended open discussions, assisted with the organisation of future disability initiatives, and developed the Forum's goal of inclusivity. Joining the Forum has taught me valuable life lessons, boosting my confidence in all aspects, and even realising that my condition makes me more interesting. People who identify as disabled often approach tasks in a different way, creating unique insight and perspective. I have also grown personally. For example, as someone with a non-visible condition, the prejudices I may receive often worry me when others discover that I have a condition. However, joining in discussions with members of the Forum has corrected that initial presumption. The empowerment and personal growth had been extremely gratifying. I think back to how I viewed my condition even a year ago, and I am grateful for the Forum's existence for changing my perspectives. I am proud of the work I have taken part in and am very excited about our future events to further our outreach and support.

Becoming a member of the Forum has been a rewarding part of the beginning of my journey to becoming a barrister. My experience of the Forum has been nothing but positive, and I only wish to develop my involvement over the coming years. I would encourage anyone reading this to join the Forum, whether to speak about experiences, learn more about events or educate themselves on often unspoken struggles of disabled barristers. Enhancing the diversity of the Bar stems from organisations like the Forum, and we would like to hear and implement as many voices as possible. My aspiration is to keep advocating for more inclusive spaces for disabled barristers throughout my career, creating a more tolerant, welcoming and diverse Bar.