

FORSTERS

CSR at Forsters

2021 - 2022



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COMMENTARY BY CSR PARTNER

Forsters' CSR year 2021/22

Forsters' CSR operates within the spheres of Community, Sustainability and Inclusion and through the following committees which consist of enthusiastic and dedicated people from across the firm: Charity and Community; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion; Pro Bono; Sustainability; and Wellbeing. Our CSR Executive, Lizzie Heighway, has worked tirelessly to implement the ambitious plans the committees set in Spring 2021 as we began to emerge from the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. This has included introducing CSR Champions in teams and improving our time recording processes, to ensure CSR contributions are recognised, and regular formal reporting on our CSR activity to Management Board, to further embed CSR into firm strategy and process.

Charity and Community: it was great to see the refugee Lunch Club and Reading Schemes restart, and to enjoy some of the fundraising and other events organised with our partner charity, St Andrew's Club. In a pleasing uptake of CSR Days, Little Village volunteering before Christmas and the Felix Project volunteering in February had good take-up, as well as the Halloween Party which we hosted at St Andrew's Youth Club.

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee published its strategy and launched seven EDI Support Networks. A firmwide training programme was launched, following the Autumn 2021 firmwide EDI survey. And this Easter, we hosted eight Sixth Form students as part of the Pathways to Law programme, enabling young people from less privileged backgrounds to learn more about careers in law.

The Pro Bono Committee launched in 2021 and we now have a formal pro bono policy. The committee is working on a number of partnerships with organisations including LandAid, TrustLaw and local legal advice centres, and exploring skills-based volunteering opportunities for business services teams.

Sustainability: we made our commitment to science-based targets in October 2021, aiming

to halve our emissions by 2030, one of the first law firms of our size to do so. We continue to offset our emissions and retain our carbon neutral status as we work towards our target, with positive team level and individual commitments made for 2022/23. The Sustainability Board meets monthly, to ensure that sustainability remains a key factor in our decision-making with the board reviewing all firm policies from a sustainability perspective before awarding (or withholding) the green stamp of approval. Our Green Impact Group has been busy, continuing to monitor and encourage best practice through its travel, printing, recycling and offsetting working groups. A number of events were marked through the year, including Earth Day, Global Recycling Day and Organic September.

Wellbeing: HR organised an impressive programme of wellbeing events including self-defence classes and webinars with the Samaritans, Working with Cancer and Diabetes UK. Staff and partners regularly share their personal experiences through wellbeing newsletters and support continues to be offered through Mental Health First Aiders, 1:1 counselling appointments, activities such as Run Club and Choir, and other wellbeing-related staff benefits.

A good year for CSR, which we could not have achieved without the energy and enthusiasm of all those who contribute so much of their time and to whom we are so grateful.

Kelly Noel-Smith



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Forsters' CSR



CSR at Forsters is broadly broken down into the following categories:



Charity and community initiatives

We have a charity partnership with St Andrew’s Club, a refugee lunch club and primary school reading scheme, CSR Days and a firm charitable trust.



Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

Including an EDI committee and seven EDI support networks, outreach work through Pathways to Law and Bright Network, and other EDI commitments.



Sustainability

We have been a carbon neutral firm since 2007 and were shortlisted for a LexisNexis Award for Sustainability in 2020. We have made a commitment to set a science-based emission reduction target, and we have an active green committee and Sustainability Board.



Pro bono work

We have a pro bono committee, firmwide pro bono policy and partnerships with a number of pro bono organisations.



Wellbeing

We were shortlisted for a LexisNexis Award for Wellbeing in 2020 and achieved a Gold award in the 2021/22 Mind Workplace Wellbeing Index.

The following pages contain highlights from the 2021 – 2022 year and what is planned for the coming year.



It has been great to be able to restart more of our charity and community initiatives and partnerships in person during 2021/22.

St Andrew's Club

Over the last year we have continued our relationship with our partner charity, St Andrew's Youth Club. The Club does fantastic work enriching the lives of young people in Westminster through opportunities to meet safely, learn new skills and try new things, helping build self-confidence and important skills for life.

We have enjoyed being able to go to the Club and have the Club members to our offices again, since pandemic restrictions lifted. Some highlights from the year are below.

EVENTS AND PROJECTS

Easter treasure hunt

We provided a creative Easter treasure hunt for the Club, which provided an enjoyable afternoon in the sunshine during the Club's Easter programme.

Halloween Party

Several of our trainees ran a great Halloween Party for junior members of the St Andrew's Club during their October half term holiday. It was a packed morning full of crafts and games, and both we and the Club members had lots of fun!

St Andrew's Club 'Hope and Togetherness' art project

We commissioned Club members to create artwork looking ahead to 2022, on the theme of "Hope and Togetherness".



Led by our own expert artist from our Risk and Compliance team, Vinita Sagoo, the Club members created some fantastic artwork that is on display in our offices for the next few months. The artists also had the chance to visit our offices for a fun afternoon of activities and tours.

Basketball

Members of the firm have resumed attendance at the Club's basketball training.



St Andrew's Club 'Hope and Togetherness' art project (Top & bottom left), Royal Parks Half Marathon (Top right), Sponsored Stroll to South Quay (Bottom)

Pro bono support

We have continued to provide pro bono legal assistance to the Club, and also learning and development support.



FUNDRAISING

Royal Parks Half Marathon

Four members of the firm ran the Royal Parks Half Marathon for St Andrew's Club in October, raising a good amount of money and clocking some impressive times! Congratulations to Andrew Denye, Horace Gooden, Stuart Hatcher and Candice Johnson.

Sponsored Stroll to South Quay

In October, a group of walkers walked from our Hill Street offices to South Quay, which takes a whole evening! We discovered new corners of Limehouse and raised funds for the Club.

12 Days of Christmas raffle

Our 12 Days of Christmas raffle was popular once again, and we equalled our fundraising total from 2020.

Dinner dance and auction

Two tables of guests from the firm attended the St Andrew's Club Dinner Dance and Auction and had a great evening. We were pleased that one of the auction winners came from within the firm!

Staff voucher donations

Each Christmas, staff have the opportunity to donate their gift voucher amount from Partners to charities, and in 2021 this raised funds for St Andrew's Club, the Felix Project and NHS Charities Together.

Penny balances

We've continued to donate our penny balances to St Andrew's Club each quarter.



“The Charity and Community Group have really enjoyed being able to facilitate more in-person fundraising initiatives and opportunities to work with the St Andrews Club and its members over the past year. We are looking forward to seeing whether this year’s Three Peaks Challenge, which promises to be a huge success with 40 people from the firm participating, can be used as a model for further large-scale initiatives.”

Christine Dubignon and Rosie Schumm, Partners and leads of Forsters Charity and Community Group



Lunch Club

We were pleased to resume our weekly Lunch Club in Grosvenor Chapel in September, as restrictions were lifted. Each week, eight members of the firm prepare and serve lunch to guests, who are either refugees or homeless and without recourse to public funds. Lunch Club is a long Forsters tradition, established by now-retired lawyer Andrew Penny, and we are really pleased to be back in action and keeping the tradition going.

Since restarting in September we have run

over **25**

lunch clubs and served approximately

400 lunches





Reading Scheme

We were also able to run our Reading Scheme for parts of the last year. Eighteen volunteers from the firm attended the primary school local to our Mayfair offices, to support children whose reading progress has been particularly affected by the pandemic.



CSR Days

Over the last year it has been good to see the number of people using their CSR Days increase, with over 30 people using their day this year.

The firm introduced a CSR Day policy during 2020, which allows every member of staff to volunteer during working hours on one full day or two half days each calendar year.

Several individuals have used their CSR Days independently, and we have also had enjoyable firm-organised days.

As well as a fun morning spent with our partner charity, St Andrew's Youth Club, we have volunteered with Little Village and the Felix Project (see more information on the next page). Next year we look forward to having more teams spending volunteering days together.

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Firmwide CSR Days



St Andrew's Club

Several of our trainees ran a great Halloween Party for junior members of St Andrew's Club during their October half term holiday in 2021. It was a packed morning full of crafts and games.

"The Halloween Party was a rewarding way to use a half CSR day. The children were so happy to be there and to participate in the games and activities which we had planned. My favourite part of the morning was decorating the gingerbread men (or skeletons?!) because the children seemed to enjoy this, and the prospect of their afternoon snack! This was my first time getting involved with the St Andrews Club and I look forward to doing much more with them."

Phoebe Jackson, Trainee



Little Village

Little Village provides young families who need support with clothes, toys and equipment for babies and young children. They have hubs across London, and provide vital help in conjunction with other family support services. Volunteers from the firm spent time in both their Battersea and Watford hubs, sorting through donated clothes and equipment, becoming very familiar with buggy and cot construction and baby clothes sizes in the process, and learning more about Little Village's incredibly valuable work.





“Earlier in December I had the privilege of using my CSR day to volunteer with Little Village, a fantastic charity which supports young families who cannot afford clothing or baby equipment. I spent the day sorting and packing donations in their Watford hub with lots of other lovely volunteers. The sense of community was simply amazing and I found the experience incredibly rewarding.”

Ellie Long, Associate

The Felix Project

Felix Project tackles food waste and poverty, transforming large volumes of donated food that would otherwise go to waste into delicious meals that are given to charities who can distribute them to people who need them.

It is an impressive operation, and volunteers from the firm had a really enjoyable and rewarding time working in the Felix Kitchen in Poplar and their warehouse in Acton. We chopped vegetables, put over 1000 meals into serving boxes, and sorted through box after box of donations.

“Apart from it having been one of the best CSR days I have ever done, I have never ever seen so much food wasted in my life. I never knew you could have so much fun chopping up thousands of Turnips, Cabbages and Potatoes but how wrong could I have been.

Everyone who joined in on the day did something good, helping people who cannot help themselves, but we also recognised the sheer mountains of perfectly good food (all in date of course) which would have ended up in landfill if the Felix Project did not exist.”

Hadwig Ruf, Client Balances Cashier, Finance team



Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) work has continued to develop over 2021-22.

EDI strategy and firmwide survey

In the last year we launched our first EDI Strategy, setting out our commitments for the next two years. An external version of the document is [here](#). Alongside this, we ran a firmwide EDI survey, which has given us a helpful indication of areas to address as we move forward with our EDI work. As part of our response to the survey, we are rolling out firmwide EDI workshops for managers and all staff with Inclusive Group.

EDI Support Networks

We now have seven EDI Support Networks in the firm, which are becoming well established. These are EnABLE (our disability support network), Faith, Gender Equality, LGBTQ+, Race, Social Mobility and Working Parents

and Carers networks. The networks offer an opportunity to come together to share experiences and ideas and help raise awareness of EDI issues. The groups run initiatives and host events, and are an active voice in the firm, contributing ideas and suggestions. See some of their work below.

EDI Celebrations 21-22

- **PRIDE MONTH – JUNE 2021**

To celebrate Pride Month in June, we were fortunate to have author, lawyer and social commentator Mohsin Zaidi join us. Trainee (now Associate!) Connor Morrison and partner Ben Barrison hosted a thought-provoking discussion on a range of topics, from diversity within the legal profession to the challenges still faced by LGBTQ+ people in modern Britain.



- **BLACK HISTORY MONTH – OCTOBER 2021**

Our Race Support Network put together a busy programme of activity for Black History Month, with a different focus each week. We covered Heroes, Food, Hair (following our Halo Code pledge in 2021) and Young People over the month. A highlight was definitely a highly popular Caribbean Lunch on our terrace, where we heard from Khareem Jamal, from Africology Productions, about Black figures who have dropped out of history.

- **INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY – MARCH 2022**

We really enjoyed hearing from Rachel Crossley, Director of the East End Women’s Museum, about women who have been forgotten from history. Thank you to Emily Holdstock, Sarupe Uppal and Erika Norrie for the really interesting discussion. We also enjoyed brownies from Luminary Bakery, which supports women who’ve been victims of domestic abuse.



Other EDI Support Network highlights

- The Race Support network has held sessions with relevant graduate recruitment, wellbeing and social media representatives within the firm, to help embed considerations about race into the firm's processes.
- The LGBTQ+ network held a tea to celebrate what would have been London Pride weekend

in September.

- The Working Parents and Carers network held a number of discussions and meet-ups, to support parents and carers as we transition back to the office.
- Our Faith Support Network has shared communication celebrating religious festivals, and is now working on an Inclusive Events Guide for the firm.



Encouraging diversity in law

Pathways to Law

In April, eight sixth form students from the Pathways to Law programme joined us to experience life in a law firm. The programme helps young people without easy access to work experience to learn more about law and prepare for university.

While they were with us, the students had presentations from all teams in the firm, spent time in departments, took part in workshops, Q&As and a networking session, having the opportunity to meet many people across the firm.

We really enjoyed hosting the students and look forward to participating in similar programmes in the future, including with university students.

“I had a wonderful time doing work experience at Forsters. I learnt so much about being a solicitor and got a real flavour of the work done in Commercial & Residential Real Estate, Corporate, Private Client and Dispute Resolution. Each section of the timetable was so informative and made me more interested in becoming a lawyer. I hope you continue to do work experience like this!”

Sarah, work experience participant

Bright Network

Our Graduate Recruitment Partner, Emily Holdstock, spoke on a panel at a Bright Network Diverse Legal Leaders event in October 2021, encouraging people from diverse backgrounds to consider a career in law. Members of our EDI Committee joined her in the network session, speaking with many prospective young lawyers. We have also continued to work with Bright Network and Rare Recruitment to improve inclusivity in our graduate recruitment process.

NOTICED Network - GROW mentoring initiative

Several of our trainees and Race Support Network members have volunteered as mentors for a GROW mentoring initiative, run with other firms in the NOTICED Network. The initiative will support potential lawyers who are at university to gain greater understanding about how to make successful applications to vac schemes and training contracts.



External commitments

This year we have become a signatory to the Halo Code, joined the NOTICED inter-firm diversity network and also become members of CityParents. We are also a member of the Legal Best network.





Announcing our commitment to science-based targets

We continued to step up our sustainability work and commitments during 2021/22

In October 2021 we committed to a near-term science-based emission reduction target, publicly pledging to halve our greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. We made our commitment and joined the Business Declares a Climate Emergency movement ahead of the COP26 discussions, to make clear our commitment to being a sustainable firm. We will continue to offset our emissions as we work to meet our target, to retain the carbon neutral status we've held since 2007.

We were pleased to join the Achilles Carbon Reduce programme, and we are now working to have our commitment and emissions data approved by the Science Based Target initiative.

“We feel passionately as a firm with our immediate stakeholders that the business community is fundamental to driving the necessary change to limit the effects of global warming. We understand the importance of businesses of all sizes taking action on climate change, and we are proud to be among the first law firms of our size to announce an ambitious science-based target.”

Kelly Noel-Smith, CSR Partner



Putting our commitment into action

Teams and individuals in the firm have all made sustainability commitments, and our Green Impact Group (with members from across the firm), and Sustainability Board have also been very active over the last year. Some highlights are here:

MARKING NOTABLE ENVIRONMENTAL DATES



Earth Day

On Earth Day last year we offered Seedbombs to the firm, and this year we launched our first Sustainability Newsletter



Organic September

We encouraged people to consider organic produce, and held a zero waste, organic cooking masterclass for staff, with chef Justin Horne



No Disposable Cup Day

We pledged to remove single use cups from our kitchens, which we have now done



World Recycling Day

We did a bin inspection, and provided further interactive resources on recycling to the firm

Embedding sustainability into the firm

Our Sustainability Board, comprising the Managing Partner, Head of CSR and Heads of Operations, Risk and Compliance and Finance, review every new and updated firm policy from a sustainability angle, and hold the firm to account for our sustainability work.

As well as marking notable dates in the environmental calendar, our Green Impact Group also now forms four sub-groups, focusing on Travel, Printing, Offsets, and Recycling, to help the firm meet our individual and team level commitments.

Our Operations function has done a significant amount of work improving our sustainable practices. A few examples of what they've been doing are below:

- Introducing new bins with WRAP signage, to help recycling
- Reviewing suppliers and introducing more environmentally friendly alternatives – e.g. our new coffee machine from Ernie
- Replacing light bulbs with more efficient LED alternatives
- Distributing no longer needed items to other charities
- Challenging large printing requests and sharing tips on how to review and prepare documents digitally

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We are looking forward to doing more environmental volunteering in the next year, which we haven't been able to do during the pandemic, such as our annual litter pick on the River Lea.





We established our Pro Bono Committee in July 2021, which signifies a step up in our pro bono commitments as a firm.

The committee have worked hard to produce a firmwide pro bono policy, which defines the nature of pro bono work at the firm and encourages further involvement. As part of this policy, pro bono work that is aligned with our pro bono eligibility criteria can contribute towards lawyer annual hours targets.

The pro bono committee is about to launch a number of partnerships with pro bono organisations, which will enable lawyers in all legal groups to use their specific legal expertise in a pro bono capacity.

These include the organisations below:

LandAid

 **Queen Mary**
University of London

TrustLaw
A THOMPSON REUTERS FOUNDATION SERVICE

SOUTH WESTMINSTER
LEGAL ADVICE CENTRE

Highlights from two of our pro bono projects from 2021-22 are below:

East End Women’s Museum

We have continued to work with East End Women’s Museum on a pro bono basis to support them as they secure their permanent home in Barking. Sarupe Uppal, Associate, is leading the work, with input from consultant Sarah Pass, Partner Emily Holdstock and Paralegal Hannah Punshon. It was great to hear from Rachel Crossley, Museum Director on International Women’s Day, and get a flavour of the kind of great work they’ll be doing raising the profile of women in history.



Citizen’s Advice Wandsworth box



Since September 2021 some members of the Forsters family team have been running a monthly clinic on behalf of Citizens Advice Wandsworth. Once a month, two clients have the chance to discuss a wide range of family law issues for 30 minutes each on a first come first served basis. Once the session

is over, an attendance note is returned to them with a summary of advice and suggested next steps.

The clinic was set up by Shabana Saleem and whilst on her maternity leave has been run by Tim Evans with help from Polly Calver and Christine Abbotts (along with trainee and paralegal assistance from Beatrix Dyer, Chloe Daley, Ellie Rogers, Phoebe Jackson and Georgina Swinglehurst).

“Thank you also once again for all the time and care you and your colleagues are putting into volunteering Pro Bono through the advice clinics for Citizens Advice Wandsworth. As a Councillor who has referred many people to the service, I’m very grateful and I have received excellent feedback.”

Claire Gilbert,
Wandsworth Councillor



We have continued to support the wellbeing of our staff over the last year.

Webinars and wellbeing sessions

Our webinars and wellbeing sessions have focused on:

- Self-defence – with KB Fitness
- Diabetes – with Diabetes UK
- Cancer and the workplace – with Working with Cancer
- Time to Talk: Time to Listen – with the Samaritans
- Grief – with The Grief Space
- Avoiding Burnout – with Wellbeing Partners
- The menopause – with Talking Menopause
- Doggy de-stress and staff massages

Wellbeing newsletters

Our wellbeing newsletters have continued to be popular, with staff sharing personal experiences on topics including mental health, hearing loss, work life balance and caring responsibilities.

Supporting employees in global crises

Over the last year we have increased our firmwide communications and support at times when employees may be particularly affected by global events. This has included responses to the situation in Afghanistan, Sarah Everard's murder, the conflict in Ukraine and other events. This has been appreciated and we are grateful to all staff who have supported these communications through sharing their own stories.



Opportunities to connect

There have been a number of opportunities for employees to meet up over the last year, for example through ReConnect events, held several times a week during September and October as we returned to the office, and a Wellbeing Walks series (expertly led by our Librarian Melody Green).

We have also been able to support causes closely connected to employees over the last year, including a tea for veterans and a fundraising and awareness raising bake sale for Target Ovarian Cancer.

Flexibility

Last year, as well as confirming an Agile Working policy we also launched our Holiday Plus benefit, allowing staff to work from anywhere in the UK for one week a year without needing to be near the office.

Our ongoing wellbeing support

We continue to have a variety of wellbeing support available for people in the firm on an ongoing basis.



'We were delighted to be awarded a Gold award in the 2022 Mind Workplace Wellbeing Index. Gold awards are for organisations who demonstrate

a long-term and in-depth commitment to mental health.

The Index celebrates the good work employers are doing and provides recommendations for further steps, which we are looking forward to working on over the next year.'

Alison Fairchild, Head of HR

- Mental health support: access to an Employee Assistance Programme; confidential counselling sessions; and Mental Health First Aiders.
- A range of wellbeing-related benefits, including: a Cycle to Work scheme; subsidised gym membership; and health insurance.
- Firm-organised activities that support connection and wellbeing, including: our Choir, Book Club, Knitting Club and Running Club.
- We have also introduced the Wellbeing+ portal this year, which is available for all staff and has a wealth of regularly updated resources to support physical, mental, emotional and financial wellbeing.



Wellbeing+ portal

Over the next year we plan to continue to embed our wellbeing programmes into teams in the firm, making a clear connection between our wellbeing support and day to day working experience. This will include finalising wellbeing charters within teams.

