

# CSR NEWSLETTER

Pro bono special edition

**Welcome** to the pro bono special edition of the CSR newsletter!



**C**SR is something we take seriously as a firm, and so we feel it is extremely important that we use the expertise of our people to provide support to the local community which might not otherwise be available.

I am really excited to be able to share with you a selection of the recent pro bono work we have undertaken as well as some of the ongoing support we give with our law clinics and our social mobility programme.

Thank you and I hope you enjoy this edition of our newsletter.

Peter Forshaw  
CSR Partner

## Firmwide CSR

# Respiratory Care Solutions

I act as a non executive director of Respiratory Care Solutions ("RCS"), a social enterprise headed by medical practitioners. My involvement includes attending board meetings and providing ad hoc advice upon issues from arrangements with pharmaceutical companies to reviewing conflict of interest policies. RCS started off just arranging training events with sponsorship from pharmaceutical companies, but recently has obtained grant funding from several sources, taken on staff and won two contracts with NHS bodies to undertake assessments of patients with asthma.



Victoria Robertson

## PRIME

We welcomed six students into the Liverpool office on 2 August as we launched our new PRIME work experience programme.

Weightmans became a member firm of PRIME in 2013, which is an alliance of law firms across the UK committed to improving access to the legal profession through work experience.

As part of our commitment, we have run an annual week-long work experience scheme for sixth form students through the Social Mobility Foundation (SMF). However, this year we are trialing a new structure to the programme to further develop our relationship with SMF and to involve our first year trainee solicitors by giving them the opportunity to develop their mentoring and leadership skills. Each of the trainees have been assigned as a mentor to a student from SMF, and as part of this relationship they have committed to accommodating the students for up to a week of work experience throughout the year.

The students are all strong academics who are hoping to pursue a career in law, and hopefully this longer term approach will lead to a beneficial relationship for all parties. If successful, we will be running this programme nationally with all first year trainees from 2019.

# HOME

I have been a Trustee and Board Member of Greater Manchester Arts Centre better known as HOME for over 22 years now. Located at First Street in the centre of Manchester, HOME is the largest arts centre outside of London with two theatres, five cinemas, a restaurant, two bars, book shop and event spaces.

The theatre programme is largely based around modern plays by new and emerging playwrights and the cinemas mainly show independent films from across the world which would otherwise not be shown in the more commercial cinemas.

We have supported many film directors at the beginning of their careers including Quentin Tarantino, Danny Boyle and Asif Kapadia.

Danny Boyle was born in Manchester and has been HOME's main ambassador since 2013.

Danny was very involved with the development of HOME attending various site meetings with us, hosting fund raising events and more recently attending the North West premier of Trainspotting 2 in January 2017.

Throughout my involvement, I have had to draw upon the kindness and support of many colleagues within the Manchester office who are too numerous to mention but I would particularly like to thank Paul Raftery, Vincent King and Phil Allen for their ongoing support.

Aside from attending board meetings and providing general advice and experience to the executive team, I have advised the organisation on the move to First Street from its previous address on Oxford Road, which involved acting for them on the Development Agreement and Lease together with associated construction documents to more recently the erection and lease of the statue of Friedrich Engels in the square in front of HOME. The statue was transported across Europe from the Ukraine by the artist Phil Collins (not the singer) and you may have seen the associated BBC film about the statue's journey across Europe to its current location.

I became involved with the organisation through an abiding passion for independent cinema, which is something I have passed on to all three of my children one of whom had recent work experience there however beyond that I have recognised the importance of art in every day life and in particular its ability to transform lives and effect social mobility.

HOME runs many initiatives within the wider community, ranging from £1.00 tickets to the theatre, young film makers programmes, creative writing programmes to working with refugees and for a week this summer it was given over to a range of artistic works by refugees.

The move to First Street was also the catalyst for the regeneration of this particular part of Manchester City Centre and the number of new businesses that have relocated down there to cluster around HOME has been estimated to have created 10,000 jobs within the City.

After such a long involvement HOME seems like part of my DNA and I get a tremendous buzz from the work that is done within the communities to support, improve and enhance the lives of the local residents. I also draw a lot of satisfaction when it is humming with activity and knowing that I play a small part in providing this.

As a result of my work with HOME I have worked with and supported other arts organisations. I have chaired and participated in round table discussions about the importance of arts to communities and the need for businesses to become more involved with supporting the arts.

It remains a constant balancing act for arts organisations to continue to provide their artistic programmes with the funding that they may receive from public and private sector and if you have an ability to influence that with your support I would urge you to get involved.

**Karl Jackson**



## Southport Dramatic Club

I have been the Hon Gen Solicitor for the Southport Dramatic Club for the past 2 years (and a member for over 30!), with Weightmans as the Club's nominated legal services provider.

The SDC is a not-for-profit membership organisation serving the town and wider district for just short of 100 years. It boasts an impressive 400 volunteer members and welcomes approximately 25,000 patrons a year – that's a lot of bums on seats!

As a registered charity limited company, its aims include the production of dramatic art and the supporting of charitable causes, and over the past few years the Society has helped everything from the St John's Ambulance and Cancer Research to the Red Cross and British Legion.

As I get little chance to perform these days, the legal support is my main contribution to the running of the Club. I attend monthly meetings to advise on issues arising from its ownership of the theatre venue and surrounding properties generally.

In addition, I (with the help of specialists here at the firm) provide legal advice on specific issues as required, most recently, Incorporation, GDPR, disability access, sub-letting contracts and auditorium safety.

Without such legal assistance, the Club would not be able to function and comply with its regulatory requirements. The role is certainly more varied than I'd imagined (and at times more interesting than shows I've been in!), but always rewarding.

**Peter Forshaw**

## Elsie Ever After

Elsie Ever After is a charity which provides bereavement support to all, regardless of location or circumstance. However, a lot of the work of the charity is currently carried out in Cheshire and Merseyside. For a few years Elsie Ever After had been incubated by another charity and a decision was taken to set up in our own right.

Jack Farrar and Will Beverley on a pro bono basis, with the support of Sarah Walton, Michelle Mathers and Victoria Robertson drafted the new constitution and submitted it to the charity commission on our behalf. They guided and advised us throughout the process and EEA is now a stand alone charity.

As a small charity and one for which I am a Trustee we are hugely grateful for the support given via the firm CSR policy.

Weightmans have helped Elsie Ever After support many more families when they need it most. The money saved by Weightmans carrying out this work for us pro bono equates to the cost of 260 bereavement packs for children or 100 hours of counselling support or art/dance therapy.

**Victoria Wright**



## University of Liverpool Law

We provide support and legal advice to the University of Liverpool Law Clinic which is pro bono legal practice embedded within the Legal Law School. The Clinic provides legal advice directly to clients, across a broad range of different areas across Liverpool and the surrounding area. The service provides legal advice and assistance to members of the public which is aimed to compliment other legal provisions within the local communities.

The advice is provided by final year law students under the supervision of qualified lawyers from Weightmans. On occasions we have also provided specific pro bono advice from the firm in conjunction with the Law Clinic to its clients where the matters involved have been beyond the scope of those normally provided by the Clinic.

The scheme runs twice a year, once in each academic term.

Jon Gregson from EPI Liverpool is the lead contact from Firm with the Clinic and so please contact him if you would like to become involved.

# Freshfields Animal Rescue

I did a charity clothes collection for Freshfields Animal Rescue, as well as volunteer at one of their fundraising events. I developed a good relationship with the charity which eventually led to them asking for assistance on a probate matter which potentially could have cost the charity a significant sum of money and left them in crisis.

Sarah Walker, very kindly offered to complete five hours, on a pro bono basis, in order to provide much needed advice. The charity were really impressed with the handling of the matter and agreed to a 10% discounted rate for the remainder of the instruction. The outcome of the matter is that the charity received a much needed sum of c. £211,000 after a hard winter with lots of deserving rescues taken in. Freshfields were delighted and very grateful to Weightmans for the pro bono advice and excellent client service.

Further to this, Freshfields have recently asked for us to advise in relation to a Real Estate matter. Janice Weatherly kindly provided pro bono legal advice in relation to this and, the matter is now in the process of being formalised as a paid instruction.

We are really pleased to have been able to help Freshfields so much that we are their first port of call when they have a legal query. Clearly our work has impressed the charity enough to become a formal paying client of the firm.

**Megan Inman**



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# Birmingham family court

The Family Team in Birmingham are founder members of the Birmingham Litigants in Person Advice Scheme, based at the Family Court in Birmingham which was set up originally in 2016.

The scheme offers free advice and guidance by way of pre-booked appointments at court for people currently involved in a court case about their children. Appointments are for 30 minutes maximum and are held fortnightly on a Tuesday. The aim of the scheme is to help people who cannot afford legal advice, to manage representing themselves in the court case and to guide them towards other support services. It does not cover divorce or financial matters, nor does it cover cases where social services are involved in the arrangements for the children.

The appointments are conducted by a qualified Family lawyer (solicitor, barrister or legal executive) and the scheme is seen as a valuable safety net for litigants in person, It offers specialist assistance to the judiciary who are put under considerable additional stress in attempting to manage highly emotional cases in which it is now not unusual for both the applicant and the respondent to be unrepresented.

Historically, the availability of Legal Aid provided a safety net for most of the users of this Pro Bono Scheme. Withdrawal of Legal Aid has removed this layer of free advice leaving litigants in person feeling that they have no option other than to make application to the court, resulting in an exponential increase in work levels in the family court.

The scheme is now supported by most family specialists in the West Midlands area including solicitors firms and member of the bar.

**Fiona O'Sullivan**