

Invested for good: Simpson Grierson Pro Bono Report 2022



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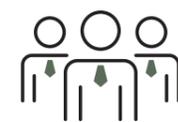
Weaving pro bono work into the fabric of our firm



Pro bono facts and figures 2021



161
lawyers



20
partners



93
clients



4,427
HOURS of pro bono services



1,356
HOURS for local community law centres

Figures for 1 January 2021 – 31 December 2021

Introduction

Kia ora tātou.

Since starting my new role as Simpson Grierson's first Pro Bono Partner in January 2020, I have gained a whole new appreciation of the positive impact pro bono work has on a firm's culture and engagement. It has been great to find that Covid-19 and lockdowns have not diminished our ability to build our commitment to pro bono.

I've learnt that by taking care of legal work for our charity and not-for-profit partners, we are able to help them be compliant and reduce their risk profile so they're free to focus on their core charitable purpose. Often charities don't have the in-house expertise or resources to do this, and our work helps ease the burden when it comes to fulfilling their legal obligations.

For example, we worked with the Aotearoa Resettled Communities Coalition, an umbrella organisation that advocates for 20 member groups from 15 diverse ethnic backgrounds. We revised their template employment agreement and sorted out the base of their employment compliance, so that they can focus on their primary work of helping new residents and resettled communities thrive.

We get many requests for pro bono support from all over New Zealand that we can't always service. Early on I saw the importance of having clear policies, guidelines and targets so that we can focus resources on where we can make the most difference.

The work we do is a drop in the ocean - there is a really high need for so many people to have legal assistance and the civil legal aid system just does not cater to that need. Access to legal advice is beyond so many people who are on low incomes.

A great initiative with the potential to reduce barriers to accessing justice is the new digital platform called 'Te Ara Ture', developed by Community Law Centres o Aotearoa.

This project aims to better connect willing pro bono lawyers with people who need help, and it may be a way for law firms of all sizes to better access pro bono opportunities in Aotearoa and give back to the community.

At Simpson Grierson, we continue to build our contribution to the community and assist where there is need due to poverty and disadvantage. Pro bono is now an integral part of our culture, and I want to thank our partners for believing in the importance of pro bono as part of our practice. I look forward to seeing where this takes us in the future - the journey so far has been full of important, fulfilling legal work for our people.

Ngā mihi

Shan Wilson, Pro Bono Partner
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Shan Wilson
Simpson Grierson Pro Bono Partner



Supporting Youthline with Privacy Act 2020 compliance

Youthline is an organisation that supports young people across Aotearoa with a free 24/7 helpline service, offering counselling, mentoring and community programmes. For over 18 years Simpson Grierson has partnered with the charity to support it with pro bono work.

Last year alone, our lawyers invested over 250 hours working for Youthline on a broad range of issues; from advising on corporate partnership agreements, to reviewing employment agreements.

When the Privacy Act 2020 came into effect in December 2020, we worked with Youthline to review and update its internal privacy procedures for staff, to assist Youthline to comply with the new Act.

These procedures are particularly important in an organisation like Youthline, given the highly sensitive nature of information which is being handled. We continue to assist the charity with privacy advice.

In 2021 as the Covid-19 pandemic took hold, one of the challenges Youthline faced was how to offer private confidential advice to youth remotely via digital platforms that young people prefer using and can easily engage with, like Facebook Messenger. Simpson Grierson advised Youthline on several regulatory hurdles, particularly relating to health information and privacy, which needed to be overcome in order to safely use Facebook Messenger as a communication platform.

Case study

For the last two years, we have partnered with Youthline to enable gender-diverse rangatahi to make applications to the Family Court to get the sex marker on their birth certificates changed.

Our work meant that we could assist those who identify as a different sex to that stated on their birth certificate, to apply to the Court for a declaration as to their true sex, after which, they can have their birth certificate changed.

Taking on this project was important to us because it throws up access to justice issues, given the complexity of the legal tests as well as the requirement to file evidence and legal submissions in support.



Michelle Dunlop and Po Tsai



Team training day session with Simpson Grierson and Youthline



Shae Ronald
Youthline CEO

“It is with deep gratitude that we thank the team at Simpson Grierson for their continued support of Youthline through the last year. Like many organisations, we faced the need to rapidly pivot on how to deliver all our services online, while prioritising the privacy of our clients.

“This was a monumental task and we couldn’t have done it without the extra support and stability of our teams and our generous partners and funders. Thank you for always being there for young people when they need it the most.”



Youthline volunteers take part in Auckland's Rainbow Pride parade in 2021

Afghan Nationals win landmark judicial review

In September 2021, Community Law Waikato sought our urgent help to get a number of stranded Afghans on the final flights out of Kabul following the Taliban's takeover and the US armed forces' exit.

The Afghans applied for New Zealand residence visas before Covid-19 hit, but became caught up in delays linked to border closures.

Simpson Grierson lawyers Tim Bremner and James Meager worked alongside barristers Wendy Aldred and Monique van Alphen Fyfe from Stout Street Chambers, and Community Law Waikato to bring urgent judicial review proceedings against the Government's failure to process the Afghan Nationals' visa applications.

The judicial review brought against Immigration New Zealand (INZ) resulted in those clients living in fear for their lives in Afghanistan winning the right to have their New Zealand residence visa applications revisited.

Justice Francis Cooke ruled that decisions of INZ not to complete the processing and granting of Refugee Family Support Category residency visas because of the closure of the border due to Covid-19, were unlawful. The judge directed INZ to progress the applicants' residence applications without further delay.

The case was brought by two applicants, but they represented a wider group of 70 clients, and the judgment may be applied to clients of other advocates and also to visa applicants in similar situations from other countries.

Tim Bremner, Sally McKechnie and James Meager who worked on the Afghan Nationals case



Simpson Grierson's Tim, Sally and James



Tim Bremner
Public Law Solicitor at
Simpson Grierson

"Through our pro bono practice at Simpson Grierson, I was fortunate to work on this really important case representing stranded Afghan nationals as part of a team helping with research, preparing submissions and assisting with urgent interim orders applications.

"I even had the opportunity to assist Wendy and Monique as third counsel for the

substantive hearing of the judicial review before Justice Francis Cooke.

"This was a great learning experience for me, and one I could not have had without Simpson Grierson's commitment to pro bono work. But most important of all is, of course, the impact the work had for the Afghan nationals at the centre of the case."

Supporting communities with legal issues arising from Covid-19

Community Law Centres o Aotearoa (CLCA) is a network of 24 community law centres and 120 outreach locations across New Zealand, which offer free legal advice to those who need it. Simpson Grierson assists various community law centres within that network. In November 2021, we were approached with an urgent request for assistance to get CLCA staff and volunteers equipped to understand and advise their communities on the new Covid-19 'Traffic Light' laws.

We set up a project team across our Auckland and Wellington offices to urgently draft guidance notes and FAQs on the new laws. With the Covid-19 'Traffic Light' legislation being so new, a lot of work was required to set out the new rules and their implications in an easy to follow format.

Our guidance notes covered the various areas of law that are affected by the recently introduced Covid-19 Protection Framework and related legislation on vaccinations. The FAQs were designed to help people understand the guidance notes and anticipate any questions that visitors to Aotearoa's Community Law Centres might raise.

Our guidance notes looked at the impact of the Covid-19 Protection Framework and related vaccination legislation on a range of legal areas that the community law centres receive queries on, such as: tenancies, access to health care, education, employment and benefits. The FAQs were designed to help people understand the guidance notes and anticipate any questions that clients to Aotearoa's Community Law Centres might raise.



From left to right: Vaughan Somerville, Matt Austin, Darryn Aitchison, Alisha Imran, James Duff, Dhvani Botadra and Shan Wilson

Shan Wilson and Darryn Aitchison, Director, Te Ara Ture, Community Law Centres o Aotearoa



Sue Moroney
CEO Community Law
Centres o Aotearoa

"On behalf of Aotearoa's Community Law movement, I want to thank your team for this huge and impressive mahi. Your support will have an enormous impact on the community.

"The shifting sands of laws resulting from the Government's Covid-19 response have made this a difficult but very important piece of work, and we appreciate how quickly Simpson Grierson has been able to bring this together for us.

"The resources will be used immediately to support over 220 community law centre staff around the country, and up to 1,200 volunteers across the 24 law centres - some are small and stretched paper thin.

"It will be of immense value to the 50,000+ low-income people who rely on Community Law for legal support each year, the 30,000 people who participate in our law-related education sessions and the 4,000 visitors to our website each day who are looking for accurate legal information."

Helping reunite refugee families

Refugee and Immigration Legal Advice Service (RILAS) is a Wellington Community Law Centre unit that is focused on refugee family reunification. Since 1997, RILAS has assisted hundreds of former refugees to reunite with their family members.

A group of Simpson Grierson volunteers from our Wellington office: Sarah Kuper, Ella Arbuckle Page, Sam Hart, Oska Rego, Olliver Maassen, Hugh Morrison and Libby Neilson, have been working closely with RILAS helping to reunite families.

Our solicitors work directly with RILAS' clients to assist them with the preparation of residence applications, which seek to bring family members to New Zealand under the Refugee Family Support Residence Visa.

To apply for this visa, the individual must be a former refugee or protected person, and have no immediate family living in New Zealand.

These applications require a lot of paperwork and coordination between various parties. To give an idea of the scope of information required, Immigration New Zealand asks for a list of every place of residence, work and education for the applicant's entire life.

Our team is currently working with clients who are seeking to bring family members to New Zealand from Colombia and Syria. This can be a long process (in most cases, several years) and we will be assisting these clients through the whole process.



Simpson Grierson RILAS volunteers



Simpson Grierson's Sam Hart and Libby Neilson



Simpson Grierson team involved in the RILAS pro bono work



Libby Neilson
Local Government and
Environment Solicitor at
Simpson Grierson

“Through our work with RILAS I’ve gained an appreciation for the amount of work that goes into reuniting families, and just how strenuous the process can be. I’m grateful that we can help make this process easier for clients to navigate.”



Renata Lodge
Community Lawyer RILAS

“The RILAS team are extremely grateful for the contributions made by Simpson Grierson’s lawyers to our work. With only two part time RILAS lawyers and over 70 active refugee family reunification cases, Simpson Grierson’s involvement means that we are able to assist many more former refugee clients and much faster than we otherwise would.

“Many of these client’s families are separated by war zones and refugee camps. The dedication and commitment shown by Simpson’s Grierson’s lawyers means the world to our clients and will enable them to be reunited with their families much sooner than we hoped.”

Raising awareness about skin cancer

Melanoma New Zealand is a charity dedicated to preventing avoidable deaths and suffering from melanoma, which is the most serious type of skin cancer. New Zealand has one of the highest rates of melanoma in the world.

Simpson Grierson has partnered with Melanoma New Zealand for nearly three years. In 2021 we provided pro bono advice to the charity on a range of topics including new sponsorship and employment contracts, trade mark protection, tax on gifts and Covid-19.

One of the sponsorship contracts we provided advice on was the agreement between Melanoma New Zealand and rural insurance provider, FMG. Farmers and growers are at increased risk of melanoma due to the amount of time

they spend outdoors under New Zealand's intense sun. The partnership with FMG enabled Melanoma New Zealand to heighten awareness in New Zealand's rural communities about the importance of being sunsmart and having regular skin checks.

While at Fieldays in 2021, together with partner FMG, Melanoma New Zealand was able to do 673 spot checks on their free spot check van.

Their nurses found 54 suspicious lesions, including melanomas, that were referred on for evaluation. While there, a survey also revealed that 61% of people had never had a full body skin check before but that 82% of those surveyed would now book a skin check after learning about the importance of early detection of skin cancer.



Nurse Educator Gill Rolfe



Melanoma New Zealand branding



Andrea Newland
Melanoma
New Zealand CEO

“Simpson Grierson’s legal support enabled Melanoma New Zealand to develop impactful partnerships, campaigns and activities that make a real difference to the health and lives of so many New Zealanders. I’m so impressed by Simpson Grierson’s formal pro bono programme and its dedicated resource, both through Shan Wilson as the firm’s pro bono partner, but also through the wider team’s heartfelt commitment to supporting the firm’s pro bono clients. The pro bono programme makes a genuine and meaningful contribution to the community and we feel so grateful to be on the receiving end of this wonderful support.”



Melanoma New Zealand ambassadors: Laura McGoldrick and Martin Guptill

Weaving pro bono work into the fabric of our firm

“At Simpson Grierson, we see a really positive flow on effect of pro bono work for our people, because the work helps build better, more well-rounded lawyers. It means our people get to use a wider skillset because of the variety of our pro bono work and the clients they are advising.

“We are working hard to deeply ingrain pro bono into our culture, so that activities and hours are recorded, input and ideas are shared during performance review discussions, and it can be highlighted for promotion and remuneration reviews.

“By offering all our lawyers the opportunities that pro bono work brings, it also gives them the chance to work with, and learn from different people. Plus they’ll get partner-level feedback through our dedicated pro bono partner, Shan Wilson, whose role was the first of its kind for any New Zealand law firm.”

Jo Stevenson, Simpson Grierson People & Culture Director



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Jo Stevenson and Shan Wilson



“I find the pro bono work at Simpson Grierson to be incredibly meaningful and rewarding. Through this work, I was given the opportunity to sit on the Board of Youthline, which gives me exposure to the issues and challenges around governance and funding that non-profit organisations face.

“I take great pride in working alongside organisations like Youthline, which is doing incredible mahi in the youth mental health space, particularly given the impacts that the last few years have had on young people in New Zealand. More broadly, pro bono work provides an opportunity to assist the communities that support us, and to share our knowledge and resources with those who otherwise may not have access.”

Matt Austin
Simpson Grierson Solicitor, Youthline Board Member



“For me, getting involved in this work for gender-diverse rangatahi applying to the Family Court, was an incredible opportunity to put my legal skills to use in a totally different way, and to connect with some amazing people whom I might otherwise never have met. I am very proud that Simpson Grierson values our pro bono contributions as highly as the paid work we do and supports us to serve our communities in this way.”

Jo-Anne Knight
Simpson Grierson Litigation Partner



“Simpson Grierson’s commitment to pro-bono was a primary reason why I chose to clerk with the firm. I was fortunate enough to undertake work in the area of child sexual exploitation and abuse, and the meaningful impact of such work, along with the knowledge I acquired, made it an immensely rewarding and invaluable experience.”

Priya Prakash
Summer Clerk 2021 / 2022



“Having the opportunity to work on pro bono matters was definitely something that drew me towards the summer clerk position at Simpson Grierson. I believe pro bono matters are extremely valuable, as they provide an opportunity to help and serve those who are in both legal and financial hardship. Simpson Grierson dedicates time and resources to ensure these people have the best legal support they can get.”

Harrison Dowling
Summer Clerk 2021 / 2022



Simpson Grierson's Shan Wilson, James Meager, Sally McKechnie and Tim Bremner

Sally McKechnie and Shan Wilson



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Simpson Grierson Pro Bono Report

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