

# Invested For Good: Simpson Grierson Pro Bono Report







Partner Anastasiya Gutorova and Senior Solicitor Viktoriya Pashorina-Nichols holding up messages of support, from Aroha for Ukraine.

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## Pro bono facts and figures

From 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023 more than three quarters of our lawyers undertook pro bono work.



Figures for 1 July 2022 – 30 June 2023





# Introduction

Kia ora tātou,

With four years in my role as Simpson Grierson Pro Bono Partner, I've really started to see the true impact that our work is having. As we become more involved with the practice of pro bono, the way that staff are now bringing forward their own initiatives, is a real sign to me of how much we're growing a culture of pro bono within the firm.

A great example of this is Senior Associate Sam Hider, who introduced me to the Canterbury Community Law Centre. This has ensured all three of our offices now link to and support their local community law centres, as well as our firm wide support of Community Law Centres o Aotearoa (their umbrella organisation).

At the end of last year Solicitor Avary Patutama introduced me to Monte Cecilia Housing Trust, Avary is a Shadow Board Member for the Trust. Monte Cecilia Housing Trust offers a range of housing services to support low income families with serious housing needs, providing transitional and community housing, advocacy and a variety of wraparound services. Thanks to Avary's introduction, we've been able to help the Trust out with the legal advice that they've needed, and they've come back to us with other work, and we've found them other specialists in the firm.

It has also been special for me to be involved in work that has had a true impact on our people. A piece of work that stands out to me was Partner Anastasiya Gutorova and Senior Solicitor Viktoriya Pashorina-Nichols' work for *Mahi for Ukraine*. We put a call out to our staff to assist

Ukrainian New Zealanders and their families with visas to relocate them to New Zealand, and more than 100 staff members put their hand up to help. We were all pleased to then see, as a result of the advocacy of *Mahi for Ukraine*, the Government announced a further extension to visas for 12 months.

It was heart-warming for me to see our people's willingness to be so involved and it meant a lot to me and Ukrainian-born, Anastasiya and Viktoriya.

Further evidence of the engagement our staff have to our pro bono practice is Senior Associate Nick Chapman coming forward with the idea we could run an education session for some of our pro bono clients on the law around bequests, and the disputes that can arise. Nick's informative session has been well received by those clients.

When I am asked what my vision is for our pro bono practice, I always start with wanting us to be an authentic and credible leader of pro bono services in the legal profession in New Zealand. Seeing staff initiative and buy in to what we do in the community is, for me, a key part of how we know we are building a real and effective pro bono culture here at Simpson Grierson. I am very grateful for how this is developing into such a collective project across Simpson Grierson.

Ngā mihi

**Shan Wilson, Pro Bono Partner**  
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# Mahi for Ukraine

## Advocating for the safety of Ukrainian people

Last year on February 24, Ukrainian civilians awoke to the engines of war rolling across their border.

While an extremely frightening time for the people of Ukraine, Simpson Grierson lawyers Anastasiya Gutorova and Viktoriya Pashorina-Nichols both felt obligated to help, particularly with their families still living in Ukraine.

After realising that there was no single voice which could engage with the New Zealand Government on behalf of Ukrainian Kiwis, Anastasiya and Viktoriya joined forces with Pacific Channel Partner Kieran Jina and Spark's AWS Partner Success Lead Kate Turska to form *Mahi for Ukraine*.

A key area of focus was immigration and ensuring that Ukrainians could escape the war and come to New Zealand to safety. *Mahi for Ukraine* worked with the Minister of Immigration New Zealand to advocate for the introduction of the 2022 Special Ukraine Visa.

The 2022 Special Ukraine Visa was introduced on 15 March 2022, which allowed Ukrainians with close family already living in New Zealand to come to New Zealand. Following the introduction of the visa, and with no end in sight for the war in Ukraine throughout 2022, *Mahi for Ukraine* advocated for the visa to be expanded to allow more Ukrainians into New Zealand.

As a result of *Mahi for Ukraine's* efforts throughout 2022 and early 2023, the Government extended the visa by another year (until 15 March 2024), as well as the time to enter into New Zealand from nine to 12 months, and widened the group of individuals who would fall within the definition of a close family member (eg: aunts/uncles/grandchildren/first cousins). The 2022 Special Ukraine Visa is the largest special visa category New Zealand has ever established to support an international humanitarian effort.

Among its other achievements, *Mahi for Ukraine* also teamed up with David Riley, a South Auckland children's book author, to collect messages of support from New Zealand school children, which were then collated into a book called *Aroha for Ukraine*. Physical copies of this book will be gifted in the second half of 2023 to Ukrainian children and families who have recently arrived into New Zealand.

For Anastasiya and Viktoriya it meant a lot to them that Simpson Grierson was able to include their work for *Mahi for Ukraine*, alongside their client work for Simpson Grierson, and we were able to support their project with public law advice.

Our research librarians monitored news articles for them and we established a team of Simpson Grierson lawyers across the firm to offer support to Ukrainians needing legal assistance with the visa application process. When the call went out for volunteers within Simpson Grierson to provide pro bono help, it was heartwarming for Anastasiya and Viktoriya to see an unprecedented number of people put their hand up to offer support.



Partner Anastasiya Gutorova and Senior Solicitor Viktoriya Pashorina-Nichols holding up copies of *Aroha for Ukraine*.



Some of the messages of support, written for Ukrainian children and their families in *Aroha for Ukraine*.



**“Everyone copes with things differently and Viktoriya and I are doers, we need to use action as a response to whatever is going on and the response that we have created makes it easier for us to deal with what is going on in Ukraine. You don't feel helpless, yes it's happening but I have helped.”**



Anastasiya Gutorova,  
Simpson Grierson Partner



# Cystic Fibrosis New Zealand

## Providing support to those impacted by Cystic Fibrosis

Cystic fibrosis (CF) is a life threatening genetic condition which affects more than 570 people in New Zealand, particularly causing damage to the lungs and digestive system.

All babies in New Zealand undergo the Newborn Metabolic Screening Programme (heel prick test), which tests for CF. Early symptoms of CF include salty tasting skin, slow weight gain, wheezing, coughing, pneumonia and bowel issues.

For the last few years, Simpson Grierson has been providing pro bono support to Cystic Fibrosis NZ (CFNZ), the only charity in New Zealand dedicated to supporting and improving the quality of life for people with CF and their families.

We've been working with CFNZ since 2020, so there are many at Simpson Grierson who have been involved in our pro bono work. Simpson Grierson Senior Associate Zac Fargher, who is also a board member of CFNZ, as well as Senior Associate Nick Bland have been involved in the constitution review. Senior Associate Raymond Scott and Solicitor Vaughan Somerville have driven intellectual property advice on recent campaigns, and Senior Associate Amanda Stephenson and Special Counsel Anita Birkinshaw played key roles on contractual advice for CFNZ.

### Our work

Our pro bono work for CFNZ included providing trade mark advice for two critical campaigns, the Deliberate Acts of Kindness Campaign and the Cruel Needs Kind Campaign, including Fred Bear. Both campaigns came with a focus on providing emotional and financial support to families with CF.

Our work also included re-writing legal documents, restructuring the constitution, and membership structure to ensure that it worked best for a modern charitable organisation.

The advice and pro bono work we provided meant that CFNZ was able to remain focused on getting Trikafta across the line, a life changing drug for those impacted by CF, while we provided the legal support they needed, to help CFNZ with key operational decisions and contracts.

Simpson Grierson Solicitor, Vaughan Somerville, who has CF said: *"While there are a number of us in New Zealand with CF, it doesn't quite get the recognition that other genetic conditions get in New Zealand. Funding can be hard to come by for CFNZ, especially in comparison to other charities, so it's great to see a firm like ours getting involved in work that actually matters to people, and has a real world significance every day for people with CF."*

*"On a personal level, Trikafta is life changing for me. My parents got told if I made it to 21 that's great, so for me to be where I am today, working in a firm that is committed to supporting people living with CF, like myself, that to me is awesome."*



*Pictured here are several of the CFNZ Fred Bear mascots, which are part of the 'Cruel Needs Kind' campaign.*



*CFNZ Chief Executive Lisa Burns, CFNZ General Manager of Finance & Operations Angela Crates, and Solicitor Vaughan Somerville holding the CFNZ mascot, Fred Bear, outside the CFNZ office in Auckland.*

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*"We have so much gratitude for the team at Simpson Grierson. Their support of CFNZ by way of pro bono legal advice has been hugely beneficial for us, as well as being a great help. We love working with Simpson Grierson, and their commitment to partnering with us, so we can channel our full focus into our CF community, means more than we can say."*

**Lisa Burns,**  
Cystic Fibrosis Chief Executive





Senior Solicitor Elizabeth Keall-Ross,  
Youthline Rainbow Development Coordinator  
Luis Meireles, and Pro Bono Partner, Shan Wilson.



Image supplied by AFRA. Photo credit: Satisfy Food Rescue.



CFNZ Chief Executive Lisa Burns and Solicitor Vaughan Somerville.

Senior Associate Sarah Lee and Regulatory Affairs  
Advisor Juliet Bing-Harmon.



Solicitors Kiara Supershad and Achi Simhony.



# Te Ara Pōtiki

## Providing opportunities for Māori in agri-tech

Since 2022, we have been assisting with the set-up of Te Ara Pōtiki, a global agritech internship programme designed to support promising tertiary qualified Māori entrepreneurs and technologists with an interest in, or who are working in, high-growth start-ups or technology companies.

With significant investment in the primary sector, iwi are looking at innovation, R&D and global markets to strengthen and extend their interests.

Te Ara Pōtiki will place Māori candidates in world-leading technology businesses in the United States, with the first cohort planning to head to the US in early 2024. Under this programme, up to 22 candidates over five years, will be placed for up to 12 months each at overseas start-ups.

### Our pro-bono work

We have been working with the founders of this initiative, advising on the charitable trust structure that will best support Te Ara Pōtiki in achieving its objectives, as a purpose-driven, not-for-profit organisation.

From our initial engagement, we were able to work collaboratively with the trustees to provide the initial structuring advice, draft the charitable trust deed and complete the required trust board incorporation and tax and charities registrations.

Other work will be around the agreements with participants and partners, across different jurisdictions.

### Impact of our work

Our work will allow Te Ara Pōtiki to encourage and support Māori in gaining invaluable work and leadership experience with high-growth start-ups through internship programmes, particularly in the agri-tech industry, which is constantly expanding and plays a significant role in Aotearoa's economy.

Participants will also be exposed to start-ups and other enterprises that do not currently exist in Aotearoa, allowing them to bring their learnings from overseas, back to Aotearoa, thereby shaping themselves as leaders in the industry.

Te Ara Pōtiki will launch later this year and is receiving funding from MBIE and other partners to support its work.



***“As soon as we heard about their idea we were eager to help and bring it to fruition. It aligns with our values of supporting community and putting people first, which encapsulates what we strive for at Simpson Grierson.”***

***“We also knew with our expertise that we were able to get things moving quickly, so that we could turn their vision of Te Ara Pōtiki into reality.”***

**Achi Simhony, Simpson Grierson Solicitor**



***“The trustees recognised the underrepresentation of Māori leaders in the technology sector and made it Te Ara Pōtiki’s mission to change this. This really resonated with our values, and we were keen to use our expertise to handle the legal requirements, so Te Ara Pōtiki could focus on delivering its internship programme and other initiatives to the community as soon as possible.”***

**Kiara Supershad, Simpson Grierson Solicitor**



Solicitors Achi Simhony and Kiara Supershad, who did pro bono work for Te Ara Pōtiki.



# Tāhine Project

## Creating an inclusive environment for all rangatahi

Youthline is a charity that provides support for young people, particularly those struggling with mental health, with a 24/7 counselling service, as well as mentoring and community programmes. For the last 18 years Simpson Grierson has been supporting Youthline as our main community partner.

We also have an ongoing commitment for a solicitor from our firm to sit on the Youthline Board. Senior Solicitor Matt Austin has been undertaking that role for us since 2020.

Since 2020 our lawyers have been working with Youthline on what has become known as the Tāhine Project, an initiative to help gender-diverse rangatahi change the gender marker on their birth certificate.

The application process under the Births, Deaths, Marriages and Relationships Registration Act 1995 was complex and required putting a formal application into the Family Court, for a judicial determination of their permanent sex. Through the Tāhine Project, we have been able to support people by doing the legal work to prepare their applications, drafting affidavit evidence and legal submissions, and appearing on their behalf in Court.

On June 15 of this year, a new process for changing the gender or sex marker on a birth certificate came into force, which provides a self-identification process for transgender and non-binary persons to change this marker on their birth certificate without having to go through the Family Court.

We are proud to have played a small part in that too – filing and speaking to Submissions before the Parliamentary Select Committee considering this law change. We spoke up from our experience of the legal process and

the obstacles it was placing in the way for owning a birth certificate that reflected the gender/sex you lived.

As Luis Meirelles says *“It is great to see that the project has ended in this way and that legislation has changed for the better.”*

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*“Being involved in this work has been incredibly rewarding. It has been such a privilege to hear people share their stories and some of the hurdles they have faced. Knowing that you are helping someone realise their identity is such a joy. It was great to work with individuals whose lives would be greatly impacted for the better.”*

**Elizabeth Keall-Ross,**  
Simpson Grierson Senior Solicitor



Senior Solicitor Elizabeth Keall-Ross and Pro Bono Partner Shan Wilson.



Senior Solicitor Elizabeth Keall-Ross, Youthline Rainbow Development Coordinator Luis Meirelles and Pro Bono Partner Shan Wilson, outside Youthline in Auckland.

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*“Working on this project with Simpson Grierson has had a huge impact on the rainbow community. Simpson Grierson was able to provide the legal support that rangatahi wouldn’t normally receive and we have been able to lessen the gap from something that is legal and scary, to create a deeper connection with our clients by providing them with the support they need.”*

**Luis Meirelles,**  
Youthline Rainbow Development Coordinator





# Aotearoa Food Rescue Alliance

## Advising on food safety during Covid-19

As the global pandemic and numerous lockdowns hit our shores, we teamed up with Aotearoa Food Rescue Alliance (AFRA), a not for profit organisation established to prevent food waste and nourish our communities.

AFRA supports the food rescue sector in NZ by bringing together food rescue organisations from around the country. The organisation and its members needed expert legal advice on a variety of matters relating to food safety education and whether they and their members are subject to New Zealand's strict food legislation.

### Making a difference

Our pro bono work for AFRA included educating member organisations who distribute food about food safety and handling issues.

It is critical that these groups who give out food have a good understanding of basic food hygiene, and responsibilities around allergen labelling and frozen goods handling.

We participated in AFRA's workshop on the Food Act, and were able to advise our client that the Food Act does not apply to food organisations which donate to the community, but that these organisations still have a duty of care when it comes to safe and careful handling of food.

We also reviewed AFRA's food safety processes and guidelines to enable them to ensure their members follow good food safety standards themselves.

### The impact of our work

Our advice enabled AFRA to ensure food members are aware of their legal obligations to keep people safe and understand the importance of good food hygiene.

We were able to clarify AFRA's understanding of their obligations under the Food Act, which was important because it meant the organisation can now confidently educate their members and refine their own systems and processes when it comes to food safety and their legal obligations.

We also offered advice around:

- AFRA members who wanted to distribute home kill meat through its network
- Whether asking for koha brings AFRA's members within the Food Act's remit
- AFRA's funding agreement and privacy policy
- AFRA's constitution and governance.

Simpson Grierson Senior Associate, Sarah Lee says:

*"The relief of poverty is an issue that I personally carry close to my heart – plus I hate it when food goes to waste! I found our pro bono work with AFRA to be really fulfilling because distributing free safe food throughout Aotearoa to those in need is a very practical thing that facilitates the relief of poverty."*



Senior Associate Sarah Lee and Regulatory Affairs Advisor Juliet Bing-Harmon.



Image supplied by AFRA. Photo credit: Satisfy Food Rescue.



**"Simpson Grierson has been instrumental in providing expert legal advice that we couldn't otherwise afford. I am eternally grateful for their work, without which our programme would have been undeliverable."**

**"With Simpson Grierson at our side, AFRA has grown rapidly over the last two years. Our 33 member organisations benefit immensely from the reliable best practice advice that we provide to support a growing and impactful sector. With dependable legal advice we can be assured that our members are getting the very best support to make a tangible difference in their communities."**

**Dawn Hutchesson,**  
General Manager,  
AFRA



Image supplied by AFRA. Photo credit: Satisfy Food Rescue.



# Valuing our pro bono work

On 1 July 2022, we changed the way we recognise our lawyers' pro bono work, so that pro bono hours would be treated and valued in the same way as commercial legal work.

This change means that our lawyers now receive billable hour credit for pro bono legal work, which goes towards their billable hour and financial targets.

Simpson Grierson's Pro Bono Partner, Shan Wilson says:

*"This is an initiative about creating fairness for our people who are doing pro bono work within*

*the community, so that their contribution is formally valued in the same way as any other legal work when it comes to performance reviews, remuneration and promotion.*

*"We are working to make pro bono deeply engrained in our culture, and an initiative like this policy is how we keep it real, because it creates fairness and equality for our people."*

We spoke to some of our lawyers about what the pro bono crediting initiative means to them.



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*"Making pro bono work count towards budgets in the same way as billable work at Simpson Grierson, underpins the firm's commitment to pro bono and it represents to our staff that it is an area which we prioritise for our clients."*

Joanna Lim | Simpson Grierson Special Counsel



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*"Simpson Grierson's policy to treat pro bono work as billable has provided me with reassurance that I can treat my pro bono work as importantly as billable work. Pro bono work is part of why I do what I do. I became a lawyer to help people from all walks of life, and Simpson Grierson's policy means that I can."*

Sam Hart | Simpson Grierson Solicitor



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*"Crediting pro bono hours encourages people from all levels within the firm to get involved in meaningful work that makes a big difference to the community."*

*"I've found my work for the Refugee & Immigration Legal Advice Service to be particularly rewarding, and a great opportunity to develop skills that are outside my normal practice area. This isn't something that I thought I'd be able to do at a large commercial firm, and it is great to know that it is reflected in the overall hours that I contribute."*

Isabel Van Tuinen | Simpson Grierson Solicitor



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*"I think it's really important that pro bono work is treated and held in the same regard as other billable work, so it is given the time and attention that it requires."*

*"As someone with trust law expertise, there is plenty of opportunity to do pro bono work, because my experience is useful to charities and other similar organisations."*

Ben Hardisty | Simpson Grierson Solicitor



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*"As a junior, pro bono work allows me to develop my skills in a broad range of practice areas, and it means I can delve into areas that I am really passionate about, alongside my normal work."*

Ishma Nasheed | Simpson Grierson Solicitor





# SIMPSON GRIERSON

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