

Dear Applicant

Re: Trustee Recruitment

Thank you for your interest in becoming a trustee of South West London Law Centres.

To apply for trusteeship, please read the attached document and fill in the application form available in this pack.

The initial closing date for applications is **2 JANUARY 2024**

A panel of trustees and senior management team will review your application. If we consider that your skills and experience are a good fit with the Law Centre, you will be invited for an informal discussion with the panel about our work and the trustee role. You may also be invited to attend a meeting of the Board of Trustees as an observer.

Please email your application to recruitment@swllc.org and don't hesitate to contact us if you have any queries in the meantime.

I look forward to receiving your application.

Yours faithfully,

Patrick Marples
Chief Executive
South West London Law Centres

ABOUT SOUTH WEST LONDON LAW CENTRES & WHAT WE ARE LOOKING FOR

Who are we?

Law Centres are community-led, not-for-profit organisations that help local people to understand and enforce their legal rights. Their services are free, and they attempt to target the people who most need them – people who are at risk of discrimination and ill-treatment and those who are least able to protect themselves, for example because they lack the money to hire someone with legal expertise to help them. The right to use the name “Law Centre” is protected by the Law Centres Federation.

We can trace our roots back to 1974 when the original law centres were established in Wandsworth.

South West London Law Centres is the largest Law Centre in Great Britain. It was set up in 2004 to bring together the Law Centres covering six London boroughs – Croydon, Kingston, Merton, Richmond, Sutton and Wandsworth. Our catchment area covers 1.7 million people. We now operate from 3 branch offices. We help over 6,500 people each year with a face to face service covering 3 broad services

- Expert casework and representation in the social welfare law covering community care, debt, employment, housing, immigration/asylum, public law and in a limited way welfare rights
- Emergency representation as part of the Housing Possession Court Duty Scheme
- Pro Bono Clinics

Amongst the results we achieve that make us proud of what we do are:

- the prevention of homelessness
- the prevention and reduction of poverty
- the protection of family life by reuniting people living in the UK with those living abroad
- the prevention of torture and death beyond our borders by the provision of advice and representation to people fleeing persecution
- the prevention of ill-health by successfully challenging unfit living conditions
- the prevention of mental ill-health by assisting people to deal with their personal debts
- the improvement of working and living conditions for people experiencing unlawful discrimination on the grounds of sex, gender, race, nationality, disability, religion, belief or sexual orientation

SWLLC is a charity and a company limited by guarantee. This means that we hold money on trust to deliver services in line with objects set out in our governing document, and the organisation has trustees whose role is to oversee the charity and make sure it is doing what it is supposed to. *The objects of SWLLC are the prevention and alleviation of poverty, and the education of the public, by the provision of legal advice and representation, in South West London and surrounding areas.*

In that role, they have to act within charity law and should follow the guidance of the Charity Commission. As long as they act in good faith and do their best to use the funds of the charity to meet the objects of the charity their liability should something go wrong is very limited. The trustees are also the directors of the company, and again in that role their liability is strictly limited as long as they act in the interest of the company and its objects, setting the organisation's strategic direction and scrutinising the actions of SWLLC's managers.

SWLLC is funded from a variety of public, private and charitable sources, but its core operations are paid for through Legal Aid contracts.

We have gone through a process of changing our constitution to limit the size of the board to 12 Trustees. Trustees are usually co-opted and then elected at an AGM for a term of four years. Trustees can only be elected for two terms of four years, as a maximum.

Who are we looking for?

We are looking for people who believe in what we do and are prepared to help oversee the charitable trust so that we can continue to do it. We need you to bring your expertise, energy and networks to the law centre. The role isn't glamorous, it's unpaid, and it's sometimes unacknowledged, but it is rewarding in other ways. The day to day management of the law centre is delegated to a small team. This team is small for what the law centre is trying to achieve.

We're looking for people prepared to give their time, generally by attending meetings bi monthly in the evening, and by taking the time to read the papers sent to them in preparation for asking appropriate questions and taking decisions at those meetings. They might need to attend training to support them in their role – perhaps training to help in recruiting staff, or to ensure that the charity is reaching the whole of the local community. Ideally the person should live, work or study in one of the six boroughs we serve, although this is not an absolute requirement. We would like the trustees to have an interest/experience in one of the areas below and as well as the board meetings to engage with the management team on their area of expertise.

Main Areas of expertise and skills we need

Any area of relevant expertise would be welcomed. The most important attribute is a passion for helping others in need. At the moment some skills and experience in the following areas would help to complement those already present on our Board:

- Finance: particularly charity accounting, Legal Aid accounting or both
- Fundraising
- Human Resources including promoting diversity and inclusion
- Communications and Marketing
- Community activism and campaigning
- Experience of using community advice services

What is in it for you

You get the satisfaction of giving something to people who need your help, and to seeing the help you give results in things that most of us take for granted, like having enough food to eat, a safe, warm place to sleep, and protection from violence.

You will get to challenge yourself by switching your thinking from what you do during the day to something different, whether that's from the for-profit to the not-for-profit world, from a place where you carry out the decisions to one in which you make the decisions, or from a role in which it is up to you to deliver results to one in which it is up to you to help someone else deliver them.

We will arrange for you to meet our Chair and Chief Executive before you decide to join us. We will provide an induction, including an overview of our organisation and the responsibilities of the role, and a chance to see our excellent caseworkers in action. You will be paired with an existing member of our Board to give you an informal route to gain experience.

How You Can Help Us?

Many of these of these areas are interlinked and overlap

Finance: particularly charity accounting, Legal Aid accounting or both

We are looking for further trustees with a financial background to support our Treasurer. SWLLC is funded from a variety of public, private and charitable sources, but its core operations are paid for through Legal Aid contracts. Legal aid rates have remained frozen for many years and other resources may not fill the gap left by this. The law centres finances have remained challenging and steady guidance is needed to see the law centre through this.

Fundraising

As well as attracting main grants and corporate donations mainly from partner solicitor firms we are looking to generate and attract more general donations and giving. Over the development of the law centre thousands of people have volunteered with us. We have a volunteer base of over 400 people who participate each year in our pro bono clinics, as well as many day time volunteers. A lot of these volunteers are at the start of their careers and we want to look at ways of keeping in touch with them with the aim of developing a strong supporters base. The current management team doesn't have the resources to develop streams of general giving and we need help from our trustees to do this.

Human Resources

Although we have external support through a contract which covers most HR issues, we continue to want to look at better ways of developing, rewarding, recognising and retaining staff in an environment where pay and conditions has not kept up with the public and private sector. We want to continue to develop diversity and inclusion within the staff group of the law centre, the way we operate and deliver our services. There is a continual task of keeping the law centre connected as we are spread apart over 3 branch offices in 3 boroughs as well as keeping a close connection between the board and staff group.

Communications and Marketing

We need to get the message out about what we do and what we can help with. We have a catchment area of 1.7 million people. It is a challenge for the small management team to cover this area and to develop contacts in each of the boroughs. We are looking for people to help act as ambassadors of the law centre alongside the management team. We are looking to further develop our website, leaflets, twitter and marketing materials. We get many good results for services users and we are looking at ways in which we can better capture, develop and communicate the impact that we have on people that use our services.

Further we need to get the message of what the law does achieve to those who may be willing to donate and give to the law centre.

Community Engagement and Community Activism

As part of the pandemic funding for the law centre we were able to get some seed funding to develop community engagement work. We have one worker covering our 6 London boroughs. Work is being focused on supporting people through the cost of living crisis and campaigning around temporary accommodation issues. Community call outs have allowed us to work more pro actively with community groups and is now

helping us to explore other avenues of work for the law centre. We would benefit from a voice within the board to help promote the growing need for campaigning to work alongside the legal work that the law centre covers.

SWLLC

TRUSTEE ROLE DESCRIPTION

The statutory duties of a Trustee:

Main duty

Under charity law SWLLC Trustees have and must accept the ultimate responsibility for directing the affairs of SWLLC, and ensuring that it is solvent, well-run and delivering the charitable outcomes for the benefit of the public for which it has been set up. In law trustees of SWLLC have three duties — care, compliance and prudence — which are set out below following the wording given by the Charity Commission.

Duty of care — Trustees must:

- Use reasonable care and skill in their work as trustees, using their personal skills and experience as needed to ensure that SWLLC is well-run and efficient.
- Consider getting external professional advice on all matters where there may be material risk to SWLLC, or where the trustees may be in breach of their duties.

Duty of compliance — Trustees must:

- Ensure that SWLLC complies with charity law, and with the requirements of the Charity Commission as regulator; ensure that the charity prepares reports on what it has achieved and Annual Returns and accounts as required by law
- Ensure that SWLLC does not breach any of the requirements or rules set out in its governing document and that it remains true to the charitable purpose and objects set out there.
- Comply with the requirements of other legislation and other regulators which govern the activities of SWLLC.
- Act with integrity, and avoid any personal conflicts of interest or misuse of SWLLC funds or assets.

Duty of prudence - Trustees must:

- Ensure that SWLLC is and will remain solvent.
- Use SWLLC funds and assets reasonably, and only in furtherance of SWLLC objects.
- Avoid undertaking activities that might place SWLLC endowment, funds, assets or reputation at undue risk.
- Take special care when investing SWLLC funds, or borrowing funds for SWLLC to use.

Specific duties of Trustees:

Vision, values and strategic direction

- To contribute actively to the board of trustees' role in giving firm strategic direction to SWLLC, setting a vision, goals, policy and plans, and targets and key performance indicators
- To ensure that SWLLC seeks and considers the views of beneficiaries and stakeholders in setting strategic direction and policy
- To ensure breadth and diversity in the vision, values, policy and strategy of SWLLC
- To serve as an ambassador for the charity, promoting understanding and recognition of, and support for, SWLLC vision and values
- To be aware of current issues relating to recovery from mental ill-health

Performance management

- To monitor and evaluate performance against plans, targets and key performance indicators, and its wider impact on stakeholders
- To appoint the Chief Executive and monitor his/her performance
- To safeguard the good name and values of SWLLC

Compliance

- To ensure that SWLLC complies with all legal and regulatory requirements
- To ensure that key risks to SWLLC are identified and effectively managed and that professional advice is sought and considered where appropriate

Prudent management of assets

- To ensure the financial stability of SWLLC through creation of an effective fundraising strategy
- To ensure the proper management of the charity's assets both physical and intellectual; and sound financial management

Good governance

- To comply always with the Trustee Board Code of Conduct and other Trustee policies
- To uphold the principles and practice of good governance
- To participate in Trustee development and training as appropriate
- To prepare for and attend Trustee Board meetings regularly and contribute to discussion and collective decision making
- To use any personal knowledge, skills and experience to help the Board of Trustees to further the objects of the charity

SWLLC

TRUSTEE PERSON SPECIFICATION

SWLLC works actively to ensure that its Trustee Board has the right skills and experience to lead the charity effectively. SWLLC Board vacancies are normally advertised. Application is normally by written application, followed by interview. The application form and interview are evidence based and we will look for clear examples of how candidates meet the essential and desirable criteria below.

Personal competencies

SWLLC Trustees are expected to demonstrate the following personal competencies:

ESSENTIAL

Commitment

1. Ability to understand and accept the duties and liabilities of being a charity Trustee.
2. Empathy with the vision, mission and aims of SWLLC
3. A willingness and ability to devote the necessary time and effort

Focus

4. Ability to think and apply knowledge strategically
5. Ability to think creatively
6. Ability to keep mission-focused
7. Ability to analyse and evaluate management information and other evidence
8. Willingness to listen and learn

Communication and team working

9. Ability to communicate clearly and sensitively and to take an active part in discussions
10. Ability to influence and engage
11. Ability to work effectively in a group
12. Willing to express their own opinion in a reasoned way, while also listening to the views of others
13. Ability to challenge constructively and ask questions appropriately

Accountability

14. Ability to exercise sound and independent judgement
15. Willingness to make and stand by collective decisions, including those which may be unpopular
16. Ability to manage difficult and/or challenging situations
17. Ability to maintain confidentiality on confidential and/or sensitive information

Skills and experience

DESIRABLE

SWLLC wishes to see the following knowledge, skills and experience represented on its Board. All Trustees will be expected to meet at least one of these criteria. During a particular recruitment one or more of the following may be identified as priorities, depending on the needs of the Board at the time as identified through a skills audit.

- Senior level strategic management experience within a third, commercial or public-sector organisation.

- Experience of community activism and campaigning
- Recent experience (within the last 5 years) of fundraising for, or in, a third sector organisation.
- Experience at senior level of financial management
- Experience at senior level of strategic human resources or organisational development.
- A professional qualification and significant practitioner experience in an area of relevance to SWLLC such as accountancy, legal aid, project management.
- Knowledge and experience of marketing or public relations in the third sector.
- Experience as a trustee in a similar size or larger organisation, together with implementation of best practice in corporate governance.
- Experience of service provision at a senior level to people recovering from mental ill-health in a health, education or social care setting.
- Experience at a senior level of developing and delivering services to people recovering from mental ill-health which promote inclusion, equal opportunities and diversity.

Code of Conduct for Trustees -Trustee Code of Conduct

Introduction

At SWLLC, the Trustee Board, having regard to our core values and examples of best practice within the sector have created this code to set out a framework in which its trustees and governing body will operate.

We use our values to describe the way we want to be, and how we want to be seen by everyone who encounters us.

We believe in providing **care** for people who come to us. We will **accept** them as individuals and **respect** their beliefs, needs and wishes.

We aim to provide a **happy** environment in which to **encourage** recovery and progression.

Accountability

Everything SWLLC does will be able to stand the test of scrutiny by the public, the media, charity regulators, members, stakeholders, funders, Parliament and the courts.

Integrity and honesty

These will be the hallmarks of all conduct when dealing with colleagues within SWLLC and equally when dealing with individuals and institutions outside it.

Transparency

SWLLC strives to maintain an atmosphere of openness throughout the organisation to promote confidence of the public, stakeholders, staff, charity regulators and Parliament.

Additionally, I agree to the following points:

Law, mission, policies

- I will not break charity law or go against charity regulations in any aspect of my role of trustee.
- I will support the mission and consider myself its guardian.
- I will abide by organisational policies.

Conflicts of interest

- I will always strive to act in the best interests of the organisation.
- I will declare any conflict of interest, or any circumstance that might be viewed by others as a conflict of interest, as soon as it arises.
- I will submit to the judgment of the board and do as it requires regarding potential conflicts of interest.

Person to person

- I will not break charity law, go against charity regulations or act in disregard of organisational policies in my relationships with fellow trustees, staff, volunteers, members, service recipients, contractors or anyone I come into contact with in my role as trustee.
- I will strive to establish respectful, collegial and courteous relationships with all I come into contact with in my role as trustee.

Protecting the organisation's reputation

- I will not speak as a trustee of this organisation to the media or in a public forum without the prior knowledge and approval of the Chief Executive or Chair.
- When prior consent has not been obtained, I will inform the Chair or Chief Executive at once when I have spoken as a trustee of this organisation to the media or in a public forum.
- When I am speaking as a trustee of this organisation, my comments will reflect current organisational policy even when these do not agree with my personal views.
- When speaking as a private citizen I will strive to uphold the reputation of the organisation and those who work in it.
- I will respect organisational, board and individual confidentiality.
- I will take an active interest in the organisation's public image, noting news articles, books, television programmes and the like about the organisation, about similar organisations or about important issues for the organisation.

Personal gain

- I will not personally gain materially or financially from my role as trustee, nor will I permit others to do so as a result of my actions or negligence.
- I will document expenses and seek reimbursement according to procedure.
- I will not accept gifts or hospitality without prior consent of the Chair.
- I will use organisational resources responsibly, when authorised, in accordance with procedure.

In the boardroom

- I will strive to embody the principles of leadership in all my actions and live up to the trust placed in me by (organisation).
- I will abide by board governance procedures and practices.
- I will strive to attend all board meetings, giving apologies ahead of time to the Chair if unable to attend.
- I will study the agenda and other information sent me in good time prior to the meeting and be prepared to debate and vote on agenda items during the meeting.
- I will honour the authority of the Chair and respect his or her role as meeting leader.
- I will engage in debate and voting in meetings according to procedure, maintaining a respectful attitude toward the opinions of others while making my voice heard.
- I will accept a majority board vote on an issue as decisive and final.
- I will maintain confidentiality about what goes on in the boardroom unless authorised by the Chair or board to speak of it.
- I will work to avoid conflict in the boardroom and seek external support to do this when necessary.

Enhancing governance

- I will participate in induction, training and development activities for trustees.
- I will continually seek ways to improve board governance practice.
- I will strive to identify good candidates for trusteeship and appoint new trustees on the basis of merit.

- I will support the Chair in his/her efforts to improve his/her leadership skills.
- I will support the Chief Executive in his/her executive role and, with my fellow board members, seek development opportunities for him/her.

Leaving the board

- I understand that substantial breach of any part of this code may result in my removal from the trustee board.
- Should I resign from the board I will inform the Chair in advance in writing, stating my reasons for resigning. Additionally, I will participate in an exit interview.

This Code of Conduct was adapted from NCVO's publication Best Behaviour: Using trustee codes of conduct to improve governance practice