



# Action in Caerau and Ely Law Firm Partnership Opportunity

## About ACE - Action in Caerau and Ely

ACE - Action in Caerau and Ely is a community based charity owned and run by the residents of Ely, Caerau and surrounding neighbourhoods in Cardiff. ACE was set up to develop and deliver a range of different projects and activities to address disadvantages in all its forms. Staff and local people work together to create and maintain a thriving network of active individuals and community groups.

ACE's key aim is to create 'Vibrant, equal and resilient communities for all, where people find fulfilment in themselves, each other, and the place where they live'. Our vision is of a happy community, one characterised by co-operation, equality and social justice. Our Place: Dusty Forge acts as a base for the wide range of projects, groups and activities run by local volunteers and staff at ACE. From there, we help people to do things they didn't think they could do, to gain confidence, friendship and to find shared and collective solutions to community issues and concerns.

## Local Need

"Nearly half of all households in Ely are living in poverty." (Cardiff Council's South West Neighbourhood Report (2017)). We work closely with our community partners, enabling us to provide tailored and holistic advice and support for people in crisis or who are vulnerable and struggling to manage. We have supported 326 households in 2019/20 through twice-weekly drop in sessions, providing advice on money management, problems with benefits, help with energy costs, support accessing grants for essential household items and many other issues. Using an assets based approach we work with people to help build their skills and confidence to overcome challenges themselves. Currently, support with legal issues is signposted to however by working in partnership with Law Works Cymru, we hope to provide a service that supports individuals holistically from start to finish. Support with employment, housing and family law is highly sought after in the area.

During Covid pandemic, ACE (funded by Macmillan Cancer Care) employed a Macmillan Development Officer to explore a community response to death, dying and bereavement. A real community need for support with legal matters including will writing, lasting power of attorneys and living wills has transpired. Our existing relationship with the local Primary Care Cluster will allow us to have individuals 'socially prescribed' to the services. Our local GPs are particularly excited about this possibility and speak of their frustration at being unable to help people whose legal issues are impacting on their health. This is an exciting opportunity to understand how receiving appropriate, timely and free legal support and advice might have a positive impact on peoples' health and wellbeing.

## ACE Legal Advice Clinic

In order to support people living in our local communities, ACE is looking to establish a legal clinic at Our Place: Dusty Forge. We have noticed a significant need for a service that helps community members access legal support around Employment, Housing and Family law. The need for access to housing support has been highlighted recently through a project that met with a range of families across the different housing sectors. It was apparent that those in privately rented accommodation

were suffering as a result of poor housing conditions. There is a real concern from tenants that if they complain about living conditions they are at risk of losing the tenancy. Through our Information and Advice drop in sessions and our Working Families project we are aware that lots of working families, particularly those in low skilled employment are not treated very well. This has had severe financial implications and we frequently see families we support amassing problematic debt. Often this is as a result of overpayments from the Department of Work and Pensions, Local Authority overpayments and Council Tax Debt where information from employees has not been provided to HMRC. Working families report that they again feel that they are unable to address these issues with their employers or challenge unfair working conditions for fear of losing their jobs. Families in the community also face difficulty in obtaining regular access to their children as a result of difficulties with the resident parent. ACE already works with Families Need Fathers and the service is heavily oversubscribed, a Family Law clinic would help alleviate some of the pressure placed on this service and enable more non-resident parents the opportunity to seek support to maintain relationships with their children. Whilst we signpost into other external services we often find that those in need of help don't always access the help. This is often due to poor mental health, feelings that their problems are just insurmountable or because they find it exhausting having to tell their stories time and time again. The vision is as follows:

- Holistic and tailored free legal advice to those seeking support with employment, family, housing and end of life concerns with support from the designated project officer to assist them throughout the process.
- A dedicated evening of pre-booked appointments with wrap-around and holistic support provided
- A triaging process which allows ACE to ensure that individuals qualify for support
- The opportunity to self-refer or be socially prescribed by a GP
- Clinics run once a month (although there is the potential to expand if needed).

## Law Firm Partnership Opportunity

- Exciting potential to be part of a partnership pilot initiative which will explore the health and wellbeing benefits of receiving legal support
- Exciting potential to be the first legal advice clinic in Wales working in partnership with ACE, Macmillan and the local Cardiff South West Primary Care Cluster.

Volunteers will:

- Have the opportunity to step out of the office setting and gain first hand practical experience of working with people in a community setting offering holistic support
- Develop skills attained through pro bono volunteering include interviewing skills, problem analysis, client relations and working with who otherwise would be able to afford legal support.
- Be supported by ACE staff who will be on hand to manage a waiting room and bookings; provide additional support and signposting to assist clients with wider holistic needs; and provide food and drinks for volunteers and clients.