



# Oasis Pro Bono Partnership Opportunity

## About Oasis Children's Charity

Oasis Children's Charity was founded 26 years ago by Director of Services, Caroline Edwards in response to cuts to Surrey Children's Services which left a vacuum of support for vulnerable families in the local area. More than two decades later, Oasis continues to be a vital asset in the community and has grown to provide both crisis and holistic support to families in need. This includes an Ofsted-registered nursery, outreach services and in-house services such as crisis support, counselling, emotional wellbeing courses, life coaching, emergency food banks and fuel bursaries with the aim of helping families build their confidence, resilience, and independence.

Over recent years, economic and social conditions have worsened for many more families. With the pandemic, further cutbacks in local authority services, the introduction of Universal Credit and the rise in food and energy prices, more and more families have come to or been referred to Oasis. Oasis' holistic approach to assist entire families for as long as they need it means they continue to be a beacon of hope and refuge for those in need.

## Local need

Oasis have noted a significant increase in the number of clients seeking private law family advice since the swinging cuts to Legal Aid under LASPO 2012. These families are unable to afford to pay privately for legal advice and at present this need cannot be met within the local community. Whilst some of the families will qualify for Legal Aid under the Domestic Abuse exemption, many do not and are therefore faced with the prospect of commencing divorce and private Children Act 1989 proceedings as litigants in person.

In April to June 2022, the number of private law family proceedings where neither the applicant nor respondent had legal representation was 39%, increasing by 25 percentage points since January to March 2013, and up 1 percentage point from April to June 2021 ([MOJ, 2022](#)). With more than 1 in 5 people in the UK now living in poverty ([UK Poverty 2023](#), *Joseph Rowntree Foundation*) the number of people seeking free legal advice is likely to rise significantly. In addition, the number of families facing Domestic Abuse has risen significantly in recent times and initial legal advice regarding the necessary applications to seek and how to obtain Legal Aid is required by a growing number of Oasis' clients; in Surrey, there are an estimated 35,400 victims of abuse, with 3,300 children visible to services as living in homes where there is domestic violence. Sadly, these figures are only the tip of the iceberg as we know that less than one in four victims report to the police. Oasis recognise this growing and urgent need for the families they work with and would like to be able to provide a legal clinic to provide initial advice on family law matters.



## Oasis Family Legal Advice Clinic

To assist families in the local community with their family law concerns, Oasis children's charity would like to establish a regular legal advice clinic. The vision for the service is as follows:

- A monthly clinic held on a day to be determined Oasis' offices in Cobham or in a space deemed appropriate in the locality
- Flexibility to allow the volunteers to see the clients via video-call where the client will be present at the Oasis offices to ensure smooth running of the technology
- A drop-in model, without the need to triage clients first
- Limited to offering initial advice on family law matters and assistance with form-filling
- 20-30 minute appointments per client.

## Pro bono partnership opportunity

Oasis is extremely keen to meet the growing need for initial family law legal advice amongst the families they support in the local community. The firm offering the pro-bono services will gain practical experience advising vulnerable clients in the community and an insight into the services offered by Oasis who may be able to support some of their existing clients. Working in a legal advice clinic will also provide volunteer solicitors and supervised trainees the opportunity to develop skills such as interviewing, problem-solving, thinking on their feet and working with vulnerable clients which may not be ordinarily available within their fee-earning practice.

## Interested?

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