**Employee Resource Group (ERG) Impact Report 2024-2025**

**Introduction**

Employee Resource Groups (ERGS) are staff networks that allow colleagues to discuss different lived experiences and provide insight into unseen barriers. They also support Forward to devise practical, creative and workable solutions to enable everyone to thrive and be their authentic selves. The Forward Trust have five ERGs, Race Forward, Embrace, ForWomen, Proud, and Lived Experience in Action.

Broadly speaking, the goals of the ERGs are to:

* Enable colleagues to feel that they are a part of and have a vital role to play in Forward
* Discuss issues affecting its members with key decision makers
* Assist in formulating new and revising existing policies and procedures, where invited to do so
* Support Forward in developing a positive workplace environment

This report explores the impact of Forward’s ERGs in the 2024-2025 period.

**Overall**

At the end of 2024-2025, the total number of ERG members was 100. This meets our goal of 100 total members. The EDI team are engaging in ongoing efforts to advertise the ERGs to all staff, including a section of the Welcome to Forward Trust session being dedicated to ERGs, and regular discussion with EDI Prison Leads. Encouraging allies to join and contribute to ERGs will be a goal of 2025-26.

Marking awareness days and celebrating key dates in the EDI calendar through hosting events formed a big part of ERG activity in 2024-2025. The total number of attendees across ERG hosted events was approximately 479. Formal feedback was collected post-online event via an anonymous survey from quarter two onwards. The average score was 4.8/5. Details of qualitative responses to this survey are discussed throughout this report.

Our ERGs have also been involved in a number of non-event based initiatives. For example, supporting policy development, being involved in decision making for various projects and delivering training to our staff group. Again, details of these are outlined below.

**Members feedback**

At the end of the 2024-25 period, a survey was sent to ERG members to gather feedback on their experiences. A total of 12 responses were received. 58% of respondents were from the Substance Misuse directorate, 17% were from Fundraising and Comms. 8% of respondents were from Employment, Research and Business Development, and Criminal Justice directorates respectively. Most respondents (75%) have direct lived experience of the identity addressed by their ERG. 17% of respondents have indirect lived experience (i.e. friend, family member), and 8% identified as allies. We aim to grow engagement from allies in 2025-26. Over half (55%) of respondents heard about the ERG from internal communications. 27% heard about the ERG via a colleague, 18% from the Welcome to Forward Trust sessions, and 9% from other sources.

We asked respondents to rate five statements on a scale of ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’. More than half (58%) of respondents strongly agreed that they feel a sense of community within their ERG. A further 8% slightly agreed with this statement. 75% of respondents strongly agreed and 17% slightly agreed that the ERGs are a good source of support, advice and guidance. There was an even split (25%) of respondents who strongly agreed, slightly agreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, and slightly disagreed that they feel able to impact decision making, policies, and processes in their role as an ERG member. This may be an area to focus on developing in 2025-26. More than half (58%) of respondents strongly agreed that being part of an ERG gives them opportunities for personal development. 42% strongly agreed and 33% slightly agreed that they feel more connected to the wider organisation through their ERG.

We asked respondents what they have most valued about being part of an ERG via a multiple choice question. The most commonly selected response (67%) was involvement in planning and running events, followed by 58% of respondents valuing a sense of community. The third most selected response (50%) was valuing connectedness to the wider organisation.

In terms of our members’ interest in taking on an ERG leadership role in the future, 45% of respondents would be interested. 36% of respondents may be interested in future. Succession planning and empowering members to take on more responsibility within the ERG will be a focus in 2025-26.

We also asked respondents for suggested improvements to the ERG. Responses regarding the remote nature of the organisation included one person sharing that they would like to meet people from the ERG in a social context, and another suggesting more interdepartmental working. Responses also included consistency in receiving communications from the ERG.

**Race Forward**

Race Forward held two events in 2024-25. One was an online webinar to mark South and East Asian Heritage Month, with guest speaker Nav, founder of No More Pretending. The other was an in person celebration for Black History Month. Feedback provided included key take aways such as that “peoples stories can be so powerful but full of learning too”. One person acknowledged the importance of “learning about diverse ways to encourage access into treatment from diverse communities”. Others stated that they felt very inspired by the event, and that they would like to be part of some change.

In terms of non-event based work, Race Forward collaborated with the EDI team on internal communications to mark Race Equality Week.

**Embrace**

Embrace hosted two online webinars in 2024-25: PTSD with Dr Karen Pitcher, and a talk from 3 Dad’s Walking to mark World Suicide Prevention Day. Feedback from Embrace’s events was that “connection is incredible” and one person noted the “importance of regular mental health check ins”. Key takeaways included that “connection is incredible”, “it’s okay to talk”, and “hope”.

In collaboration with the EDI team, Embrace hosted a program of online activities for Mental Health Awareness Week. This included a sound bath, bodyweight HIIT class, a colouring coffee break, body scan meditation, laughter yoga, and a sing-along. Embrace have continued to host monthly colouring coffee breaks where colleagues can take a break from the busy working day, engage in something creative, and chat.

Embrace have also led on a number of non-event based initiatives in 2024-25. To celebrate Happiness at Work Week, Embrace shared a collage of pet photos submitted by staff to honour the friends who regularly make appearances in team meetings. 48 submissions were received. Embrace also set up an e-card to highlight the times colleagues felt happy at work with Forward, and encouraged colleagues to send an e-card to show gratitude to their co-workers. To mark World Mental Health day, Embrace used internal communications to highlight the support Forward offers to staff regarding mental wellbeing.

One of the Embrace leads facilitated Neurodiversity training for the Dependency and Recovery team. This awareness session looked at common neurodiverse conditions, how it presents in the workplace and their strengths, and what support is available from Forward Trust. Staff fed back that this was the best part of their away day, and that it encouraged staff to disclose their neurodiversity and discuss it with each other.

**ForWomen**

ForWomen hosted three online events in 2024-25. Two of these were webinars: Pre-Menstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD) with guest speakers from the PMDD Collective and one to mark Breast Cancer Awareness month with a guest speaker from Coppa Feel. The third event was an online panel discussion to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls. Feedback was that the events “prompted eye opening discussions”, “highlighted the importance of checking your breasts regularly”, and that “domestic violence is extremely prevalent and education around it is very important”. Key takeaways included “to not be afraid to ask”, and that violence against women and girls happens a lot more than they were aware.

For International Women’s Day, ForWomen coordinated a Forward Trust wide celebration of women, inviting staff to nominate woman/women who inspire them. A total of 75 nominations were received, with a mixed gender group of nominators. They also shared a toolkit to help services run events to mark International Women’s Day. Some feedback included: “I think the initiative by the ForWomen ERG was great and the wider discussions this has created are immeasurable. I know within our team that this created a great chat and those that didn’t receive recognition also highlighting how proud they were to be part of a team of inspirational women at Forward so there is a definite ripple effect.” and “I would also like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank Abbie and Ellie for all your hard work and dedication. Your commitment to supporting women in the workplace, fostering kindness, and celebrating the qualities that make women so valuable is truly inspiring. The impact you’ve had is immeasurable.”

To further raise awareness of PMDD and recovery, ForWomen shared [a lived experience blog](https://www.drinkanddrugsnews.com/a-lonely-battle-premenstrual-dysphoric-disorder-pmdd/) which was published externally in Drink and Drug News. This article was also shared externally by Kent, Surrey, and Sussex probation services, and was received well internally. Feedback was that it sparked conversations about intervention development specifically for women service users.

**Proud**

Proud hosted three online events: Why We Still Need Pride (an online discussion on why Pride is still important in 2024), Allyship Beyond Pride webinar with guest speaker Yvonne Okiyo, and a talk from TransSober, a peer support service for transgender people experiencing substance use problems. Key takeaways from these events included “never be afraid to ask questions and learn new things”, “to keep learning, be confident to challenge unacceptable behaviour”, and to “treat everyone with love and respect”. Attendees reported learning that allyship is constant, about the barriers to accessing services that impact trans/non-binary individuals, and improvements they can make to ensure their services are accessible for this community.

Proud have also utilised all-staff emails to mark key awareness days and educate staff around Pride and the LGBTQ+ community. These emails have included useful resources, suggestions of how to mark key dates, and testimonials from transgender people in prison. Email content was presented according to level of time commitment needed to engage, and feedback was that this was especially well received and showed understanding of the limited time capacity of staff.

**Lived Experience in Action**

Lived Experience in Action have hosted two online panel discussion events, titled Life After Offending, and Beyond the Record: Mental Health and Employment. The latter included guest speaker Dr Nicola Colett. Feedback was that these events offered “great insight into the challenges faced by prison leavers” and that “this can be such an isolating topic, and it made me realise that we're not alone.”. Staff said that it was “great to talk about the impact of offending on children/families of those who have been to prison - not something spoken about enough.”. Key takeaways included:

* “A deeper understand on the type and extent of limitation to 'normal life' a criminal record can have, even many years on.”
* “Differences in men and women's experiences, and the value and impact of lived experience staff!”
* “I learned about how complex experiences of disclosure are even when there is no legal requirement to disclose (spent conviction).”

Lived Experience in Action have been working with HR to revise the wording of Forward’s volunteer and recruitment policies. Updates to the volunteer policy aim to increase opportunities for meaningful engagement post-release. The initial months post release have been identified as a challenging time, where meaningful engagement is key. Updates to the recruitment policy aim to make the risk assessment process clearer. Changes will emphasise that decisions will be made on a case by case basis. This work is ongoing, but is expected to further break down barriers for people with lived experience of the criminal justice system to access employment with Forward.

**Joint initiatives**

This year, the ERGs have collaborated on a number of projects which has supported Forward to be inclusive of intersectional identities. ForWomen and Embrace co-hosted an online event for Maternal Mental Health, involving an internal speaker. Proud and ForWomen collaborated on internal communications to mark Breast Cancer Awareness Month, highlighting the ways in which breast cancer can affect people of all genders.

The ERGs have also offered consultation on central EDI projects. Proud and Embrace members offered insights into the update of self-ID options on Cascade, ensuring that staff are able to see themselves represented in workforce profile data. Proud and ForWomen have been involved in an ongoing project around the inclusion of transgender people in Forward Trusts services. This ensures that marginalised voices are heard when making decisions that will impact these groups.

We aim to further utilise opportunities for intersectional working between ERGs in 2025-26.