

# Employee Resource Group (ERG) Impact Report 2025-2026

## Introduction

As part of our commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), the Forward Trust actively promotes the existence of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) to enhance workplace inclusion. Our ERGs provide a unique space for colleagues to discuss different lived experiences, provide mutual support and insight into unseen barriers. The Forward Trust has five ERGs, Race Forward, Embrace, ForWomen, Proud, and Lived Experience in Action. Over the past year, our ERGs have been instrumental in disseminating resources, organising awareness events, and helping the organisation to reflect on and improve its policies and practices for greater inclusivity.

This report explores the impact of Forward's ERGs in 2025-2026.

## A Year at a Glance

The EDI team continued to engage in ongoing efforts to promote the ERGs to all staff, and opened ERGs to volunteers in 2025. Encouraging more allies to join and contribute to our ERGs was a goal in 2025-26.

Marking awareness days and celebrating key EDI dates through hosting events and sharing comms continued to form a big part of ERG activity in 2025-2026.

We welcomed three new leaders to our ERG Leads group, supported by improved succession planning and ERG Leader training. One of our previous leaders reflected on his time in post as "both rewarding and insightful, and it has significantly contributed to the development of my leadership skills".

## Across 5 ERGs:

- 115 members
- 9 events
- 437 attendees (250 unique attendees)
- 20 ERG meetings (based on 1x per ERG per quarter)
- Average satisfaction score of 4.7/5 for online events
- 9 communications (via email; information/education/awareness raising)
- Hosted our first ERG Members Day

Our ERGs have also been involved in several other initiatives, working as a critical friend to the EDI team and wider organisation. They have supported policy development, contributed to decision-making for various organisational projects and delivered training to staff. Further details of these are outlined below.

## Members feedback

At the end of the 2025-26 period, a survey was sent to ERG members to gather feedback on their experiences. This survey received 20 responses.

### Who are our members?

70% direct lived experience, 15% indirect lived experience, 15% allies. This shows an increase in number of allies involved in our ERGs as compared to last year (8%).

### How did our members hear about the ERG?

40% internal comms, 25% colleague, 25% welcome to FT training, 5% town hall, and 5% other. This shows an increase in ERG members hearing about us from the Welcome to FT training as compared to last year.

### How do our members feel about ERGs?

We asked respondents to rate five statements on a scale of 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'.

- **Sense of community:** 90% of respondents agree they feel a sense of community within their ERG, up from 64% last year.
- **Connection to the wider organisation:** 85% feel more connected through their ERG, an increase from 75% in the previous year.
- **Personal development:** 85% agree that ERGs offer opportunities for personal growth, up significantly from 58% last year.
- **Impact on decision-making:** 65% feel able to influence decisions, policies, and processes through their ERG, up from 50%—an area we specifically aimed to improve this year.
- **Support and guidance:** 90% see ERGs as a valuable source of support, advice, and guidance, slightly lower than last year's 92%

**Overall:** The data show clear improvements across most areas, particularly in personal development, sense of community, and organisational connection. The slight dip in perceived support is the only area showing a minor reduction, highlighting an opportunity for continued focus.

We asked respondents what they have most valued about being part of an ERG via a multiple choice question. The most commonly selected response (75%) was 'a sense of community', followed by 'connectedness to the wider organisation (70%)'. The third most selected response (55%) was 'receiving advice and guidance'.

## What next?

In terms of our members' interest in taking on an ERG leadership role in the future, 20% of respondents would be interested, with 55% maybe interested. Succession planning and empowering members to take on more responsibility within the ERG was a focus in 2024-25. We have seen changes to leadership across three of the five ERGs this year and developed an in-house ERG Leader training to support the transition into leadership. Robust succession planning will remain a goal for 2026-27.

We also asked respondents for suggested improvements to the ERGs. Responses included more involvement from frontline staff, and making ERGs feel less of a 'bolt on'. Respondents broadly encouraged the continued development of ERGs, including emphasis on promotion and incorporation of ERGs within existing Forward processes.

Finally, we provided a space for respondents to share any other feedback they would like. Responses include:

- “Just to say that the UK is increasingly a scary place for LGBTQIA+ plus people, especially for those of us who are part of the T, and it means a great deal to me to work for an organisation which explicitly and loudly supports LGBTQIA+ staff members and clients, not just in words, and not just in Pride Month, but through meaningful, observable actions 365 Days a year.”
- “Just that it's lovely to work for an employer who creates this space. Being trans in the UK in 2026 can be pretty scary, and it's great to work for an employer who actually has our backs.”
- “The Proud ERG are a lovely bunch of people from different walks of life, I feel comfortable chatting with them and we laugh a lot.”

## Race Forward

**Mission:** A safe space for staff of different racial and cultural backgrounds to voice concerns, champion achievements and share lived experience of Black and Minority Ethnic people within the organisation.

### Goals for 2025-26:

- Establish bi-monthly staff group meetings
- Review internal policies to ensure representation of different racial and cultural groups and their needs
- Contribute to all staff awareness of racial and cultural groups needs through information/resources and events – we plan to have 3 awareness events during the year

- We will be supporting and creating awareness of cultural events such as black history month, South Asian Heritage Month and acknowledging different religious dates and events, events are being planned

**Chairs:** Stephen Anderson and Bijay Limbu

**Executive Sponsor:** Asi Panditharatna

**Key achievements in 2025-26:**

- Online webinar titled 'A Celebration of African and Caribbean Food' to mark Black History Month.
- Launched an initiative to collate recipes from across cultures, celebrating food that is traditional for Forward staff.
- Online webinar titled 'Brown Girl in a Bottle' to mark South Asian Heritage Month, which focused on a lived experience perspective of Aunee.
- Online webinar titled 'Talk by Regina Williams', author of Blessed Struggles, who shared her journey from sleeping on a mud floor in rural Kenya to walking the halls of power in Britain.
- Supported Race Equality Week 'my name is' campaign.
- Feedback included:
  - "Hearing Aunee's honest and powerful story highlights the continued need for safe, inclusive spaces and open dialogue between cultures - my takeaway is to learn how to challenge cultural taboos"
  - "Inspiration, a truly remarkable woman"
  - "Food brings everyone together despite our backgrounds"
  - "That there are so many different types of food and traditions I did not know anything about!"

**Embrace**

**Mission:** Supporting our employees with disability, mental health and neurodiversity in the workplace to achieve their full potential and encouraging colleagues to understand the needs of disabled people within the community

**Goals for 2025-26:**

- Update the sickness policy to increase flexibility around chronic illnesses, physical and non-visible disabilities and neurodiversity issues (HR leading).
- Organise quarterly events on disability inclusion, inviting senior leadership and management to share any actionable steps they have taken to help team members with disabilities achieve their objectives/discuss relevant strategies.

- Organise quarterly events on disability inclusion to promote Forward as a learning organisation that takes disability seriously.
- Provide useful information around disabilities to the organisation via email and bulletin.
- Organise lunch and learns during awareness months/weeks, inviting guest speakers to share their experiences/for staff to raise their concerns.
- Featuring on the bulletin and newsletters as a way to train the organisation without sitting in a training session.

**Chairs:** Emma Warren and Harry Gilson

**Executive Sponsor:** Caroline Scott

**Key achievements in 2025-26:**

- Online webinar titled ‘Autism in a Neurotypical Workplace’ to mark Autism Awareness Month.
- Online joint webinar with ForWomen titled ‘When Pain is Dismissed: The Untold Story of Women's Health Inequality’ for Women’s Health Month, which focused on the gender pain gap.
- Shared information and resources to all staff to mark National Sign Language Awareness Day.
- Supported development of Neurodiversity Hub.
- Feedback included:
  - “That there are some really easy ways to make a huge positive impact on our autistic colleagues”
  - “Very interesting and validating”

**ForWomen**

**Mission:** To provide a voice for those who identify as women at Forward Trust. We want to encourage colleagues of all genders to understand the needs of women within our workforce and our service user community, so that Forward’s vision, values and objectives are fulfilled. ForWomen also stand to encourage all colleagues within Forward to celebrate diversity, including celebrating intersectional representations of *womanhood*.

**Goals for 2025-26:**

ForWomen aim to conduct an event every quarter (4 within the year) to mark, acknowledge and raise awareness of women’s specific issues. These will take different formats, with a mix of in-person and online events, information and resource sharing. In conducting regular events, we intend to generate momentum,

sparkling outspoken discussions about the experience of women and womanhood at Forward, including the barriers faced by women and the possibility to better working conditions. These discussions will be held at bi-monthly meetings of interested members, led by ERG leaders.

**Chairs:** Abbie MacGregor and Ellie Watson

**Executive Sponsor:** Nina Royle

**Key achievements in 2025-26:**

- Online joint webinar with ForWomen titled ‘When Pain is Dismissed: The Untold Story of Women's Health Inequality’ for Women’s Health Month, which focused on the gender pain gap.
- Shared staff experiences of medical discrimination, resources on various women’s health conditions, and shared two long-form lived experience pieces on PMDD and Endometriosis for Women’s Health Month.
- Menopause support group started, with members reporting that they feel the group is a safe, supportive space in which they can share details of their experience.
- Online joint webinar with Lived Experience in Action titled ‘Layers of Stigma: Workplace Challenges Faced by Women with Offending Histories’.
- Feedback included:
  - “I've surprised myself and found myself having a little cry due to the reassurance it has provided me.”
  - “This has been very informative in order for us to support clients in our service. It’s also hit very close to home with myself”

## **Proud**

**Mission:** The PROUD ERG aims to support LGBTQ+ colleagues in feeling a sense of belonging at Forward Trust. The group acknowledges the disproportionate number of people within the LGBTQ+ community who face addiction, and we hope to provide a space where Forward colleagues can learn and support one another and improve the experience of our LGBTQ+ service users.

**Goals for 2025-26:**

1. Increase employee understanding of aspects of the LGBTQ+ experience in order to empower everyone to be inclusive.
  - a. Organise series of 4-6 bitesize workshops on the ‘essentials’ of LGBTQ+ topics to support engagement through a variety of learning styles.
2. Build an active community for Proud members.

- a. Improve engagement with 'Proud members space' teams channel by posting regularly and facilitating its use as a discussion space.
  - b. Explore other online spaces/forums to build community, with collaboration from members.
3. Highlight awareness days relevant to the LGBTQ+ experience to facilitate regular learning, and ensure different identities are represented within the organisation.
  - a. Mark 4 awareness days across the year (1x per quarter), as chosen by the Proud members and in collaboration with the Communications team.
4. Support the development of an organisational policy that promotes the inclusion of transgender and gender non-conforming (GNC) people in Forward's single sex spaces.

**Chairs:** Rosie Watson and Ted Burr

**Executive Sponsor:** Helen Greenard

**Key achievements in 2025-26:**

- Online webinar titled 'Proud to be an Ally' to mark Pride month, with a focus on what Forward staff can do to be an ally to the LGBTQ+ community.
- Online webinar titled 'Exploring Identity: A Look at the Gender Spectrum' to mark Transgender Awareness Month, with a focus of myth-busting, sharing personal experiences of people with different gender identities, and highlighting the importance of having these conversations.
- Published blog on allyship, authored by our Executive Sponsor.
- Published montage video on what allyship means to our staff and how they're being active allies.
- Launched series of bitesize webinars on the essentials of LGBTQ+ topics.
- Carried out ET & SMT survey to explore understanding of some basic LGBTQ+ topics at this level, given the lack of representation.
- Launched regular internal 'Proud coffee breaks' to grow community within our membership.
- Feedback included:
  - "It's encouraging to witness an organisation supporting LGBTQ+ community"
  - "Allyship requires an intentional commitment and courage to stand outside the crowd"
  - "Learned the reason why sharing pronouns is important"

**Lived Experience in Action**

**Mission:** A safe space for staff who have experience of the Criminal Justice System (CJS) to voice concerns, champion achievements and share their lived experiences with others within the organization.

**Goals for 2025-26:**

- To increase understanding of the impact of criminal justice experience – helping our organisation become more inclusive, informed, and supportive for staff and volunteers with lived experience.
- Maintain and promote a safe environment and support network for staff and volunteers around lived experience of the CJS.
- To provide advice and guidance to lived experience staff, for example on questions over disclosure of lived experience etc.
- Wider promotion of ERG and support and explore ways to further embed the Lived Experience ERG in Forward culture.
- Extend ERG to Forward volunteers.
- To become an advocate for challenging barriers to employment.

**Chairs:** William Garnier and Daniel White, with Tevfick Souleiman as Strategy Lead

**Executive Sponsor:** Julie Muir

**Key achievements in 2025-26:**

- Online joint webinar with Lived Experience in Action titled ‘Layers of Stigma: Workplace Challenges Faced by Women with Offending Histories’.
- Began developing a peer led guidance document for staff with lived experience of the criminal justice system.
- Online webinar titled ‘Working Together on Vetting: A Conversation with the HMPPS Lived Experience Vetting Team’, which focused on updating staff on recent developments in HMPPS vetting policy and providing practical guidance for applicants with lived experience of the criminal justice system.
- Feedback included:
  - “Very insightful and informative session”
  - “It really helped me to understand the process better”

**Joint initiatives**

This year, the ERGs have collaborated on several projects which has supported Forward to be inclusive of intersectional identities. ForWomen and Lived Experience in Action co-hosted an online event to explore layers of stigma experienced by women involved with the criminal justice system. Feedback was that the event was “really interesting and thought provoking” and that a key takeaway was around intersectionality and the

impact that it has. Embrace and ForWomen co-hosted an online event exploring the gender pay gap, with one attendee noting that they learned “how best to advocate for [themselves] in medical settings”.

The ERGs have also served as a critical friend on central EDI projects. Continued from 2024-25, Proud and ForWomen have been involved in our project around the inclusion of transgender people in Forward Trust’s services. Proud and Embrace have continued to support our self-ID campaign.

This year, the Lived Experience ERG was a driving and supporting force in connecting the Forward Reconnect team to the Lived Experience Charter. Our ERG Leads also played a key role in proofreading new website content through an inclusive and accessible lens.

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

### **ERG Members Day**

Finally, we hosted our ERG Members Day to celebrate our ERG members, recognise their work, and facilitate connection across ERGs. The theme for the day was intersectionality, embedded with a guest speaker and a workshop. Awards were presented by the dynamic duo Mike Trace (CEO) and Tony Adams (Chair of Trustees):

- Stephen Anderson was awarded ‘In the Deep End’ for “engaging with tough issues diplomatically, showing emotional intelligence, inclusivity, and innovation”
- Ted Burr was awarded ‘Most Valued Member’ for “consistently bringing a positive attitude, contributing thoughtfully, and readily taking on additional responsibilities. Ted focuses on centring the voices of different identities within the LGBTQ+ community”
- Tefick Souleiman was awarded ‘Best Collaborator’ for “being a true team player, empowering several members and coaching them to grow within the group”
- Abbie MacGregor was awarded the ‘ERG Leader Award’ for “being an exemplary ERG lead at Forward with a strong focus on raising awareness and improving support for women’s health. Abbie leads the initiative in a thoughtful and inclusive way, actively creating opportunities for members to shape the group and take on additional responsibilities”

## **Conclusion**

Looking ahead to 2026–27, our ERGs will focus on strengthening collaboration, celebrating diversity, and embedding their influence across Forward to ensure they continue to make a meaningful impact. This includes:

- Promoting more intersectional working across ERGs to strengthen collaboration and shared learning.
- Hosting a wider EDI celebration day for ERG members, EDI Champions, and allies to recognise contributions and foster community.
- Growing membership and enhancing engagement by thinking creatively about how we keep members involved and recruit new ones.
- Further embedding ERGs within Forward’s processes and moving beyond an event-focused approach to broaden the ways ERGs can influence our organisational culture.