



Emma Johnson, Paralegal, Family department

Emma is a Paralegal working in our family law department. She mainly assists clients with public and private children matters and issues of domestic violence.

Our 'cuppa with' series is an informal chat with one of our team to give a deeper understanding into their area of law and share some little-known legal facts!

1. Can you tell us a bit about your route to coming to David Gray?

I graduated from Northumbria University in 2019 after studying the MLaw (Exempting) degree course. This is an integrated Masters' degree which incorporated the Legal Practice Course. After I graduated, I spent some time in London working as a Paralegal and covered private family and commercial proceedings. This was a great experience and gave me an opportunity to experience working and living in a bigger city. During COVID, I relocated back to Newcastle as I missed living in the city and had a good network of friends still based here. Prior to joining David Gray, I worked at a couple of firms in Newcastle which allowed me to gain experience in different areas of law. I applied to David Gray as I wanted to get back into working in family law and the firm has both a fantastic reputation in the Newcastle area and provides good opportunity for juniors to progress in their career.

2. What are your career aspirations?

I have gained a lot of experience as a Paralegal and now feel that I am in a good position to progress my career. I hope to obtain a training contract at David Gray in the near future and have the opportunity to experience other areas offered by the firm whilst completing my qualifying seats. At this stage of my career, I enjoy Family law and hope to qualify in this area in the future.

3. What is the best part of your job?

Personally, I enjoy how 'client facing' and varied the role is. Although I gain a lot of experience whilst completing work at my desk, my day-to-day job isn't entirely desk based. I have the opportunity to attend court hearings and PLO meetings with the Local Authority away from the office, which is invaluable to my progression and career development.

4. And the worst part of your job?

With this area of law, sadly we often become involved at a difficult time in a client's life. Some cases can be very eye opening and it does make you appreciate your own upbringing.

It is difficult to hear about how much a person is struggling and it is a really important element of the job to be able to listen and empathise with what a client is going through.

5. What does a typical day entail?

On a day to day basis, I assist Solicitors, Beth and Sukhi, with the general running of their caseloads. Although a lot of my role is desk based, I do have the opportunity to spend time at Court clerking hearings and attending PLO meetings at the Local Authority. I enjoy the role as it provides variety to my working day and means that I have the opportunity to work outside of the office environment.

We have an injunction rota within the family department which we all take it in turns to cover. This is used for any emergency injunctions that may need to be dealt with urgently and ensures that there is always someone available to assist. I regularly cover the injunction rota, speaking to victims of domestic abuse to consider whether we are able to assist them in any way, whether that would be to make an application for a Non-Molestation Order or to prepare a warning letter to the perpetrator.

I have now started to pick up client appointments of my own and I am available to assist anyone who is looking to legally change their name and obtain a Change of Name deed.

I always try to try to get out of the office at lunchtime for some fresh air and some time away from my desk. I find this really helps to clear my head and prepares me for any work I have to complete during the afternoon.

6. What is it like working at David Gray?

I had an extremely warm welcome to David Gray and was impressed with the formal induction process. On my first day, I was given a tour of the office and introduced to everyone in the different departments. Shortly after my start date, the firm had arranged a weekend trip to Centre Parcs for us all and this was a great way for me to meet people from other departments, who I don't necessarily see on a day to day basis. This trip really helped me settle into the firm well. The firm has a lot of junior members of staff who are at a similar stage as me, in terms of life and career, so it was really easy to make friends and we are all very supportive of each other.

There are lots of opportunities to socialise at the firm, whether that is at the firm's annual summer and Christmas parties or simply at the Mile Castle on a Friday after work! There are also a lot of keen runners at David Gray and a small group of us attend the local park runs on a Saturday morning.

In terms of career progression, I have good support from my supervisors and other senior member of the department. There is opportunity to have additional training should we feel that we need it and there is always someone available to answer any questions or provide support when I am having any difficulties with a case. I feel that I have learnt a lot in such a short space of time at David Gray and this is most definitely from having the opportunity to learn from my peers and benefit from their expertise.

The firm offers a mentoring scheme which allows you to be mentored by someone in the firm who is at a more senior level to you in terms of experience.

7. What question(s) do you most often get asked about your job?

Generally, people will ask what the role of a Paralegal is in a law firm. It is quite a tricky one to answer, especially if the person asking has minimal or no legal knowledge, as the work I do can differ day to day.

Being family law specific, I often get asked if I find the job quite emotionally challenging. The simple answer is yes, we wouldn't be human if we didn't find the issues emotional in some way. A lot of the time, this area involves highly vulnerable people going through times of extreme difficulty and it is rewarding to be able to support them to navigate through the issues.

8. Tell us some little-known facts about this area of law...

In order to make a private law application to Court, for example for a Child Arrangements Order, Specific Issue Order or Prohibited Steps Order, there is a general rule that the parties must attend a Mediation Information and Assessment Meeting (MIAM) to consider whether the matter can be settled out of court. There are, of course, exemptions to this rule which can be considered in special circumstances.

If you would like to speak with Emma or one of our team, give us a call on 0191 232 9547 or visit www.davidgray.co.uk