



MINDFUL EMPLOYER™

Local Employer Networks

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LOCAL EMPLOYER NETWORKS

Right from the outset, MINDFUL EMPLOYER™ has been an initiative for employers. One of the ways this has been tangibly demonstrated is the bringing together of individuals from different types of businesses and organisations, small, medium and large, public, private and voluntary sector and from the range of roles and specialisms – business directors and owners, HR and occupational health specialists, line managers etc. This is enabled through a variety of means including telephone, e-mail and personal contacts, the online Discussion Forum at www.mindfulemployer.net and a number of Local Employer Networks. Bringing together such a variety of people has been key to the success of MINDFUL EMPLOYER and produced a very creative environment in which to work.

In many respects, local employers like local contacts and MINDFUL EMPLOYER is keen to work with local organisations in enabling Local Employer Networks – occasional and informal meetings aimed at bringing together people with an interest and concern for staff who experience mental ill health.

This document outlines some key points to consider when setting up and running a Local Employer Network.

MINDFUL EMPLOYER™

MINDFUL EMPLOYER is a Trade Mark of Devon Partnership NHS Trust and as such there are restrictions on the use of the name. However, local organisations who would like to run a local employer network with us will be able to use it at no cost and subject to prior agreement with ourselves.

MINDFUL EMPLOYER is focussed on mental health. The term MINDFUL EMPLOYER should not be used in direct relation to non-mental health issues nor used in relation to issues not directly about supporting employers.

Employers set the agenda

This is probably the most important aspect of the networks and reflects a key principle of MINDFUL EMPLOYER – by employers, for employers.

- What do the employers who attend want to discuss?
- What issues do they face?
- What's important to them?

Attracting the right audience

Put simply: it's a Local Employer Network not a Local Employment Network. The networks are for employers – e.g. HR, OH, business directors and owners etc – the people who recruit and manage staff and not so much employment services or health professionals (while the latter are welcome and clearly may have services to offer the employers attending, the networks are not primarily for them). The number of people attending is not crucial – just 3 or 4 employers coming to the first meeting is not a bad thing: they will know people and word will spread.

Working with local organisations

As stated above, local employers like local contacts and MINDFUL EMPLOYER is keen to work with local organisations in enabling Local Employer Networks. The role of the local organisation is primarily to act as a local point of contact, to let local employers know about the network meetings and to coordinate venue arrangements.

We will be able to provide support in planning the meetings, offer some contacts, help devise invitation letters, give presentations and attend meetings for as long as seems appropriate. We will also publicise the dates of meetings.

Venue

All that's needed is a room and cups of tea! Employers may be more likely to come to a meeting hosted at another employer's premises. It's also good to share the hosting and vary the venue from meeting to meeting. (Some networks do meet over a lunchtime which can have a cost implication

about who provides lunch: that is something to be addressed locally. Experience suggests that host employers are willing to express their support for the network in this tangible way!)

Costs

By encouraging different people to offer venues and refreshments and through the use of e-mail, costs can be kept to a minimum. Any guest speakers (e.g. if the employers coming want a talk on a particular topic) should be invited to come on a goodwill basis. It does take some time of course to send out invitations and write up notes afterwards – although we are happy to help with that, particularly in the early stages – but running a network should not be a particularly time-consuming matter. We would suggest that each meeting requires a total of about 3-4 hours administration plus time for the meeting itself.

Duration & Frequency

Most of the current networks meet for 1½-2 hours, every 3-4 months. It is important to meet as often as those who come wish to do so.

The first meeting

We would suggest a couple of 'presentations' – introducing yourself as the local organisation, an introduction to MINDFUL EMPLOYER (we are happy to come to do this) and perhaps a brief overview of mental health & the workplace. But key to this first meeting is to discuss the issues of importance to the employers who come – setting the agenda for the next meetings

Examples of topics

The agenda is to be set by those coming but topics discussed at current networks have included drug & alcohol issues in workplace; managing sickness absence; disability equality duty; depression; stress management; Access to Work; sharing policies; bullying at work.

Set date for next meeting

This is good to do at or asap after a meeting – to get it in people's diaries and to demonstrate an ongoing commitment to keep the network going.

Notes of meetings

These should not be formal 'minutes' but simply a summary for those present and for those who could not attend. They should also carry date and time (and venue if known) of the next meeting.

Keeping in touch

It is important to keep the network in people's minds – two ways of doing this are to:

- Keep an e-mail list of those who are in contact with, those who come and those who don't.
- Forward on the monthly M.E. updates sent out by Richard Frost & Lynn Aggett.

Remember, you are not alone...

We are more than happy to help with any aspect of setting up and running a Local Employer Network – please do contact us on 01392 208833 or info@mindfulemployer.net