# **Self-Care Forum Self Care Innovations Award 2022**

# **Award Application Form and Eligibility**

***The Self Care Forum is inviting applications of good practice and innovations in self care, personalised care, and social prescribing that have made a difference to individuals, groups, or organisations.***

**Who can apply?**

This invitation is open to everyone, whether you are an individual, a community champion, an employer, GP practice, Local Authority, school, college, business, or services organisation (public, private, or charitable). For a guide, see examples table below.

**£500 bursary**

The winner will receive a £500 bursary to spend on a self care related initiative and the top entries will be included on the Self Care Forum website to share best self care practice and excellence. The winners will be announced during the UK’s National Self Care Week (12 – 18 November) as part of its launch and promotional activity.

Closing date for admissions: **31st July 2022.**

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| Examples of possible initiatives | If specific health-related conditions were targeted, they might include |
| * 2021’s Self Care Week activities * Coronavirus related self care * Signposting to services * Protecting mental health and wellbeing * Promoting self care to the shielded population * Self care for the elderly or other specific groups * Self care introduced by employers * Local authority population or community initiatives * Pharmacy initiatives * GP initiatives * Self care education by schools, universities, or community groups such as Scouts, Guides etc * Empowering vulnerable groups | * Long-term conditions * Obesity * Diabetes * General health * Nutrition * Exercise * Mental Health * Self-treatable conditions/minor illness |

## Please use the form below to tell us about your self care initiative.

If you are typing directly into the form, do not worry if the box extends beyond the page – it will continue onto the next one.

## Title and contact details.

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| Warrington Borough Council Employee Support (Joanna Cottrell 07749618625) |
| **Warrington Borough Council** (Warrington Cheshire) HR Employee Support and HR Wellbeing Service |
| Joanna Cottrell (Employee Support Officer) /Caron Jones/Gill Thornicroft (HR Wellbeing Officers) /Caroline Woods/Neil Barlow (Training Department). |
| **Joanna Cottrell** |
| **jcottrell@warrington.gov.uk** |
| Ongoing. The Employee Support Service started in 2015 and added to the HR in-house Wellbeing and training Programme already in existence. The Positive Thoughts Course has been running for over 10 years, the Building Resilience Managing Stress cause over 15 years |
| **Date of submission**  27/7/2022 |

## Problem(s) and how you tackled them.

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| **What was the problem you were trying to tackle? (max 200 words)**  Warrington Borough Council has a large, diverse workforce. Employee wellness is a top concern and priority for the organisation  It was acknowledged that there were several measures in place to help reduce and manage workload stress and concerns including Occupational Health provision but less support readily available for dealing with individual personal or family stress.  Managers were reliant on welfare advice from a busy HR team and although there was a 24 hour EAP telephone helpline available for staff (at significant cost to the organisation) this was underused.  In 2015 In order to meet this need for a wider and personalised care for employees, Senior HR Managers created a confidential in-house Employee Support Service, dedicated to provide 121, person-centred holistic listening, support and signposting for its employees.  They continued to develop their wider HR Rewards/Wellbeing Programme and Training offer to include personal and social development courses as well as role specific training. |
| **Please give a brief description of your self-care innovation (max 250 words)**  The Employee Support Service, supports employees to maintain or improve their health and wellbeing. It can also support employees with their wellbeing recovery, e.g. those employees that are absent with stress, anxiety or depression. It helps employees to navigate their way through their difficulties by providing a confidential impartial ear. Employees are provided with individualised support and wellbeing action plans as well as other resources in order to build confidence and resilience. They are encouraged to make self-care as a priority in their daily lives. One such resource is the “Fabulous Four” Wellbeing Planner which is a tool to help identify gaps in the ways to wellbeing (e.g. social or physical activity) and to help build in healthy routines and balance. This encourages self-care as well as time with others e.g. friends and family, pleasurable activities and activities providing a sense of achievement. They are encouraged to be self-compassionate and less critical on themselves and to adapt, with support to difficult circumstances, e.g. long term health conditions. They can be signposted to internal and external services including counselling, specialised services and crisis services if needed. The two dedicated HR Wellbeing Officers deliver a rolling 6 week Positive Thoughts Programme for small groups of employees throughout the year. This is in work time across 6 mornings, and can be accessed by staff who are absent from work as well as those in work who may be in need of some relaxation, mindfulness, peer support, self-care and other resources. This is very popular and is in addition to the HR Wellbeing Programme already on offer e.g. massage, nails, yoga, Employee Rewards programme and the Training Department offer, e.g. Building Resilience Managing Stress. |
| **What challenges or barriers were you faced with and how did you solve the problems or overcome the barriers? (max 250 words)**  The Employee Support Service is now well established and respected throughout the organisation. Initially the service required a lot of promotion but right from the outset the service was well used by employees across all the directorates.  Any scepticism that may have been initially felt with the service being in HR was soon dispelled as the word got around about the neutrality and employee focused approach. As the employee support officer had a background in wellbeing mentoring and coaching they were easily able to build rapport and discern what resources would help the individual concerned. They also had excellent knowledge and working relationships with both internal and external partners so could easily signpost to local, regional and national services. Managers began referring their employees to the service (with employees consent) and also employees themselves were able to self-refer in confidence. The Employee Support Service began to offer drop –in sessions at different bases for staff otherwise unable to access the service to access. (No appointment Necessary). Many staff at these bases were not on the intranet to see digital information. The Employee Support Officer also met with employees that are absent from work at a neutral venue near to their home address so that they didn’t have to travel to their work base.  The service offers advice and resources to Managers, supporting their employees e.g., those undergoing absence management, performance management, and grievance or suspension conditions. |
| **Did you collaborate with other partners or organisations, if so, who were they?**  Yes The Employee Support Service collaborates with internal services, e.g. Union Stewards, HR Business Partners, HR Wellbeing Officers, Wellbeing Mentors (Neighbourhoods), Training Department Officers, Recruitment and Payroll Team, Managers at all levels.  Externally a variety of support and advisory services, e.g. counselling services, psychological services, community mental health teams, specialised services e.g. drug and alcohol services, leisure services, carers centres, citizens advice centres and so on. |

## Impact and outcomes

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| **Who was the initiative directed at and what were the benefits to the targeted group or individuals? (max 250 words)**  Approximately 2400 Employees were eligible to access the ESS at any time, as required during their time with the council. This includes a diverse workforce from Health and Social Care, Environment and Transport and Corporate directorates. They are often customer facing and offering a vital valuable service to the residents of the town including the most vulnerable and in need. They work hard and often work long hours going above and beyond to offer an excellent customer service.  The benefits to the employees including the time and space to talk about their concerns, at home and work and to receive a supportive, confidential, non-judgemental in- house service tailored to their individual need. Improved emotional wellbeing, health, resilience and self-management are some of the benefits of accessing the service and additional specialised support if signposted to such. |
| **Were there further benefits to you, your colleagues, and your organisation or to a wider area such as the NHS? If so, what were they? (e.g improved job satisfaction, smoother running of facility, happier service users, better use of scarce resources, cost saving)**  The benefits through having a happy and well workforce are not to be underestimated for the individual, the organisation and the customers that they serve. Healthier, happier employees make for happier teams and a positive work culture. The benefits also impact on the employee’s family life with employees having more energy /resources to spend quality time with their loved ones.  Reduced absenteeism, in particular through stress, anxiety and depression also has a great economic benefit to the organisation that has budget pressures and scant resources. |

## Evidence

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| **Please quantify the benefits of your initiative. (e.g. cost improvement, numbers of people helped, time saved)**  After the first 12 months of the Employee Support Service a cost saving exercise was done by the Head of HR. This took into account the number of counselling sessions that had been received through signposting (and the cost of these if they had been through OH), the difference between the number of days of absence through stress, anxiety and depression in the 18 months prior to the service (based on an average pay scale) which showed significant annual cost savings.  The service has now supported (in the 6 years to date) 700 employees on a 121 basis, sometimes over several months depending on their circumstances.  The Positive Thoughts /Building Resilience Course have both been running for at least 15 years and so hundreds, if not thousands employees have benefitted from this offer!  Hundreds of employees have benefitted from accessing the HR Wellbeing Programme (e.g. yoga, nails, footcare, money advice etc), which is ongoing. New developments include a Menopause support group a Long Covid support group and a Wellbeing Choir. |
| **Do you have formal or anecdotal evidence of success? (e.g. qualitative, quantitative, informal feedback?)**  The Employee Support Service has received consistently positive feedback not just informally but via the service Feedback Form which is given at the end of the support service. This has been rated as excellent most consistently than any of the other ratings. Feedback has included that the service provided much needed support at a very difficult time in the employee’s lives and that they feel much better for having offloaded and gained access to internal and external resources.  All participants have said that they would recommend the service to colleagues. Word of mouth and recommendation has been reflected in the increase in the number of self-referrals to the service year by year. Also some employees have re-referred themselves to the service when they have needed further support down the line. Managers continue to rely on the service to facilitate their support of employees both in or absent from work. The Employee Support Service is now supporting those employees absent with Long Covid as well as anxiety, stress and depression.  Managers are referring employees that need timely preventative support and may not need Occupational Health services in the first instance. This has prevented the organisation from over subscribing on the number of counselling places agreed in their SLA. The Employee Support Service Officer is able to offer first contact counselling and the ESS officer is currently a trainee counsellor on the final year of the BACP L4 Diploma. The number of absentees from the organisation has continued to decrease or be stable, (the average FTE days lost) despite the difficulties of the Pandemic.  The Wellbeing Charter assessment conducted in 2018 (Kevin Yipp) referred to the Employee Support Service repeatedly throughout the outcome report. Some examples include :  “The introduction of an Employee Support Officer for staff has been positively received; the role was created 2 years ago to support employees and through interviews, employees are becoming highly reliant on this service.”  “The implementation of the Employee Support Officer has been hugely successful in helping and supporting staff who may have issues that can affect their work ability”.  “The promotion of the Employee Support Officer role in absence to managers can significantly decrease the costs associated with absence, especially if the person is able to continue to work”  “A stress management policy is in operation and a SOP on mental health refers to the HSE management standards. Support is available through a number of avenues, including the Employee Support Officer, Counselling and HR. From the interviews conducted it was clear that this approach is positive to employees; with some relaying their own experiences and how the Council supported them” |
| **What was the cost of this initiative in terms of time, money, and/or other resources? Please be as specific as you can**  There was no additional costs as the ES officer was already employed in another capacity for the council and whose substantive role was not replaced permanently.  Some investment was made to train The Employee Support Officer in specialised areas such as infant loss, health anxieties and trauma informed practice because it soon became clear that the service was relied upon for a wide variety of complex areas of support.  Other training was free through the councils training department. The Employee Support Officer undergoes CPD for the role and due to being a counselling trainee is in supervised practice at a community counselling practice.  Positive thoughts is ran at little cost as the HR officers were already employed and it added to their duties. Rooms are used within council buildings at no additional cost to the organisation and free to employees. The HR Wellbeing Programme does not cost the organisation as participants will pay a small fee (e.g. wellbeing choir, yoga) which cover costs. Training is ongoing via the PDC and is run by council training officers, programmes run both in person and online. |

## And, finally…

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| **Are there any lessons you learned or top tips that you would like to share? (max 200 words)**  The organisation has learned that investment in Employee Wellbeing is beneficial on all levels, individual, team, organisation and community. When employees are encouraged and supported to put their own wellbeing as a priority, there is a happier, healthier and more productive workforce.  Supporting the wellbeing of employees goes beyond a legal duty of care and is best delivered on an individual person centred basis rather than a one size fits all approach. Employees are any organisations most valuable resource and they spend a huge amount of time committed to the organisations values and goals.  When the organisation values their employee’s individual goals and commits to supporting them, they feel better understood and cared for as a person. They are likely to be more engaged, and satisfied at work if they are able to bring their full selves to work and to have support at times of difficulty.  There needs to be a joined up approach between all employees within the organisation that are involved in employee health and wellbeing. There also needs to be good external relationships with partners and a pooling of knowledge and resources in order to promote good practice.  Wellbeing is everybody’s responsibility but everybody has a tipping point where their demands may outweigh their resources or they feel overwhelmed.  The pandemic has shown employers that they can trust employees to work more flexibly and that despite the extra pressures on employees they are still incredibly committed to the organisation.  The pandemic has helped reduce the stigma attached to mental health concerns and helped people to be mindful of their own and others wellbeing. There has never been a better time for people to look after themselves and make self-care and wellbeing initiates a priority. |
| **Did you use any of the Self Care Forum’s resources? If so, please specify.**  I haven’t accessed these yet but will do! |
| **Please state your social media addresses including all those who were involved in the initiative.**  Warrington Borough Council has a Facebook page for events and job notices etc.  Most of our support and wellbeing information is available internally only through our intranet. |
| **Why do you think this initiative deserves to win the award? (Max 100 words)**  I feel that Warrington Borough Council has gone above and beyond when it comes to investment in their employees’ health and wellbeing. I have not come across another organisation, either public or private that has its own dedicated Employee Support Officer as well as Occupational Health provision. I have seen some clinical roles (e.g. Clinical Psychologist or Counselling psychologist) but nothing that can offer such a broad range of support from counselling through mentoring and coaching. I am aware of Reward and Wellbeing programmes or EAP phone lines but nothing impartial, non-clinical, and in-house, dedicated to best serving the needs of the individual employee. Neither have I seen anything in line with the rolling PDC programmes, in particular the positive thoughts programme. These initiatives are all available in works time and easy to access. |
| **Do you have an image, materials or web links to supplement your application? Please supply no more than 2 images which may also be used to promote your application if successful.**  Yes. I have Employee Support Fliers/posters that can be used. The service is for employees only so wouldn’t need promoting externally, but could be used as an example of good practice for other organisations |
| **Your application may be chosen to be uploaded to the “best practice” page of the Self Care Forum website to share excellence so that others might use the learnings in your application to empower more people. We will also include your email address so that people may get in touch with you. If you would prefer that your application and/or email address was NOT chosen then please make it clear in the box provided below.** |
| Yes my work email is : Happy for it to be used  jcottrell@warrington.gov.uk |

We look forward to receiving your application. Please email your completed form to:

[selfcare@selfcareforum.org](mailto:selfcare@selfcareforum.org)

**About the Self Care Forum**

The Self Care Forum supports organisations in helping their communities and service users better understand how to self care. It is the leading independent provider of best practice around self care and the ‘go-to’ place for top quality resources, current opinion, and self care interventions in the UK.It is a charity and aims to improve public health by promoting self care at national policy level. It creates resources, runs the UK-wide National Self Care Week, and supports robust research evidence.

For more information about the Self Care Forum please go to the website. [www.selfcareforum.org](http://www.selfcareforum.org).