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Respondent

25

Anonymous

14:37

Time to complete

Title and contact details

1. Title of Initiative (please ensure this is a good description of your initiative in no more than 90 characters) *

Westbank Community Health and Care's 'Great Place to Work' scheme

2. Name of organisation and region (please state context, ie general practice, community care etc) *

Westbank Community Health and Care, a Devon-wide charity that supports individuals and communities on their journey to better health and wellbeing (South West region)

3. Name of person or team involved in the self-care initiative *

Lead: Westbank's CEO Sarah Hicks

4. Timeframe and dates of initiative *

2022 - present

5. Contact name for entry *

Sarah Hicks

6. Contact email for entry *

sarah.hicks@westbank.org.uk

About your self-care initiative

7. Describe the problem you were facing and your objective(s) in tackling this. (1200 characters max) *

Unlike successful businesses, charities like Westbank can't show staff how much they are valued by raising their salary. They lack the funds and also face restrictions on how they can spend their money. Having held senior positions in numerous settings, CEO Sarah Hicks has exceptional operational and leadership skills; she knows that valued and motivated colleagues in a supportive workplace pull together as a strong team, are happier and loyal and produce effective results. Drawing on her experiences as an employee in several sectors, Sarah has embedded a workplace culture where people know they are safe, looked after, respected and valued, and established an ethos where 'family and health come first' and such needs are accommodated wherever reasonably and operationally possible. This was the 'big idea' behind Westbank's Great Place to Work initiative. Her objective was to set up a wide range of staff incentives, initiatives and non-financial rewards under the overarching banner of a 'Great Place to Work', compensating staff for lower salaries than in the public or private sector by offering them other meaningful benefits and a real sense of recognition.

Please enter at most 1200 characters

8. Outline your initiative, explain your planning and execution of the project. (1200 characters max) *

Sarah has developed a highly professional leadership team to help steer Westbank through its next stage of growth, further increasing its impacts and impressive outcomes to support even more individuals, families and communities across Devon on their journey to improved health and wellbeing. She recognised the need 'to take her entire team with her' and initiated plans to create a supportive and inclusive work environment, where health and family come first and everyone's work-life balance is as good as it can be. First step, including everyone in defining the organisation's Vision, Mission, Values and Behaviours, then introducing a comprehensive package of rewards and incentives to make team members feel seen, valued and supported. Through westbankrewards.co.uk, staff benefit from lower prices on everything from food shopping to domestic appliances to holidays - a big help during the cost-of-living crisis. Other benefits include: 2 wellbeing days a year, in addition to annual leave, when time off is needed for a valid wellbeing reason; Westbank's annual Wellbeing Day, the first held on Blue Monday 2025; regular events providing health walks and practical/financial advice.

Please enter at most 1200 characters

9. What were the challenges and how did you overcome these? (1200 characters max) *

Westbank has grown from small beginnings. Founded in 1986 to support the local community of Exminster, where the majority of its staff are still based, it now offers a diverse and impressive range of health and wellbeing services across Devon, a mix of self-funded projects and commissioned services, available to people of all ages - from babies to centenarians. The size of the team and the complexity and spread of Westbank's services are a challenge. Around 130 full and part-time employees, in turn supported by hundreds of volunteers, currently support 38,000 service users across a large, mostly rural county. Sarah became CEO as the charity was emerging from Covid. Like many organisations, Westbank was experiencing some retention issues at that time. Realising the scale of the challenge ahead, Sarah knew she needed to involve the whole team in re-shaping the organisation to make it resilient, sustainable and a great place to work. For all these reasons, clear, regular and consistent communication - delivered in many different ways - was vital to bring about change, from outlining the initial vision to executing a plan and achieving objectives.

Please enter at most 1200 characters

10. Did you collaborate with other local partners, if so, who and why were they chosen? *

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11. Would you describe your initiative as "innovative", if "yes" please tell us why. (800 characters max) *

Yes, we believe Westbank's Great Place to Work initiative is innovative because of its scope, its many benefits to employees and the difference it has made to their workplace, as well as the motivation behind it, which aligns with the charity's overall Vision, Mission, Values and Behaviours. While many organisations are waking up to the need to be more inclusive and flexible to incentivise their workforce, Great Place to Work goes beyond the usual offering. It values staff as individuals, supports their holistic health and wellbeing and therefore benefits the charity as a whole. This, in turn, makes a positive difference to the charity's service users, volunteers, and the communities it supports across Exeter and Devon.

Please enter at most 800 characters

12. Did you use any of the Self-Care Forum's free resources as part of your initiative? Provide details *

Not for this particular initiative, but it's a fantastic resource that we plan to engage with more. To this end, Westbank has already made plans to celebrate Self Care Week in November.

Impact, outcomes, and evidence

13. Who was the initiative directed at and what were the benefits to the targeted group or individuals? (1200 characters max)

The initiative was directed at Westbank's full and part-time employees who deliver a diverse range of impactful community-based health and wellbeing initiatives to empower people of all ages (including some of the most vulnerable in society) to lead happier, healthier, more fulfilled lives and to maintain their fitness and independence for longer. 'Great Place to Work' ensures that Westbank's staff feel supported, valued and nurtured through a range of initiatives, discounts and incentives, and opportunities to maintain their own health and fitness for free by using Westbank's fully accessible gym, and taking part in exercise classes and health walks. In addition, they benefit from being able to work more flexibly when needed for family or valid wellbeing reasons. Sarah says, "I want my team to know that if they have a poorly child or parent, or some other pressing need outside of work, they don't have to have sleepless nights before asking for time off. It's tricky to strike the right balance, but wherever possible, I accommodate requests for flexibility. When you do that with transparency and honesty, I believe you get the best out of people."

Please enter at most 1200 characters

14. Please quantify the impact of your initiative. (e.g. cost improvement, numbers of people helped, time saved) ((1200 characters max))

Westbank supports service users of all ages and backgrounds on their health and wellbeing journey, with a priority on preventative healthcare. Westbank's team now receives similar support to maintain their health and happiness. One area in which the charity has been able to quantify its impact is the significant reduction in staff absence due to sickness. HR figures show this has fallen by about 1/3 since the introduction of the scheme. It has also positively influenced staff retention issues post-COVID and the engagement and retention of volunteers, who also have access to several of the benefits. In the year to 31/7/25, 119 users of the easy-to-access experience and benefits platform westbankrewards.co.uk saved on a wide range of purchases, including wellbeing and fitness services and extra leave. This is just one of the ways Westbank is helping staff stretch their wages and take care of their physical and mental health. 14% took up the annual leave purchase, and 8% opted for the Simply Health plan. Staff feedback from the first Westbank Wellbeing Day in January indicates that staff also feel an improved sense of purpose/connection and satisfaction in their work (see below).

Please enter at most 1200 characters

15. Do you have formal or anecdotal evidence of success? (e.g. qualitative, quantitative, informal feedback?) (1200 characters max)

By way of anecdotal evidence of success, we reviewed feedback from a sample of 25 staff following Westbank's first Wellbeing Day - almost all said the event and activities benefitted their wellbeing and exceeded their expectations. Asked 'Which activities did you enjoy most and why?' replies included: All of the activities were exceptionally well run and I got to do them with colleagues I work closely with, and some that I don't. Not only was it great for wellbeing, but also team building. Tried yoga for the first time and really enjoyed it, good teacher. Breathing, a useful skill. Massage, excellent. Healthy lunch recipes were fun and interactive and gave me new ideas to take home. I found the resilience workshop really helpful. Breathwork was really good. I enjoyed all the events I attended. Hobbies - a real chance to get to know other colleagues, their interests and to widen my experiences. Yoga, Talkworks and Massage. All excellently delivered, welcoming and enriching. Made me want to springboard back to considering nutrition and exercising more. I felt happy and uplifted leaving the event. The same again, please. It was an amazing day!

Please enter at most 1200 characters

Learning and sustainability

16. What was the cost of this initiative in time, money, and other resources? Please be as specific as you can. (1200 characters max) *

As a charity, Westbank has a limited budget. We incur direct costs for some of our staff benefits, such as the discounts platform, My Possible Self, Simply Health, etc and the production of our in-house magazine Pass It On and our Wellbeing Brochure. Indirect costs include cover for two additional days' leave each year for all staff (wellbeing days), downtime during events like the Wellbeing Day, administration of the initiative, and some resources we buy in. We combine and offset these paid-for services with a range of free-of-charge activities and partnerships delivered by staff for staff, such as the Westbank Wellbeing Day.

Please enter at most 1200 characters

17. Were there any learnings from the initiative, if so what were they? (1200 characters max) *

The main lesson learnt from this initiative, one that's been evident from the outset, is that you need to really know your staff and their priorities to put together the right offering to create a more cohesive workforce. Many employees have expressed how relieved they feel that they are no longer made to feel guilty about prioritising time for health and family matters. Also, we have a high percentage of remote workers and have learnt how essential it is to provide a high level of support to keep them engaged and maintain their wellbeing. Remote workers are at particular risk of loneliness and disconnection, and in turn, decreased motivation. The shared experiences that we offer through our Great Place to Work initiative, and other events we have introduced, such as our annual Conference, help to overcome this. This scheme, combined with our Workforce Governance Strategy (more details below), provides meaningful opportunities to check in more regularly with team members face to face. All of the above are valuable lessons.

Please enter at most 1200 characters

18. Are you continuing to implement the initiative, please give details. (1200 characters max) *

Absolutely! We are committed to building on and improving our Great Place to Work initiative. We invest time and resources into looking at ways we can further improve the work environment of our team and the health and wellbeing opportunities we provide. To this end, we have created a Workforce Governance Strategy that has both formal and informal methods of communication and provides individual and team opportunities. Every team member receives a monthly 1-2-1 focused on their wellbeing, and an annual appraisal for the more formal conversations around goals, expectations and objectives. These are complemented by team meetings, so there is an environment to share/communicate with their peers. 1-2-1 meetings cover a set of questions, including one to check in on the team member's Sunday evening mood. Sarah believes this is a valuable indicator of staff well-being and aims to ensure that no one starts the working week feeling anxious or dreading it. During the week, there is ample opportunity to participate in a range of exercise classes or attend the on-site gym. The activities on offer cater to all fitness levels and help to support health and wellbeing in the workplace.

Please enter at most 1200 characters

And finally

19. How easy will it be to replicate your initiative and do you have top tips to share? (1200 characters max)

Our initiative would be easy to replicate. It just requires thinking outside of the box and an understanding of what makes your team tick. It's important to recognise that one size does not fit all; that's why it's vital to know your team well. As a health and wellbeing charity, it's of the utmost importance to us that we support our staff (and volunteers) while they are supporting our service users. Top Tip: Be open to honest feedback. It's impossible to get everything right the first time, so you need to pause every once in a while to review what's working and what isn't and tweak things when necessary. Our in-house magazine Pass It On! plays an important role in communicating our successes internally, ensuring that everyone is kept informed about the charity's outcomes, ambitions and finances and knows that Westbank is in a good place because of their hard work and commitment. Staff and other stakeholders are developing a growing sense of pride about Westbank's achievements as a result of seeing the charity making headlines and reading positive news stories about how it's improving the lives of those it supports, including many of the most vulnerable people in Devon.

Please enter at most 1200 characters

20. Please let us know the social media addresses of those involved in the initiative.

Insta: @westbankdevon Facebook: Westbank Community Health and Care YouTube: @westbankdevon7243 Website: www.westbank.org.uk

21. Why do you think this initiative deserves to win the award? (800 characters max)

Great Place to Work strives to create a workplace culture where people know they are safe, looked after, respected and valued. It deserves to win not only because of the many benefits to Westbank's employees, but also because of the knock-on effect within the wider community the charity serves. Creating a healthy, inclusive, holistic, supportive workplace culture, where staff have opportunities to grow, enjoy a better quality of life and are united by a common purpose to improve the lives of others has a ripple effect. Great Place to Work embodies everything Westbank represents - empowering staff to take ownership of their health and wellbeing with the full support of their employer, along with measures to ease their cost of living and create a cohesive, caring community.

Please enter at most 800 characters

22. Do you have an image, materials or weblinks to supplement your application? Please supply no more than 2 images which may also be used to promote your application if successful. Ensure images are square (ie height and width dimensions are the same). Please email information to selfcare@selfcareforum.org including the name title of your initiative (as in Q1).

2 photos: Westbank staff learning to cook healthy lunches in the Community Cookery School as part of a wellbeing event

23. Your application may be chosen to be uploaded to the "best practise" page of the Self-Care Forum website to share self-care excellence with others who might want to use the learnings in your application. We will also include your email address so that people may get in touch with you. Please confirm your preference below. *

- ☐ I am happy for the Self-Care Forum to add our entry to the website **with** my email address
- ☒ I am happy for the Self-Care Forum to add our entry to the website **without** my email address
- ☐ I would rather our entry was not included on the Self-Care Forum website

24. Would you consider becoming a self-care champion? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe, I'd like to know more