

Case Study: Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust

This case study has been written by Anne Power, Staff Networks Coordinator at CNWL.

1. Why did CNWL set up the Carers Network? (eg your aims/objectives)

We set up our Carers at Work Network (CAW) to support Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust (CNWL) equality priorities. One of which was to seek out and identify 800 working carers out of a total staff of 7000.

- My role is Staff Networks Co-ordinator and I support seven networks at CNWL:-
- Carers At Work Network
- BAME Network Group
- LGBT+ Staff Network
- Disabled Employees Network
- Lived Experience Of Mental Health Issues and Stigma Transformation.
- 50+ Group
- CNWLWomen

2. What was involved in the process of starting up the Carers Network?

What type of network did you decide to set up? (ie virtual, informal face to face, formal network)

We identified two people who were interested in running the network and we scoped out what carers issues might be in the Trust. Based on our discussions we created a SurveyMonkey. We provided our draft definition of what a working carer is and asked all CNWL members if they identify as being a carer. Other questions were if their manager knew they were a carer; was the manager supportive; how carers would like to meet and what topics they thought the network should address.

We collated the responses into a report and set a date to launch the network. The survey report was discussed at length at the launch as well as the name of the network being agreed along with a logo and branding.

The Network has full support and funding from the Trust.

3. How did you publicise and promote the Carers Network?

Word of mouth by committee members is a very powerful way of reaching out to carers. The Trust has a weekly 3 Minute Read and other avenues such as the CEO's Talking Trust. Also, as Staff Networks Co-ordinator, I have grown a database of members, allies and supporters. We also have an intranet where the Network has their own page, along with leaflets, a carers handbook and relevant videos of carers stories. I attend all our inductions and present my leaflet introducing carers to the CAW Network. Often we help staff to identify themselves as carers.

At events the Committee wears their branded t-shirts and uses other promotional items to promote the Network.

CAW has developed a 'Helping Managers Support working Carers' training sessions which they deliver throughout the year (including by Zoom during the Pandemic).

Also CAW developed a 'Navigating HR Policies Workshop for Working Carers'. This workshop is best on a 1:1 or 2:1 basis where the co-chairs support a particular individual with their unique caring experience and explore which CNWL employment policies are most supportive.

We also promote and hold events in Carers Week and on Carers Rights Day and other national days such as National Staff Networks Day.

4. What processes/provisions have you put in place to sustain the Carers Network for the future?

CAW is supported wholeheartedly by the Exec both in terms of support and financially and this is written into CNWL's Equality Priorities. Co-chairs of the Network keep their term of 3 years and sometimes longer. They grow a committee around them so succession should happen with ease. The Trust supports the Carer Confident Scheme and the Trust is currently about to reach Stage 2.

5. What advice would you give to other organisations who want to set up a carers network?

My advice would be identify, support and empowering your working carers. Carers in particular bring additional life skills to work learnt from their caring experience. People who are supported at work show to be much more loyal than those who aren't supported. By supporting working carers companies can also avoid retention and recruiting issues.

I always ask people to bear in mind that no one is exempt from becoming a carer or attaining a disability. We all need a bit of compassion and support at some stages of our lives.

So far CAW has identified 358 working carers so we still have a way to go to identify 800!