

Sarah Craine

Head of People Operations - OD & People

Salisbury NHS Foundation Trust

We can see the recruitment and retention benefits and now we're committing to be an employer who offers flexibility

Why did you apply for the NHS Flex For The Future?

The representatives from nursing were interested in how team rostering would work with flex, the IT people wanted to work out how they could manage IT equipment if people were working from home. It brought a lot of practicality to the project. One of the Deputy Chief nurses was particularly keen on embedding flex working so they could see the benefits from a staff retention perspective. They really pushed the agenda of rethinking the culture to allow more people to work flexibly.

How is your SRO involved?

Our SRO is on board and engaged which is good. Every month we present a highlights report to our committee around the progress we're making and our future plans so from that perspective she's quite involved.

How did you keep everyone engaged?

The main sessions were really helpful for that. We'd always try to have an extra meeting after each session to discuss what we thought about what we'd learnt and we'd use the agendas to guide us through what we were going to talk about.

What was the biggest shift you noticed?

For us, as the project team it was interesting to see the bits of the jigsaw fit together, how our plans related to each other's. That's where having a project team really helped, because it wasn't just one brain thinking about all this, we could bounce ideas off each other and form a plan. The project sits within my portfolio but it needed to go much wider than that and involve the other team members.

What did you find useful about the programme?

I'd say the main sessions and the drop in sessions. The two of them worked together nicely because the sessions themselves were really good then, you got to be interactive, sitting with the rest of the change team going, 'Right, let's get on with these specific questions'. It was a good combination.

Which tools were particularly helpful?

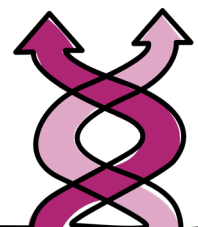
The cost calculator helped the managers understand the benefits of flex, the templates and presentations in the resource library were all really helpful too.

What difference has Flex For The Future made?

Covid brought us to a place where people want to change the way they work and now the programme has helped us have the internal conversations that wouldn't have happened otherwise about making those changes.

What have you achieved so far?

We've written an internal survey to collect some benchmark data, we're rewriting training sessions for our line managers to realign our policy and we're updating our recruitment ads to offer flexible working. More generally, we've been trying to help people understand what flexible working is. You'll have someone working on a ward who says they can't make their job work flexibly, but then we can talk to them about self-rostering, term time contracts, an annualised hours contract and they become aware of the possibilities.



What's next?

One of our next steps will be working out how to record information about flexible working patterns in a central database. Progress is definitely being made.

What do you think the main successes of the programme have been?

I would say, putting flexible working on the agenda of the trust, because prior to the programme we were not really getting anywhere with it. Also, it's helped sort out the trust's response to flexible working. We can see the recruitment and retention benefits and now we're committing to be an employer who offers flexibility.

What challenges have you come across?

One of the biggest challenges is changing the culture around flex working. Now that Covid is less of an emergency, some frontline managers want to see people back on location, in front of them every single day, so that's where we have some work to do. But when we roll out the new line manager training that will solve that problem.

How would you improve the programme?

The drop in sessions were great but, as I'm from the South West, our breakout group was a bit small. It would have been great if there had been more engagement from other people in the area so we could have heard their experiences and collaborated more.

What advice would you give to any other organisations considering the programme?

I would say do it. I'd also advise them to think carefully about the makeup of their project team to make sure that they've got buy in from all the key areas. The more you engage people, the more they'll get on board with the idea. If people hear about flexible working from a nurse rather than hearing it from an HR person they're more likely to get it. They should ask themselves, 'Who do you want to listen?' It's so important.

Would you recommend the NHS Flex For The Future programme to others?

Absolutely. It's a great process in terms of guiding you through the various theories and giving you the tools and resources to be able to achieve results around flexible working while still being very adaptable. The future is obviously about flexible working and this programme helps you measure where you are and what you're doing. Then just when you're thinking, 'How the heck am I actually going to deliver this?' it gives you the tools and resources you need.

