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# This programme...will really change how we handle working patterns in future

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

It was quite timely really. We already had a campaign in the trust around promoting flexibility when the Flex for the Future programme was advertised. We realised that the programme would mirror the work we'd started and could give us a bit of structure and direction in terms of what we could achieve and gaining more ideas.

### **Was it your idea to join the programme?**

Yes. In my role, flexibility was already one of my specific areas of interest. Covid helped embed more agile working across the trust but once that calmed down some of our managers wanted everyone to go back to their old ways and started to say, 'We don't have to work at home any more. Let's get everybody back in.' We wanted to know why that was necessary. Why would people have to be physically present to get their jobs done? It would just mean our car parks getting full again as people travelled into work. There was a huge lack of understanding about the opportunities flex working could bring, so we needed to upskill our managers.

### **How did you form your change team?**

We already had our agile working group so we added to that core and made sure we had a good cross section of people from across the trust. We were keen to make sure that we had a representative from each division so they could feed back to the rest of their division on the work we were doing.

### **Were there many different perspectives in the group?**

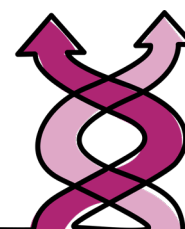
Absolutely, because what works in one area for a nurse might not work in another area for someone with a completely different role so you have to allow for that.

### **What did you find most useful about the programme?**

It was a combination of things really. I enjoyed taking part in the break out groups and working with the other teams. It was so helpful to talk to people from other trusts about their experiences. Often they'll have come across a problem you're having and they'll have a solution for it and there are times when you can share what you've learnt too. The speakers were interesting and inspiring and the materials shared with us have been so useful we've already incorporated them into our training programme, and made them available to managers.

### **What was the biggest shift you noticed?**

Getting each department to look at where they stood on the maturity curve in terms of flexible working made it clear to all of us where we needed to focus our efforts. We identified that there were some really good pockets in certain areas, departments which actively encouraged flexible working, but also that other areas needed to progress more. We've encouraged managers to start from a 'yes' position when it comes to flexible working requests which has certainly pushed things forward.



### **What have you achieved so far?**

It's quite early to say but the number of applicants for flexible working and part time work has already markedly increased. Plus, we've reviewed our policy, adapted our manager training to incorporate some of the ideas we discussed in the programme, become clearer in how we advertise flexibility in our job adverts and started to look at ways in which we can properly record people's flexibility patterns. The programme has really helped me focus on important areas I wouldn't necessarily have considered before such as looking at inclusive career paths and progression. Before, I might have just focussed on making sure we advertised jobs as flexible and left it at that.

### **Has the programme inspired any other changes?**

It encouraged me to go one step further and look at how flexible working might affect job retention. I contacted every member of staff who had left us in the previous 12 months and stated that work life balance was their reason for leaving. I asked them a number of questions to try to understand why they left and whether they requested flexible working before they did so. And, if not, why not? Doing that was totally triggered by being part of the programme. I found that a lot of people who had left hadn't asked about flex working beforehand because they didn't think it would be approved. Knowing that will really help change how we handle working patterns in future.

### **What challenges have you faced?**

Trying to keep consistency among the team members has been difficult. Ideally, you want to have the same colleagues turning up to each meeting so they're up to speed with everything that's going on and they can consistently report back to their divisions, but people have a lot of conflicting commitments so it's not always possible. It means you have to spend time catching up new team members and then you don't have as much time to move forward and make progress.

### **How would you improve the programme?**

I'd like to have had more time in the break out sessions, especially with the regional meet ups. They were so helpful in terms of sharing information and experiences in person. You gain a lot more from the experience of working through something with others in the same room than just watching somebody presenting slides, but there wasn't always long enough to get into those conversations in depth.

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

I'd definitely recommend it. I'd say they should set up their action group as early as possible and make sure that they have people with enough time and dedication to follow the programme through. Make your group as representative of your organisation as possible and get buy in from them from the start so you don't end up having to do all the hard work yourself!

### **Would you recommend NHS Flex For The Future to others?**

Yes. It's been really beneficial. It's given us structure for where we're going and it's given us loads of ideas. I wouldn't have covered as many different ideas or made as much progress as I have without being on this programme.

