

Becoming a good and responsible individual employer

Peer support sector stories

Good Boss Support Network is a support group for individual employers (IEs) or the people who represent them, across the UK. It is for individuals who use their Social Care Personal Budgets/direct payments (DPs) and/or Personal Health Budgets (PHBs) to employ personal assistants (PAs) to deliver the care and support they need to help them in all areas of independent living. Here, Sebastian Lynn, Admin Assistant, shares his experience of being involved in peer support.

The Good Boss Support Network is a safe, friendly, caring, supportive, relaxed and respectful space where IE's or the people who represent them can comfortably share information, their thoughts, feelings, views, worries, concerns and experiences without any fear. It is also a space where advice is given and suggestions are made, and where privacy and confidentiality are respected.

Collectively, we wanted to create a network in which each member could be supportive of each other, whilst feeling supported to be the best individual employer/representative they could be.

The network was initially formed during lockdown in an effort to help alleviate the worries and concerns some individual employers had about employing a personal assistant during the pandemic, as well as the amplified isolation they were experiencing as a result.

The network fulfilled these aims and met our expectations. As time has moved on, my involvement with, and expectations of, the Group have ever increased, especially since being appointed as admin assistant. I have become more invested in the network and expect more of myself in helping it achieve its outcomes.

The members of the network now feel that we are better individual employers, on the whole. We have and are a support network of like-minded peers on whom we can each lean and upon whom we can call when we are each experiencing challenges, difficulties and/or issues with our care and support. We can generally solicit the support, knowledge, advice, guidance and general reassurance and comfort of each other and of our founder/coordinator at any given time.

Challenges

Over the course of the network's existence, there have been many different challenges. These include:

- **Making sure everyone's voice was heard**
For those who may not be able to make their point, views and/or concerns known at, or attend, the meetings, they can participate via the WhatsApp group, the Good Boss Support Network Facebook group and it's dedicated Messenger chat group.
- **Growing the networks's membership and ensuring it was as representative and diverse as possible**
The existing membership share the network's details on social media and with friends, family and other groups/networks. In addition, as admin assistant, I ensure I post more content to the Facebook and WhatsApp groups and to keep it updated as a means of making the network look enticing and appealing to existing and potential members.
- **Ensuring the assistive technology used was accessible and always in working order allowing as many people as possible to participate**
We advise and guide the membership via our platforms on how and when to use Zoom to attend the group's virtual peer support meetings, including coming to each other's aid remotely when we encounter technological issues when actually attending/accessing a meeting. In addition, our founder/coordinator has a Zoom subscription.
- **From time to time, it has been challenging trying to schedule a virtual Zoom meeting, due to the administration required and the need to ensure that the majority of group members are available to attend.**
We have been able to overcome such difficulties by, again, using the Group's other means of communication, other than the virtual meeting itself, via which members can also make contributions. The scheduling and administration of meetings has also been aided by my appointment as admin assistant and the use of tools such as event posts, opinion polls and Doodle to determine the availability of the majority and, therefore, to schedule meetings accordingly. Not only do we now have regular fortnightly meetings on a Wednesday, lasting approximately one hour and a quarter, but, knowing that our members experience loneliness and isolation and that they value the form of companionship that the network offers them, particularly during and for times of national holiday/celebration, we look to schedule more than one meeting over a given festive period, so that as many people as possible can attend.
- **Funding was required to ensure the continuation and growth of the Group beyond the Pandemic, as well as ensuring the further development of each**

of the members as individual employers.

The founder/coordinator managed secure funding through Skills for Care for the development of each individual employer specifically and their staff related training needs. The network's development and general receipt of training has often involved (especially during Lockdown) courses and workshops being delivered via our fortnightly Zoom meetings.

3 things we've learnt

- The importance of video calling when meeting in person is difficult or an impossibility.
- The value in the creation of peer support groups to reduce loneliness and isolation, and in feeling supported as part of a network/ community of individuals with similar life experiences who can each benefit from shared learning.
- The value in being able to rely on knowledge, advice, guidance and training to better oneself and those close to you.