

Pilot, refinement and embedding



Overview of actions

“Engaging registered managers was vital, but time constraints meant we had to pivot. Building trust with front line staff and using informal networks helped us embed the initiative more deeply.”

Karina Bennion, Former ICS People Partner for Social Care, Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent ICS/ICB

Whilst the wellbeing champion programme was not introduced as a short-term pilot, the initiative evolved and strengthened as it was rolled out and embedded. Its flexibility, inclusive recruitment and commitment to continuous improvement became defining strengths, enabling the initiative to grow, embed into practice and deliver measurable impact across social care settings.

- **Initial pilot concept** – The programme began by targeting nursing associate apprentices, aiming to use their six hours of weekly off-the-job training to pilot the wellbeing champion role. This approach looked to combine wellbeing leadership with professional development, offering dual benefits for individuals and organisations.
- **Challenges and lessons learned** – Despite enthusiasm, nursing associate apprentices faced heavy academic and work pressures, including assignments and university day-release, making additional responsibilities impractical. Feedback confirmed that adding wellbeing duties risked overwhelming them and jeopardising progress, prompting a strategic pivot toward a more inclusive model.



- **Strategic pivot to inclusivity** – Within two months, the initiative opened to all staff, regardless of role or contracted hours. Champions were recruited from diverse positions ensuring wellbeing support was relatable and embedded across service delivery.
- **Future opportunities for feedback** – Digital communication was used throughout the programme, and all materials for champions were shared digitally.
- **Network development and engagement** – Monthly meetings launched in May 2024 with 15 wellbeing champions, later evolving into quarterly sessions as the network grew. These informal, themed meetings provided peer learning, resource sharing and confidence-building, reinforcing engagement and sustainability.
- **Embedding into practice** – Champions created wellbeing boards, shared updates during team meetings, and acted as peer contacts for signposting and support. Posters ahead of meetings encouraged staff to raise questions or suggest topics, keeping the initiative grounded in front line realities.
- **Adaptability and continuity** – The programme responded to challenges such as time constraints and leadership changes through flexible delivery and structured hand overs. Clear communication during transitions, maintained trust and ensured ongoing support for champions.
- **Positive impact and growth** – By the six-month point, there were 80 champions across 35 services. Feedback confirmed increased resource uptake, training participation and improved morale. The Staff Psychological Wellbeing Hub reported a rise in social care assessments – 20 in six months compared to 11 in the previous six months – indicating greater awareness and engagement.
- **Positive feedback driving wider engagement** – Early success and enthusiastic feedback from champions and managers generated significant interest across the sector. Word of mouth spread rapidly, leading to a surge in volunteers and enquiries. Recruitment was temporarily paused to consolidate processes and ensure consistent onboarding before expanding further.





Key decisions

- Revised planned participation from nursing associate apprentices to all front line staff to improve feasibility and engagement.
- Embedded wellbeing into daily routines through visible wellbeing champion roles and informal engagement methods.
- Introduced regular network meetings to sustain momentum and share resources among champions.

“Once foundations were set, maintaining momentum became light touch.”

Rich Bagnall, Service Manager, Staff Psychological Wellbeing Hub,
Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent ICB



Key learning

Flexibility and responsiveness were critical to success, and the pilot phase demonstrated how adaptability can transform challenges into opportunities for improvement and scalability.

- **Adaptability transforms feasibility** – Pivoting beyond apprentices revealed a more scalable and inclusive model that embedded wellbeing into everyday practice.
- **Actual time commitment** – Champions confirmed the role required one to two hours per week, providing a realistic benchmark for future delivery.
- **Visibility strengthens engagement** – Consistent communication and accessible channels helped embed wellbeing conversations across teams.
- **Continuous feedback ensures relevance** – Regular surveys and meetings enabled fast learning and sustained momentum.