



# tapestry

## HSC Disability Staff Network

### **Tapestry Minutes**

Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2020 12-2 pm

Zoom video call

#### **1. Welcome**

Siobhan McGrath (Chair) welcomed members to the meeting.

#### **2. Minutes and Matters Arising**

Members agreed the minutes of the last meeting.

#### **3. Tapestry Engagement Feedback – Face coverings**

Karen explained that the Equality Unit had helped HR develop a survey aiming to explore how colleagues with disabilities were experiencing the wearing face coverings in work. The survey looked at any issues the individuals had themselves in wearing the masks and from colleagues wearing masks. We were particularly interested in how face coverings affected people who were hard of hearing or deaf.

Unfortunately, too few people completed the survey.

Karen emphasised that at the last Tapestry meeting some members explained that wearing face coverings can be

particularly difficult for those with sensory disabilities, such as Hearing Loss. Also, some of the voluntary organisations (National Deaf Children's Society; Hearing Link) are saying that communication for virtually all deaf people, including those who use sign language, relies in part on being able to see someone's face clearly – whether this is for lip-reading, or for understanding facial expressions or for understanding non-verbal communication more widely (e.g. seeing whether someone is smiling or looks upset).

The Equality Unit then had more in-depth discussions with staff who experience sensory loss (see further information covered under the Disability Action Plan updates below).

#### **4. Carers during Covid Report (paper)**

Karen presented on the research carried out by CarersUK on what it is like to be a carer during the pandemic.

Sandra added that a regional group had been set up with representation from the Department of Health, the Health and Social Care Board, the Trusts, and the voluntary sector. They have developed guidance for carers. Gerard explained that the Patient and Client Council had also done some work on care partners and care homes.

Siobhan referred to a colleague who looks after a parent and the impact on the individual's mental health, triggering her to ask what we can do in the workplace to help colleagues who may be struggling with caring during Covid.

Mairead thought that most contact with colleagues at the moment takes place in group calls. A lack of one-to-one conversations makes it difficult to pick up how others are and to raise issues.

Siobhan suggested that it would be useful to look at HR data to gain insights into the impacts on staff who are carers. She also

thought it important that organisations review their Carers Leave Policy to see whether it needs adjusted under Covid.

Mairead mentioned that the ability to work from home had helped her enormously and thought that for many staff with a disability and those who are carers having a policy in place will make it easier. The experience under Covid has proved that it can work.

Hazel stated that she had been given the option to work from home but chooses to come into the office to support her line manager and for personal reasons related to her own mental health and her need for routine. She underlined that it is the support from a line manager that makes all the difference.

Pat recounted that she had received excellent support from line manager and her colleagues while she has been shielding.

**Action: Siobhan to approach HR to request data on**

- **the share of carers amongst those applying to reduce their hours**
- **exit interviews - caring role being mentioned as one of the reasons**
- **return to work interviews – caring issues being mentioned**

## **5. Tapestry Action Plan Updates**

### **Lunch and learn session**

In light of two Awareness Days scheduled for January and March, Anne suggested to pick up on the Lunch and Learn session again in 2021-22. Members agreed.

### **Website Updates**

Sandra explained that information on this year's Disability Awareness Days has been added to the website.

## **Tapestry Presentations to SMTs / Boards**

Anne reported that at the last meeting it was agreed that Tapestry should aim to offer presentations to SMTs/Boards in selected organisations (PHA, PCC, BSO). It was agreed that this would be done before end March.

## **6. Disability Action Plan Updates**

### **Disability Awareness Days**

Sandra outlined that an Awareness Day on Deafness and Hearing Loss will take place on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2021. A focus will be given to the particular difficulties faced by people who are deaf and hard of hearing during the Covid pandemic. A member of staff from RNID will deliver a presentation via videoconference on the day. Two Tapestry members who are deaf have kindly documented their experience of Covid – these will be shared on the day.

A further Awareness Day focussing on Bipolar Disorder will take place on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

Information relating to both days will be shared by email in advance of each date.

### **Placements**

Anne reported that after speaking with the PaLS warehouse managers and employment support officers and participants it was decided that these placements would be restarted provided all the necessary safety measures were carried out. One participant decided not to return. The other two participants have or are planning to return. They will complete their full 26 weeks before end of December.

### **Disability Champions Network**

Anne explained that the last meeting took place on 12<sup>th</sup> November and focused on the carers agenda. Katherine

presented the findings from a recent CarersUK/NI report on the experience of caring since Covid. Likewise, a member of staff with caring responsibilities reported on their experience of working and caring during the pandemic.

Paula Smyth, BSO Director of HR and Corporate Services will be invited to attend the next champions meeting.

### **Any Other Business**

Siobhan mentioned documents recently circulated for comment, namely a staff manual and a line manager manual, as well as a corporate video recently produced. She thought that HR should have approached Tapestry directly in the production of these to ask for input to ensure these include information from and for staff who have a disability or those who are carers. Members agreed that this would have been important and also mentioned the need to ensure that these are produced in accessible formats.

Anne talked about the Five Year Review of Equality Schemes that the regional HSC organisations are carrying out and suggested that Tapestry members are asked to share their views as part of the review.

**Action: Equality Unit to arrange input of Tapestry members into the Five Year Review of Equality Schemes.**

### **Date of Next Meeting**

Date of next meeting: 24<sup>th</sup> March 2021, 12-2pm: Zoom videoconferencing. Joining details will be shared before the meeting.

If you require the agenda or papers in an alternative format, please contact [tapestry.network@hscni.net](mailto:tapestry.network@hscni.net)