

# CASE STUDY: GROWING YOUR OWN – PUBLIC HEALTH ADVANCED PRACTITIONERS

To drive improved health outcomes, the public health system needs a competent and driven workforce. The challenge is to create a culture of leadership at all levels, with staff who are engaged, empowered and encouraged to lead public health into the future.

The 'Growing Your Own' leadership development programmes, cultivated by Health Education North West's public health workforce team, aimed to develop and grow leaders at all levels across the public health workforce. It comprised three programmes which focused on the development of:

- aspiring directors
- practitioners
- advanced practitioners

## Advanced Practitioners

This case study, which is part of a series of three, focuses on a leadership programme developed to inspire leadership in the advanced practitioner workforce in order to support the implementation of the new public health system. The programme was designed for a cohort of 80 advanced practitioners from across the North West public health system and ran from April to July 2013.

### Key Outcomes

An evaluation of this programme aimed to understand not only participants' motivation, expectations and satisfaction, but also the application and impact of learning upon everyday practice. Findings were very positive, demonstrating the following outcomes:

- **Applied learning** - there was concern that due to the system-wide change, staff would not be supported or feel able to apply their learning. However it was shown that this programme engendered high levels of satisfaction, and that learning was applied following the course - 97.5% of participants enjoyed it, and applied the knowledge and skills they had gained.

*"I got what I expected from these courses and more! They gave me a rounded look at my image, profile, leadership style, ways to engage, act in meetings, simple touches to build at reputation and how to frame an idea, argument or case in a respectable, responsible fashion. Overall, the classes were excellent"*







- **Peer support** - often system-wide change results in the disappearance or dilution of informal support networks. However, an outcome of this programme was the creation of new peer-to-peer support, as group activities and discussions presented an opportunity for new relationships to forge and emerge..

*“Key learning was around key players, slight adjustments to what I do now, working out the key players in a meeting and knowing how to frame your part of the debate so it is taken forward – all from the strategic leadership course”*

- **Increased resilience** – participants showed that they had applied learning by considering spheres of influence, group dynamics and different perspectives, as well as finding new ways of working, collaborating, and scoping proposals. This has led to an increase in personal and/or team resilience.

*“I have never had the opportunity to take part in any training like this before. When at work I tend to be very involved in my specialist subject and I probably only stop to evaluate my style when I feel things haven't gone well. The workshops gave me some time to consider how my style is effective as there were lots of things I was already doing that make me effective and I now have some tools to put less positive experiences into perspective. There wasn't a low point”*

organisations. The majority of staff are based in local authorities or within Public Health England, but there are also staff based in academia, CSUs and other NHS organisations. The workforce is very complex and diverse, working across the three core domains of public health that include; health protection, health improvement and preventative health care. Staff come into public health roles from a wide variety of other professional backgrounds, and their roles vary from that of health trainers right through to director level roles, with only the specialist consultant workforce currently professionally registered and regulated.

Within NHS North West (NHSNW), the Strategic Health Authority for the North West, it was recognised that policy changes associated with the transition would require changes in working practice, employment and in leadership. The health and wellbeing alliance at the SHA and the regional public health team saw this as a timely opportunity to build staff resilience and individual leadership skills, and to mitigate against the potential negative impact of organisational change and its impact on staff morale, retention and productivity. Therefore the Grow Your Own programme was developed to provide a development opportunity that would allow people to think beyond the immediacy of change and focus how they would work in the future as public health leaders. Strategic support and approval was provided by NHSNW's senior management team at that time.

## Background

The backdrop to delivering this workforce development opportunity was the reorganisation of public health services as part of the overall changes to health and social care, as set out in the Health and Social Care Act 2012. Consequently, the public health workforce now works across many new

## Key Aims

The key aims of the Growing Your Own leadership development programmes were to:

- secure increased leadership development at all levels of the public health workforce during a period of significant

- organisational change
- support public health workforce resilience and responsiveness to change both personally and at an organisational level.

The aim of the advanced practitioner leadership programme was to develop leadership in the advanced practitioner workforce, in order to support implementation of the new public health system, and delivery of the Public Health Outcome Framework.

The objectives of the advanced practitioner programme were to:-

- support and develop leadership in advanced practitioners in public health to deliver the Public Health Outcome Framework
- support application of leadership across the new public health system
- support public health workforce resilience and responsiveness to change, both personally and at organisational level
- highlight further development and support the needs of the advanced practitioner workforce

### Key Stages of Setup

This project was the final part of the 'Growing Your Own' leadership development programme, therefore set up and organisational arrangements had already been made as part of previous courses.

### How It Works

#### Recruitment

80 public health advanced practitioners at Bands AfC 7-8C took part in this programme, which ran for four months from April 2013 until July 2013. Participants self-selected, supported by their respective director, or consultant of public health.

#### Programme content

This project replicated those components of the Aspiring Directors of Public Health programme that were relevant to the advanced practitioner workforce. For instance, running master classes and using the same provider to run the programme (Prospect Consulting). However, these master classes were tailored by the North West Employer Organisation (NWEO) so that they were suitable at an advanced practitioner level.

This programme was designed to help advanced practitioners examine ways of achieving greater personal resilience in themselves and others, as well as teaching them to apply a range of techniques to help build resilience. This project was rooted in real work examples and case studies, and no components of the programme were open to non-participants.

Master classes included:

- Strategic Influencing, Leadership, Resilience and Resourcefulness
- NWEO's Brilliant Public Sector Leadership Programme

### Expected learning outcomes

The expected learning outcomes were that participants were to:

- explore their own current leadership style and approach to influencing
- adapt their current styles to fit their new environment of local government
- apply tools and methods to influence and lead new stakeholders
- explore their personal brand and what it tells others about 'you as a leader'
- develop their existing brand and recognise challenges

### Evaluation

An evaluation was carried out to understand participants' motivation, expectations, satisfaction, application and the impact of learning, whilst also providing evidence on investment, informing future development opportunities of the practitioner workforce, and helping make decisions about whether to replicate the programme in future.

### Resources

Non-recurring funding was received from the Department of Health across the North of England.

### Key Challenges

- System-wide change** - the project was conceived to support advanced practitioners in leadership during a time of system-wide change. This posed both organisational and personal challenges. To overcome some of these challenges, the programme was commissioned pre-transition and delivered post transition. This way, the workforce had started working with new stakeholders and situated in their new environment. This arrangement resulted in enhanced peer learning and support, as staff brought and reflected on 'real issues' rather than perceived or pre-transition issues.
- Sustainability** - the remaining challenge is around sustainability and supporting this cohort of staff going forward. Work has commenced to investigate the feasibility of an informal peer support learning network.

### Key Learning

- Timing** - the evaluation highlighted the benefits of supporting leadership development across the whole workforce at a time of system wide change. The timing of development is crucial, as if performed too early in the



system change the participant's focus is on the system change not their leadership in and after the change. This was seen in the evaluation of the practitioner leadership. This project was delivered just after transition, which resulted in 97.5% of participants enjoying, gaining and applying their new knowledge and skills.

- **Assumptions of leadership** – across the public health system, advanced practitioners lead areas of work, therefore an assumption was made that they would see themselves as leaders. Yet themes emerged from facilitators and the evaluation that this was not the case. This insight was invaluable for future learning for this level of the workforce and the project replication in the Yorkshire & Humber and North East. The personal branding leadership master-class has been adapted so that exploration and self-perception of leadership is discussed in greater detail.

## Next Steps

Public Health England has allocated legacy funding for replication of the project across the North of England (Yorkshire and Humber and the North East). The programme has been re-designed using the findings of the evaluation, and it is due to be completed by March 2014.

The geographical footprint for this network (the North of England), lends itself to exploring the role of digital technologies and the use of social media to facilitate a network of practitioners.

A digital platform ([www.phlive.org.uk](http://www.phlive.org.uk)) has already been developed to enhance the communications and on-going engagement of the public health workforce, and support networking and collaboration. There has been a keen interest in contributing to this and already there are regular tweet discussions taking place ([#phlive](https://twitter.com/phlive)) on a wide range of public health topics.

## Supporting Material

Evaluation summaries for all three programmes are available at [nw.hee.nhs.uk](http://nw.hee.nhs.uk) or by contacting Alison Farrar, using the contact details below.

- [www.phlive.org.uk](http://www.phlive.org.uk)

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