

We are

disability
positive

Staff & Volunteer's Newsletter December 2023



Wishing each and every one of you a very Happy New Year!

In December, we held our final board meeting of 2023, the board approved all the policies that had been reviewed by the committees. These will be on the HR portal soon.

The board approved the roll out of condensed working hours after a successful pilot in 2023. This will be managed in the same way as flexible working requests. If you are interested in condensed working hours, please speak to your manager and/or HR.

A business case was presented to the board on salary sacrifice schemes. It was agreed to pilot a small trial in 2024 to test the potential for this within Disability Positive as another benefit. We will update you later in the year.

After the exciting coproduction work we carried out on behalf of Cheshire Disabled People's Panel on the review of day services, we're really pleased that the council have asked us to lead on the coproduction of accommodation - watch this space!

CEO's
Update



It was lovely to see so many of you at the company Christmas meal, it was great to finally have an in person get together again for the festivities! Congratulations to the award winners, everyone who was nominated and those who won a prize in the raffle.

I hope you all had a restful Christmas and have had a great start to the new year.

**Happy
New
Year**



Activity Groups (Buzz, Good Company, Sensory Hive, Duke of Edinburgh)

The team have continued to deliver weekly activity sessions and there have been lots of Christmas events during the last few weeks including Christmas crafts, Christmas parties, visits to panto's and Chester Zoo Lanterns.

We were delighted to be able to offer 60 free pantomime tickets to families living within Cheshire, funded by Children in Need. The cost of pantomimes locally are expensive, especially within the current cost of living crisis, so we were delighted that all 60 tickets were allocated.

The team are continuing to develop the Good Company Group for adults based in Chester and are looking to open the service up to more adults in Jan 2024. We already have 5 new members registered to attend activity sessions.

We have had some great news regarding grant applications recently submitted – we have secured a small grant to expand Good Company and a small grant to deliver holiday activity sessions for young people aged 12+ in 2024.

We have welcomed new children to the Sensory Hive Group and Buzz Youth Group and we have started to deliver the bronze D of E award for young people aged 14-24 years. We are excited to provide an opportunity for 6 young people to achieve this award as we are aware there are a few issues with other local providers with completion of the residential section of the award.

We are looking forward to 2024 and continuing to develop services to ensure more young people have an opportunity to attend inclusive activity sessions of their choice within their local community.



Community Connections (funding, 1-1 support and information/signposting)

The service has continued to provide funding to enable young people to purchase activities of their choice within their local and wider community and to enable parents to have a short break. Young people are attending lots of different community-based activities, and we are currently working with over 400 families.

We have had a few incidents when parents have incorrectly used the funding available and subsequently, we have worked with the local authority to ensure their terms and conditions for the service are clear and accessible.

The team are continuing to support a number of young people on an individual basis to attend activities of their choice within the community. This work continues to be challenging but we carry on with a positive attitude and ensure the voice of children and families is being heard. We have successfully supported 3 children to attend community-based activity sessions independent of parent/carers.

In January 2024, we will be contacting all providers who attended our inclusive training programme earlier this year to review how the training has impacted their service delivery. We also have free resources to give to providers which we hope will support the delivery of accessible activity sessions for all young people.



Mel has continued to work with the local authority Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) Commissioning Team to ensure their offer is accessible for all and delivered a workshop about the Equality Act for their full staff team. The Christmas HAF Programme was launched by the local authority in the December and we have noted that providers are still requesting that parent/carers attend activity sessions with their young people if they have lived experience of disability. Mel will be discussing this with the HAF steering group in 2024 and will be providing feedback from parents/carers.

The Information and Signposting service continues to support families to research what activities may be available in their local area.

Cate has continued to attend community networking events to promote our volunteer opportunities and the volunteer video is proving to be a good tool to show interested people exactly what the organisation does and how volunteers are crucial to our service delivery.

Volunteers

We thanked our volunteers for all their hard work in 2023 with an invitation to the Christmas Meal on 15th December or for those who could not attend this event, a small gift was sent with a thank you card.

We hope you all had a lovely Christmas break and wish you a very peaceful 2024



Happy New Year!

Throughout December Supported Banking have:

- Completed 53 external audits.
- Processed 1897 payments to PA's and care agencies.
- Completed 443 bank reconciliations.
- Opened 21 new accounts.

2 members of the team have trialled condensed hours which was successful.

We have been working on becoming more efficient with our processes and have started with some feature elaborations on caseworker to enable us to use the system instead of spreadsheets to track our caseloads. So far we have integrated reconciliations and awaiting funds.

Happy New Year to you all!

It's been a very busy month for ACSS, the phones never stopped. We have some very complex cases that have taken hours of our time to resolve. The Bolton Brokerage is up to 168 referrals. Well done Caitlan, Chris and Ellie for all their hard work. We are now recruiting for another advisor. S117 - 9 clients identified to take part in the pilot.

ACSS

The Learning Service had a quiet month and we would appreciate all staff to share the social media posts and information about the training that we offer.

Sadly Chris Scholes Lawrence has left the building and we wish him the best in his future role at Reaseheath College as an Engineering Apprentice Mentor, (not that he knows anything about engineering) but we all know how good he is with words. We will be recruiting another Advisor.

Finally we had confirmation about the 6 months extension to the AC&SS contract for Cheshire West and Chester Direct Payment and Cheshire and Merseyside ICB for Personal Health Budgets which will end September 2024.



Staff Awards 2023

It was so good to see everyone that could make it to the Christmas meal held at Cottons, and not a bad effort with the Christmas jumpers!

We presented the Staff Awards which were gratefully received!

The winners of each category were:

The Expert Award...Annette Gallagher, ACSS Manager

The Unsung Hero Award...Natahsa Greenfield, Payroll Manager

The Christmas Spirit Award...Steve Wood, SBS Clerk

The Team Player Award...Elissa Bagnall, Payroll Clerk

Living & Demonstrating our Company Values Award...Rachel Carruthers, Receptionist/Admin

Staff Survey

Thank you to everyone who has completed the Staff Survey. The results are being collated and feedback will be given in the coming weeks.

Pilot for Condensed Working Hours

We are pleased to confirm that the pilot that was conducted from May to October 2023 was a success. 8 staff members were part of the trial across 5 departments. A report which details the findings from the trial has been shared with the Board and approved to be rolled out to all staff to be considered for condensed hours. Consideration to such requests will be treated as we do with Flexible Working. The Employee Handbook has been updated to now reflect this within the Flexible Working Section.

Annual Leave & Birthday Days

As we are now fast approaching towards the end of the annual leave year (end of March) this is a gentle reminder to ensure you have booked any remaining annual leave. The HR System will allow you to book holiday for the next annual leave year (1 April 2023-31 March 2024) if you wish to start planning ahead and of course don't forget 'Birthday Days' should be recorded in the system under 'Sickness/Absence', select 'Other Paid Absence' from the drop down list, and enter 'Birthday Days' in the Details box!

Starters

We are pleased to welcome Ashley Fairhurst who has joined us on the 2 January as an ACSS Advisor for the Bolton brokerage contract. 🍷

We wish everyone a Happy New Year from Sue & Sally!

1 Data breaches
ZERO HSE incidents or near misses
ZERO Formal complaints
1900 External calls

**Operations
Admin**

Happy New year to all!

A big reminder as we enter the new year being mindful of costs is to keep printing black and white where possible and to always email rather than post. We currently are looking at posting costs and the number of letters that we send, and I take this opportunity to remind you that if you do need to post a letter out then you must write your department code in the top left hand corner. This will let reception know who to charge the item to. Please do not write anything on the right hand side as this is where the franking stamp goes.



As at our last pay day (20th December) we provided 6811 hours (down from 7546 last month), to 44 Principal Members (up 2 from last month) and 65 Personal Assistants (the same as last month). We also retain a healthy list of new applicants looking to join us.

Our last Board Meeting considered 'Dunbar's Law'. This is work from the 1990s of the British anthropologist Robin Dunbar, who identified a correlation between primate brain size and average social group size. He proposed that humans can comfortably maintain 150 stable relationships – that is relationships in which an individual knows who each person is and how each person relates to every other person. He explained the principle informally as "the number of people you would not feel embarrassed about joining uninvited for a drink if you happened to bump into them in a bar." The theory imposes a limit of 150 in any group or organisation because to maintain group cohesion, individuals must be able to meet their own requirements, as well as coordinate their behaviour with other individuals in the group. Exceed 150, and a network is unlikely to last long or cohere well.

Obviously, there are organisations who number more than 150, but Dunbar's point is that for these organisations to function effectively they are organised into sub-groups no larger than 150 people. With 44 Principal, 65 Personal Assistant and 33 Supporting members (total 142) we are close to Dunbar's number, and day to day experience is suggesting that we are close to a size where the sense of 'community' that we have built could be displaced by the kind of large-scale soulless provision that we wish to avoid.

The Board agreed that over the duration of our 2023-30 Business Strategy (which aligns with Disability Positive) 'growth' would consist of:

1. Diversifying (and monetising) the service offer to our existing membership (such as developing an 'After We're Gone' service).
2. Starting entirely new 'Dunbar's Law' groups probably outside of Cheshire.

What this means in practice is that in most cases we will only be able to take on new members as others leave.

Work on our 'After We Are Gone' service continues and is likely to have a profound effect on the way that the Co-Operative develops. It offers a huge opportunity - not only to grow the 'businesses' without over extending our membership, but also to offer something really significant to members that is about 'more than care'.

And finally, to the Christmas Do!! Held at the Port and Anchor in Ellesmere Port on 1st December and involving a three-course meal, a Robbie Williams tribute act and a disco. What a banger! What an absolute banger! If you had wanted to experience everything that North-West Care Co-Operative has been about ever since we launched in 2019, that evening was it! A large and representative sample across our entire membership living life well! Here's a selection of our photos from the celebrations, to see them all follow the link to our Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/carecooperatives/>



All augurs well for an even better 2024!

And you can keep up to do date with our journey in our weekly You Tube update posted every Friday on the website at: <https://nwcarecoop.co.uk/>



Calling All Coop Members!

Don't forget to choose Good Company Social Group as your Coop Local Community Fund charity! Every time you buy Coop branded products and services using your membership card you'll be helping us raise funds to support disabled young adults to make new friends and take part in local community activities, reducing social isolation and increasing self-confidence and emotional wellbeing.

Business Development



To find out more click the link, or speak to Lisa Cormack.

<https://membership.coop.co.uk/causes/76670>

No Limits is back!

As mentioned in the last newsletter our next No Limits event will be taking place at the Memorial Court in Northwich (Brio Leisure) on Saturday 2nd March 2024.

Bookings for stalls and entertainment are already coming in, but if you have any ideas of community groups and services you think we should be featuring, then please let Steve, Diane or Lisa know.

Working with local social enterprises

We're working with The Neuromuscular Centre's 'Design & Print' service on the promotional materials for No Limits, who offer employment and training opportunities to people with neuromuscular conditions.

We'd love to increase our work with social enterprises that are providing income for local charities. If you know anyone who you think might provide a service we could incorporate into our work, then please let Kate or Lisa know.


Policy and Communications

Our Policy Influencing Team have continued to respond to consultations over recent months. As well as drafting a response to Cheshire West and Cheshire Council's Funding Our Future consultation, and we drafted a response to the House of Lord's consultation on transition from education to employment for younger disabled people.

Following up on the consultation response, our Chief Executive was asked to submit evidence at a committee session with the House of Lords in December. Consultation responses are an important part of ensuring that the voices of disabled people are heard when national and local government are making policy decisions that may impact on people's day to day lives.

Communications

Social Media wise, Diane has noted the top three posts in order of interest (reach and engagement) for this month (December):

 Good Company - festive celebrations

 Festive closures

 Social Media break



Social Media - We need your help!

As part of our ongoing strategy we need to increase our reach, engagement and followers beyond our local areas to where people, potential clients and funders may not know of us and the incredible work we do for people living with disability and long term health conditions. You could help to get our name out there, all we're asking you to do if you can - is please 'like, share and comment' on some of our social media posts (all of our accounts can be found at the foot of the newsletter).


For those who are worried about being inundated with Disability Positive posts on your feed, just like the posts, you don't have to like/follow our page if you prefer not to. I can see that some of our wonderful staff and volunteers have already started to do this - 🙏 thankyou! It is already having an affect.


No Limits


You will begin to see social media posts and more detail on our website about our No Limits event on Saturday 2nd March. Again, could you please help us advertise by spreading the word and increase the footfall once more this year. 2022's No Limits was very well received and attended, but working on some of the feedback we received, people mentioned that they weren't aware it was going on. So we're advertising everywhere we can that has not cost implications - social media being the most obvious. Please look out for our posts and help us to make No Limits another great success.


Thank you!



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