

ADASS SpringBoard – Developing the next generation of care leaders

Cath Roff (Trustee Sponsor for the SpringBoard Programme, EDI Lead at ADASS and Director of Adult Social Care Services at Leeds City Council)

The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) recently hosted a graduation ceremony for the principal social workers (PSWs) who had successfully taken part in the ADASS SpringBoard Programme. Cath Roff (Trustee Sponsor for the SpringBoard Programme, EDI Lead at ADASS and Director of Adult Social Care Services at Leeds City Council) shares the impact the programme has made on those attending and the importance of continued investment in the sector.

When I offered to be the Trustee Sponsor for The ADASS SpringBoard Programme, I'll admit we were not sure who would apply, and whether it would really work given the pressures I know all our PSW members have been facing over the last two years. But with the support of our Tunstall colleagues who sponsored the program, and some of whose members joined the cohort, it was amazing to attend the virtual graduation ceremony recently to celebrate the successful completion of the course by so many people.

Launched in 2021 by ADASS and Tunstall Healthcare, SpringBoard focuses on identifying and developing the next generation of care leaders and innovators, and providing them with specialist support to improve their impact and influencing skills. Phased over several weeks, the programme blends various methods of online learning with personal assignments and contains three modules: emotional intelligence and the growth mindset, personal impact and influencing others, assertiveness and challenging positively.

Educating and empowering the social care leaders of the future is crucial if we are to increase and improve innovation, ensure our services meet the population's health and care needs, and deliver greater integration.

Being effective leaders is about many things, but perhaps most importantly for PSWs it's about influencing directors, and others, to champion the value and essential importance of frontline social work practice. That is why the SpringBoard course has been so valuable, and it's clear from the feedback of participants that it has enabled them to fulfil their current role more effectively, as well as providing skills that will stand them in good stead in the future.

The impact of Covid

2021's cohort have participated in less than ideal circumstances, with the pandemic exerting extra strain on local authorities, and limiting the ability to deliver the programme in person.

However, trainer Will McKelvie, of Quantum Coaching and Consultancy, consistently reported that PSWs taking part in SpringBoard made excellent use of their course materials and were incredibly committed to making the most of the programme.

Feedback from the cohort

The first year of SpringBoard has proven to be a resounding success, with a very high level of engagement and attainment by attendees, and positive feedback from delegates about the ways the course will help them in their current and future roles.

Kelly McAleese, principal social worker at Rutland County Council, commented: “What I wanted out of SpringBoard was to learn more about leadership, whether what I was doing was effective, and what other methods were out there. The new course offered plenty to take away in terms of new techniques, but it also gave me confidence by highlighting other things that I was already doing well.”

Simon Homes, principal social worker, Isle of Wight Council and vice-chair of national PSW Network believes that it’s crucial to regularly revisit personal skill sets to avoid becoming stagnant. He added: “I learned that I need to work a bit more on enabling, pausing and letting others make decisions. The course has proved valuable in helping maintain a sharp focus in relation to the work of the practice development team I manage.”

Vanna Changlee, principal social worker, London Borough of Waltham Forest, said: “I welcomed the opportunity to meet, albeit virtually, with PSWs from around the country. This was really helpful as some of the things that came up were very similar to my own experiences. No matter where you are, we’re all facing comparable challenges and issues – not feeling that you’re alone with it is important.”

Gemma Laister, principal social worker, Hull City Council believes that small things can have a big impact on colleagues. She commented: “More than anything, I learned about myself. The breadth of what’s involved is really wide, but when I got to the end of module three, I could really see how it all interlinked, from what I’d learned six months ago in module one. SpringBoard has taught me that even the smallest thing can have a major impact on the people you work with, for example turning notifications off when in a one-to-one meeting.”

Looking forward

Feedback clearly shows that the SpringBoard course has enabled participants to fulfil their roles more effectively, and develop skills that will not only enhance their professional development in the shorter term but also provide a foundation for new roles as their career progresses. After all, we have every confidence that some of the SpringBoard stars will be future Directors of Adult Social Care.

Effective change relies upon good leadership, and as second year of SpringBoard commences in a few weeks’ time, I look forward to seeing how the course can enable a second cohort of willing students to unlock their full leadership potential, and feel confident in contributing towards service transformation through their careers.