

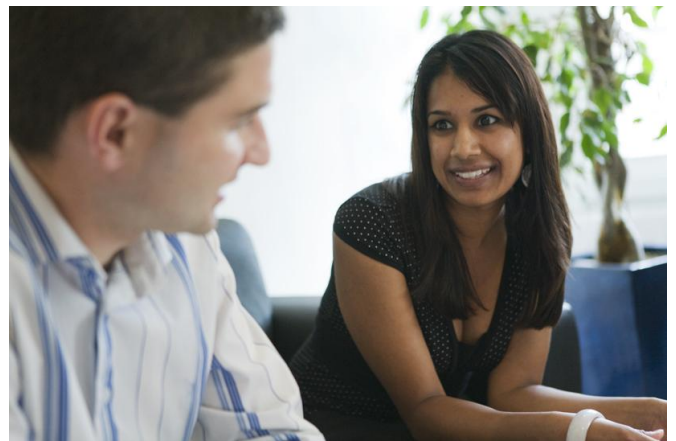
CASE STUDY



THE ADVOCACY PROJECT

“As an independent advocacy organisation, we were proud to be one of the first in our sector to achieve Investors in People. Our association with the Standard validates our desire and overriding drive to ‘make a difference’ to the lives and experiences of the clients and employees with whom we interact.”

Chris Mackie
Development Manager



BACKGROUND

Size: 25 and 25 volunteers
Sector: voluntary and charity
Location: Scotland
Status: Most recently recognised in 2008

THE ORGANISATION

The Advocacy Project (Scotland) Limited is a registered charity established in 1992 and run by a voluntary Board of six members. The advocacy services it provides enable vulnerable people to have a voice on the issues that are important to them. Relying on the provision of external funding from a variety of sources, The Advocacy Project (Scotland) Limited currently employs 25 people. Together with the volunteer Board, the provision of its service is supported by a further 21 volunteer advocates who work on a part time basis.

The Advocacy Project has had Investors in People accreditation since 2002 and were recognised through the new approach in November 2008. The organisation sees Investors in People accreditation as integral to its current strategy for future growth and ongoing development of its current market position. The total number of people in scope for the review was 48, of which 19 were interviewed resulting in a percentage sample of 40%.

- Relatively few issues with sickness absence
- The new approach assisted with all fundamentals of the restructure
- Resulted in the organisation enhancing the team capability.

THE CHALLENGE

As a small organisation with limited resources, it was important for The Advocacy Project to establish that Investors in People would be a tangible return on investment. However the assessment and subsequent accreditation provided a bench mark seal of approval of what the organisation had achieved. It also uncovered legitimate areas that could stretch and drive the business upwards which was invaluable.

In November 2006, The Advocacy Project radically changed its operation, consolidating from four separate locations into one. Subsequently in April 2007, and following a review of organisational structures, management roles and responsibilities were redefined. The streamlining of the operation was set against a challenging external marketplace, which has seen increasing pressures in securing funding and more competition between advocacy providers. These had impacted heavily on the organisation and were issues that required to be addressed.

Managers within The Advocacy Project were concerned about the time commitment required for another IIP review. When it was investigated, it became apparent that there would be minimal preparation required and significant benefits to participating. These included evaluating the impact of the restructure, and the information that could be gleaned from participating.

The challenge was also to fulfil several planned elements to assess the business against the Investors in People best practice framework, and identify if it continues to meet the standard at Level 1. In addition, managers wanted to gain feedback on the appropriate aspects of the framework that related to the organisation's objectives. Specifically given that a key requirement of the organisation's strategy is to recruit and retain motivated people.

THE STRATEGY

The Advocacy Project used the new approach to establish whether the recent restructure had been successful. This was borne from the organisation's drive to continuously strive for improvement and achieve excellence in the delivery of advocacy services. Therefore, in terms of the restructure, managers and board members needed to know if it was working, what they could do differently or what did they need to concentrate on.

As with much of the voluntary sector, funding for services can be time-limited and unreliable. Therefore, the longevity of staff positions cannot always be guaranteed.

The Advocacy Project also utilises volunteers to deliver advocacy. It is part of the organisation's approach that volunteers get the same training and development as employed workers. So the new approach ensured that

feedback was obtained from across all these different employees to get a true understanding of how the business was operating and to what effect.

The feedback used key elements of the Investors in People best practice framework on how the revised structure could support staff. The office relocation presented challenges for some employees but a variety of factors, including the introduction of a flexi-time system, ensured that all staff remain completely engaged. The review also provided clear feedback on how the revised structure was also supporting:

- Internal staff development
- Making the most of staff talents
- Career progression activity

THE RESULTS

The Advocacy Project is a very honest company with a significant emphasis placed on training and development. There are many successful procedures in place and by using the Standard, these have been enhanced. Individual staff members are able to see how their objectives align with the organisation's objectives. A significant piece of work is ongoing to introduce new Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which demonstrate the positive outcomes for clients, clearly linked to the organisation's principles. Taking this further will enhance the organisation's focus on delivery and performance measures through the company, and define managers' roles, values and behaviours. The new approach assisted with all fundamentals of the restructure. An upwards trend in the number of clients supported has also been demonstrated.

Without a doubt there is an embedded culture of support within the organisation. The advocacy role is frequently one that causes stress, which is acknowledged in some as contributing to high levels of sickness absence and turnover of staff. However, The Advocacy Project has relatively few issues in this area. This can be directly attributed to working with the new approach and Investors in People has helped immensely with the working environment. The Advocacy Project is habitually dedicated to its people and the people it helps. The emphasis on wellbeing for staff and clients is evident. This is something Investors in People has exposed and is apparent internally as well as to the rest of the market place.

Learning and development is vital to the operation of the organisation and it is clear that the revised structure supports this. There are 25 full time staff and a similar number of volunteers. Due to the organisation's excellent development programme, some of those volunteers have successfully become full time members of staff. Whether full time staff member or volunteer, The Advocacy Project makes sure that the structure enables its people to make the most of their talents

Refreshingly, The Advocacy Project doesn't only put what it has learnt into practice immediately prior to a review but is using what it has extracted to better the business on a continual basis. It has helped the organisation identify its good practice and the fact that it is dedicated to continuous improvement. Board members and managers are not complacent and aren't satisfied until they are doing everything possible to improve things and the review has underlined how to achieve this.

In essence, consolidating the operational base into one location has enabled the staff to share knowledge and expertise formally, informally and routinely. It has resulted in the organisation enhancing the team capability and promoting a more team-based rather than insular or 'silo' approach. The organisation has also opted for an annual review and already has an improvement plan to work to.