

Innovation in Attracting and Retaining Baby Boomers

Agewell – Sandwell Primary Care Trust

February 2009



EFA Overview

Sandwell was the largest of eight pre-retirement pilot sites funded by the Department of Health and overseen by the Health Development Agency in 2001 to 2003. The pilot looked at ways to improve the health of men and women over 50 by addressing health inequalities in life expectancy using midlife interventions. It was jointly managed by Agewell and Workwell, two health at work projects within the Sandwell Primary Care Trust.

Initiative

The project teams set out to understand the lifestyle and health issues facing older workers in their region and to find ways to help them deal with practical issues.

Aims of initiative

The aim of the pilot project was to target older workers between 50 and 65 years old in small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities. The Sandwell pilot was asked to provide health checks in a number of companies, produce a local information resource and provide pre-retirement training.

Approach taken

The project leaders worked with the Black Country Chamber of Commerce to gain access to local employers and employees. Information was gathered from employers, employees, local surveys and focus groups which concluded that:

- Pre-retirement initiatives were taking place too late. People felt they needed to plan lifestyle changes and have access to appropriate information from a much earlier age to decide whether to retire or continue working.
- Employers stated that 'loss of worker, loss of skills' was one of the main issues, as most of the industry in the area is engineering, and younger people were not interested in that type of work.
- Employees stated they would continue working after retirement age to keep in contact with other individuals and to remain active and involved. Some also cited financial needs.
- Some recently retired people said that they felt isolated both mentally and physically after leaving work because they had nothing to replace it with.

It was decided that pre-retirement initiatives were happening too late and midlife interventions were needed to enable people to access services, advice and information at a much earlier age.

Agewell, which is part of Sandwell PCT, decided to look at older workers within the PCT first. The project co-ordinators worked with focus groups of older workers and fed their comments into policies including the PCT's draft retirement and flexible retirement policy. Following this work Sandwell PCT decided to fund projects targeted at midlife issues.

The project team then developed a two day course to give older people access to all the lifestyle and health information needed to make informed

Case Study



decisions on how to keep working in the future. External organisations were invited to present on specific subjects, such as health, finance, leisure and relationships.

The NHS Improving Working Lives initiative helped to establish the two day course within Sandwell PCT for employees aged 50 and over. It is now part of the PCT's learning and development programme and is delivered by a range of external organisations including adult education providers, volunteer bureaux, Sandwell PCT Physical Activity Team and the local pension service.

Workwell manages the Health at Work programme for SMEs and it joined forces with the Black Country Chamber of Commerce to offer the course to local employers. Each business has different needs that must be addressed individually. For example some local businesses cannot release staff for a two day course and so a number of modular options were designed.

Challenges

Finding organisations to deliver relevant information on the four key subject areas of health, finance, leisure and relationships was a challenge. The information needed to be carefully targeted to help participants make valid choices on how and when to retire, or continue working.

The project team also worked hard to persuade Sandwell PCT of the benefits of recruiting, retaining and retraining their older workers. The project team helped senior managers to understand that employees in this age range need support to keep them in the workplace by recognising skills and training needs. It also worked with SMEs to encourage them to use the courses on offer.

Outcomes and benefits of the initiative

The course and the wider programme has been recognised by NHS Employers as an example of good practice and is shown on its website as a case study addressing positive action on age.

A number of courses have been run for Sandwell PCT and detailed feedback from participants shows:

- Many people want to work or have to work after retirement age.
- The course benefits the employer and leads to discussion between employee and employer about future training needs and retirement options.
- Remaining both physically and mentally active is important to many individuals.
- Giving people informed choices at an earlier age enables them to take control of their future years.

Lessons learned

There has been low uptake from men within Sandwell PCT and work is going on to engage with male employees. Initial feedback suggests promotional literature for the course needs to be redesigned to be more relevant to men. This would also help to reach male employees within SMEs.

Case Study