

Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust achieves an Inaugural Recognition Award with its invaluable work supporting employees facing financial hardship

Amid the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, many staff members at Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust faced significant financial hardships, which threatened their ability to continue working. Rising costs led some staff to consider additional shifts, while others faced more severe challenges, including homelessness and the need to flee unsafe living conditions. Recognising the critical impact of financial wellbeing on staff retention, performance, and overall morale, the Trust launched the Staff Financial Wellbeing Project. This initiative was designed to provide comprehensive support to staff experiencing financial difficulties, thereby enabling them to remain in their roles and maintain their focus on delivering quality patient care.

The initiative comprises a range of targeted support offers, each aimed at addressing specific financial challenges faced by staff. It has not only supported staff within the Trust but has also extended its reach to health and social care partners across West Yorkshire.

Invaluable support

The Trust, with the support of Leeds Hospital Charity, established the Employee Support Fund to provide immediate financial assistance to staff members in urgent need. The fund offers grants of up to £500, with larger amounts available in special circumstances. This support has helped staff in various critical situations, such as securing temporary accommodation after fleeing unsafe homes. Over the past 12 months, the fund has awarded over £27,000 to help 145 staff members, providing a crucial safety net during times of crisis.

Money Buddies

In collaboration with the financial charity Money Buddies, the Trust offers one-on-one financial advice, including guidance on benefit entitlement and debt management. Due to the programme's success, it has been expanded to include health and social care partners in Leeds, Kirklees, Bradford, Calderdale, and Wakefield. Over the past year, 92 staff members accessed Money Buddies, resulting in a total financial gain of over £500,000, which includes the recovery of unclaimed benefits and debts being written off or managed.

Discounts and awareness raising

To further alleviate financial pressures, the Trust has secured exclusive staff discounts in partnership with businesses such as Pure Gym and local food stores. Additionally, the Trust has partnered with Vivup to offer lifestyle discounts and a salary sacrifice scheme for home and electrical goods, allowing staff to spread the cost over 12 to 24 months.

A Welfare Officer role, supported by the Defence Medical Welfare Service, provides practical assistance to staff in complex situations across the Leeds healthcare system. From January to May 2024, the Welfare Officer provided practical support to 18 staff members.

The initiative also includes support and training via the delivery of webinars on various financial topics and through rolling out Financial Wellbeing Weeks alongside a range of partner organisations.

The initiative has received overwhelmingly positive feedback from staff, with many expressing relief and gratitude for the support provided:

A staff member shared the difference the support had made to them: "I am more than delighted with the fee given to help me and put me in a better position financially. I can't express how relieved I feel & this will enable me to look forward to resuming my job at the desired place of work. I really do not know how to put into words how much I appreciate this."

Anna Edgren-Davies, Head of HR at Leeds Teaching Hospitals, commended the project, stating: *"I still find it astonishing, the financial gains made for staff by some of the services provided here at Leeds Teaching Hospitals. The team have worked extremely hard to work with staff to implement and provide financial support. The amount of communications and promo work that goes into this is incredible. It's award worthy!"*

Recognition and impact

Claire McGarry, Health and Wellbeing Practitioner at Leeds Teaching Hospitals, explains why she applied for an NHS Health at Work Network Recognition Award:

"I wanted to shout about all the amazing work my team have done over the past few years working on the financial wellbeing project. It's hard to comprehend sometimes, the difficult circumstances that some of our workforce find themselves in. Having all this support in place can literally be a lifeline to some. I am incredibly proud of what I believe goes above and beyond an organisation's ability to support staff wellbeing."

Building on the project's success, the Trust is considering further steps to enhance financial support for staff, including securing ongoing funding for the Welfare Officer position due to high demand. The Trust's commitment to financial wellbeing remains a priority, as evidenced by the Leeds Hospital Charity's pledge to continue supporting the Employee Support Fund and Money Buddies into 2024 and 2025 and what is clear to see is the direct and invaluable impact of the initiative on the individuals it supports.