Communicating with our employees through an advocate network

Everybody has a right to be safe no matter who they are or what their circumstances. We all have a duty to ensure the safety and welfare of vulnerable adults and we must ensure that we are doing all that we can to protect the most vulnerable members of our society treating them with care and compassion and dignity and respect.

For Cornwall Council, this is not just a responsibility for employees who work in our adult care and support services. It applies to every service, team and individual which engages with vulnerable adults in the work that we do.

This case study shows how employees from across all of our directorates act as advocates to help to raise awareness of safeguarding and communicate with our employees about the importance of treating everyone with dignity and respect.

Getting to know our advocates and what they do

As a Council we employ approximately 11,000 people across the county. Given the diverse range of services we provide not all of our employees work in an office on a daily basis and therefore would not have regular access to a computer or email, particularly if they are working with local communities. Because of this, it is really important for us to make sure we communicate with all of our employees as effectively as possible and in the right way.

So, to help us ensure that everyone is aware of safeguarding and understands what it is and what it means, we have developed the role of the ‘safeguarding advocate’.

Our safeguarding advocates play a really important role in making sure that our employees know about this important issue. They help us to communicate important safeguarding information across the Council.

We have advocates in every service of the Council so if anyone has any general questions or concerns, or would like to talk to someone about a particular safeguarding issue then our advocates are there to help.

Our advocates are passionate about safeguarding and have volunteered to take on this important role in addition to their normal day to day duties.

How do we support our advocates to support our employees?

In order to support our advocates and help them to feel confident in their role each of our advocates receive a welcome email from our Chief
Executive which provides them with all the information they need to know about being an advocate and what is expected of them and explains where they can access information and tools to help them in their role. We give each advocate an advocate card, the size of a credit card, which reminds them of their role and responsibilities and useful contact information.

We send regular e-newsletters which are full of information and guidance about safeguarding and hold regular events where our advocates can discuss concerns and find out more about safeguarding by meeting specialists who work with children, young people and vulnerable adults.

**Who is ISAAC and how is he helping to communicate with our employees?**

To provide our advocates with an identity, we created ISAAC, ‘I safeguard adults and children’ and then brought him to life in the shape of an owl.

We chose the owl as he has big eyes for seeing and excellent hearing so he will always listen to what he is being told. ISAAC has proved to be a very popular little character both across the organisation and with our partners and we have used him in awareness raising campaigns and brought him to life in a short DVD.

We have also encouraged external suppliers of services to the organisation to join the advocate’s scheme. This has been part of a targeted awareness raising campaign to ensure the importance of safeguarding and their responsibilities are understood. Each supplier has a nominated safeguarding representative who is a key point of contact within their own company and a key contact for the Council.

**Listening and learning**

Our advocates play a really important role in providing feedback, telling us what they think is working well and what they think could be improved so we can continually learn and improve the way we communicate safeguarding information to them and our employees.

As a result of the feedback they have provided we have developed a wide range of resources and tools designed to increase awareness of safeguarding. These tools include, bite size guides with basic information about what safeguarding is and case studies highlighting how we deal our services deal with and respond to safeguarding issues.

To ensure that we are meeting the needs of our employees we conduct an annual consultation to provide feedback and to allow us to develop our
communication activities for the next twelve months. We discuss the results of the consultation with our advocates and work with them to ensure that our proposed activities are robust and achievable. This has proved helpful in strengthening our relationship with our advocates and building their confidence in their role as an advocate.

Let’s hear from our advocates

‘As an advocate within the Community Safety and Protection Directorate there is a real sense of confidence that frontline employees are recognising potential safeguarding concerns and those concerns are effectively channelled to the appropriate team’

‘Cornwall Council has developed a very committed network of advocates. By maintaining regular networking events and training sessions it provides me with the confidence and skills to effectively process safeguarding concerns to the appropriate team’

‘The publicity that ISSAC has contributed to the Safeguarding agenda has significantly enhanced the awareness of safeguarding, and now employees proactively raise appropriate concerns through an advocate’

‘I feel that the role of advocate is very important and has helped maintain a focus on the duty of care that everyone has in ensuring that young people and vulnerable adults are kept safe. Employees working in the Localism Team are in contact with local communities on a daily basis and it is valuable to have a point of contact within the team if they feel something is not quite right or suspect that vulnerable people are being put at risk’

‘As a Community Network Manager it has also helped me personally to; firstly be more aware of potential safeguarding issues and secondly to know what to do if a potential or actual safeguarding situation arises’.

For more information

If you would like to find out more about our safeguarding advocates please email: corpcomm@cornwall.gov.uk