

# Wrexham Glyndŵr University Case study notes

## Why we signed the pledge

WGU is a small university – we have around 7000 students whereas Cardiff has over 30 000 and Swansea over 20 000. However, we are a ‘Reaching Wider’ University, meaning that we pride ourselves on inclusivity and diversity

22% of our students receive Disabled Student’s Allowance – the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest proportion in the UK – and 24% of our undergraduate students come from ‘low participation neighbourhoods’ – again, an exceptionally high number.

As a result, many need a considerable amount of support and, as a result, many need high levels of support, which can be demanding, even stressful, for support staff, tutors and other academic staff. Like every other public organisation in the UK we are working with limited resources and lower staff numbers than might be ideal, which can also take a toll.

I am the ‘Chaplaincy Coordinator’ at WGU, meaning that I am responsible for managing our team of 13 voluntary Chaplains (who come from a variety of Faiths). The Chaplaincy is the only source of confidential 1-2-1 support in the university for staff, so I often come into contact with staff who are stressed, some of them have mental health issues. In 2016 I realised that more staff than students were actually approaching us for support, and discussed with my then manager possible ways we could provide better care for my colleagues.

Looking online I came across Time to Change Wales. From my own personal experience, I realised that what you offer via the pledge is precisely what I was looking for – both the chance to train Workplace Champions to listen to staff in need of a listening ear, and the opportunity to encourage senior management to look at putting extra support and training in place for line managers and others that could then offer support and signposting to any of their staff that they realised were struggling. Both my line manager and the HR department were keen to work on the pledge, which the Vice Chancellor signed at an event attended by a T2CW Community Champion on October 2017.

## How we promote Mental Health Awareness

We have organised a variety of events including drop-in coffee mornings, running an information Stall at our annual Staff Conference, a mental health themed art trail around campus using artworks provided by students, a Mindful ‘Walk and Talk’ around campus held one lunchtime and Time to Talk Day stalls. One of our best attended events was an end-of-academic –year Picnic at which staff relaxed together and we provided information on common mental health conditions.

We have also gone door-to-door around staff offices knocking and handing out information on the Champions and our events and been asked to be involved in induction sessions for new staff members.

WGU holds an annual ‘Respect Fair’ at which we run workshops at which people share their experiences of being in groups that have ‘Protected Characteristics’ under the Equality and Diversity Act, and we have run workshops on recognising depression and supporting those experiencing it based on staff’s own lived experience.

We also publicise a dedicated phone line (with answering machine) and an email address on which staff in need of a listening ear can leave their details. These can be accessed by all the Workplace Champions who then arrange to meet the staff member in question.

We are aware that our Workplace Champions have taken on the role in addition to their usual and often very demanding roles and duties. Therefore, we keep things simple by meeting only once every 2 months, restricting the number of events to 3-4 each year and staffing information stalls in shifts of 30 mins-1 hour each.

## How this helps in the workplace

There have been a large number of staff changes at the University recently, and many staff have accessed team members’ help in dealing with the uncertainties related to this. Activities such as the Art Trail and the picnic have

offered opportunities for people to begin talking about mental health in unthreatening surroundings which has been a benefit to many who are then, we hope, empowered to talk more generally about what they are experiencing.