

Abi Davies

Regional Wellbeing Officer
Interplay

Interplay is a charity offering integrated play and leisure opportunities for young people with extra support needs from 2 to 25 years of age.

Many children are in segregated education, and therefore, daily play opportunities can often be difficult to access. Play, leisure, and social activities provide a very useful medium for children and young people to learn the social and independent skills that they need throughout their teenage and adult lives.

Interplay started life as a summer play project in 1987 to overcome the issues caused by this form of segregation. By providing support for children with disabilities and additional needs to access mainstream play, we enabled them to have better access to the social interaction needed to develop necessary skills. The charity has grown over the last 30+ years to become a year-round provider of inclusive play, leisure, and activities for 2-25-year-olds in the counties of Swansea and Neath Port Talbot.

Why did you sign the pledge?

Our goal is to further champion wellbeing and mental health support within Interplay, leveraging the resources provided by Time to Change Wales to empower our staff to prioritise their own mental health and enhance our team dynamic. Additionally, cultivating a team environment that is more attuned to mental health can positively influence the young people we serve, encouraging them to adopt a more optimistic perspective on their own mental wellbeing and reassuring them of the availability of mental health support whenever they need it.

How will you promote mental health awareness in your organisation?

To maintain the centrality of wellbeing and mental health discussions, we prioritise these topics in supervision, ensuring the mental health and wellbeing of our staff are given due attention. During our weekly team meetings, we dedicate a segment to wellbeing activities, providing staff with an opportunity to engage in relaxation techniques before continuing with their workday. These meetings also serve as a platform for open dialogue, where team members share updates and offer support to one another.

In my office, I uphold an open-door policy, encouraging staff to approach me whenever they need support. I am readily available to discuss their feelings and explore avenues for assistance. Furthermore, we are committed to utilising resources from Time to Change Wales to amplify our efforts to promote mental health and wellbeing. While we have previously attended mental health events, the limitations imposed by Covid-19 have hindered our participation. However, we are determined to reengage with these events and leverage the resources provided by Time to Change Wales.

As a small charity-funded team, access to such resources will be invaluable. They will reduce costs and streamline our efforts to promote mental health within our organisation.

What long-term actions will you take to enable a positive mental well-being environment in your workplace?

Creating a positive mental health environment within our team hinges on fostering open communication and providing tailored support to each member. We prioritise this by ensuring that staff feel heard and supported in ways that suit their individual needs. Recognising that different team members may require varying forms of assistance, we maintain clear communication channels and have mechanisms in place to offer timely support during critical moments.

I am currently drafting a new mental health and wellbeing policy to promote the overall wellbeing and mental health of our staff. By leveraging the expertise of Time to Change Wales, our aim is to instil confidence among staff to openly discuss mental health issues. Notably, the pandemic has prompted more candid conversations within the team regarding mental health matters, fostering deeper trust and understanding among us.

Our long-term objective is to empower staff to seek external support they may have previously postponed. Personally, my journey at Interplay, where I've openly addressed my struggles with PTSD and sought therapy, underscores the importance of creating an environment where such discussions are encouraged and supported. In addition to supporting and promoting designated mental health awareness days, we facilitate ongoing discussions through regular one-on-one meetings to cultivate a working culture where staff feel comfortable sharing their feelings and concerns with colleagues.

Our WhatsApp group serves as a platform for daily communication, including discussions about mental health and wellbeing. Encouraging staff to feel at ease expressing themselves within this group fosters a sense of community and support. We employ various communication methods, such as email and face-to-face interactions, to ensure that everyone remains informed about upcoming events and opportunities for engagement, catering to individual preferences and needs.