

Case Study – North East London Sustainability and Transformation Partnership

Introduction

Nichola Gardener was the NEL STP Programme Director up until June 2018. She shares her experience of working with Staff College between February 2017 and June 2018 and the difference their support made to the NEL STP.

Context

“Staff College is supporting the North East London Sustainability and Transformation Partnership (NEL STP) in developing collaborative working across its twenty partner organisations.

North East London has a track history of strong relationships. However, working together for the wider good of the system can sometimes be stretching as organisational priorities, agreed with regulators, may be at odds with the system. The STP, as it tackles big societal issues, also requires wider partnership working with the voluntary sector, communities, academic organisations and other parts of the public sector.

The priorities that all partners are working together to take forward are important but challenging - reducing health inequalities, meeting increasing demand and the needs of an ageing population, improving the quality of services whilst making efficiencies, attracting and retaining the workforce and developing services and innovating services to maximise the potential of technology and innovations.

The NEL STP is implementing an ambitious programme of service transformation across primary, mental health, community and hospital services. Staff College is supporting the Partnership with a national pilot, focused initially on the following programmes:

- *End of Life Care*
- *Medicines Optimisation*
- *Diabetes*

Specifically, Staff College has:

- *facilitated collaborative working across a wide range of agencies involved in end of life care, building a consensus and vision, set of priorities and developing the leadership arrangements to take forward a plan of work.*
- *supported the Medicines Optimisation group with identifying their leadership strengths and styles, including skills at managing meetings effectively and identifying priorities*
- *worked through historical barriers to effective relationships with the teams delivering diabetes care.”*

What was it like working with Staff College as a commissioner?

“The Staff College approach is highly tailored and flexible. The programme of support was developed through an iterative process of co-design, where the consultants sought a deep understanding of the issues, relationships and desired outcomes. They brought huge energy and creativity to the process of co-design, asking insightful questions that challenged any unconscious assumptions but balancing this with a pragmatism about creating a programme that would draw participants out of their comfort zone without sending them running for the hills. The approach encouraged huge creative input from the STP team too, which was refreshing as often OD interventions can come largely pre-packaged with in reality small scope for adaptation. It was invigorating to be involved from the start in the process, so that it truly had a NEL feel to it.”

What was it like working with Staff College for the teams?

“The programme itself was grounded in evidence and the latest learning about leadership practice, which all the participants welcomed and the leadership activities were engaging, revealing and fun. The consultants created a safe place but one which didn’t shy away from holding people to account for their behaviours if these were standing in the way of collaboration - but by seeking to understand that these were not personal but driven by dysfunctions in the system, which helped people move on from trying to blame each other to fixing the system.

The consultants were adept at flexing the programme on the day to deal with any unexpected issues or to explore an issue that required more time, whilst still moving the agenda along towards the outcomes set by the group.”

What difference did it make?

“The aspect of the programme that participants universally found compelling was the opportunity to reflect on their group dynamics and own behaviours. Observing how the groups moved from wary, closed or sometimes defensive stances to ones where people spend up about their organisational struggles and sometimes personal vulnerabilities and sought and received the support of the group was powerful. As were the examples of where this new-found collaboration then continued after the sessions, with colleagues supporting each other with difficult decisions across organisations.”

Conclusion

“The Staff College approach is so potent because it brings together a focus on achievable outcomes that groups willingly hold themselves to account for, applying leadership theory, and group and personal behavioural change, reflection and growth. All of which is achieved with creativity and respect.”