Claire Blacka

Specialist in engagement for social and supported housing

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I have over 20 years' experience leading successful health, social care and housing services, with a particular focus on engagement, innovation and quality improvement. I have considerable experience working with people with mental health conditions and neuro-diversities.

Working in partnership with people using services is crucial to the my approach, and I put those people at the heart of everything I do, designing fun, meaningful activities that create change.

Work Experience

Engagement Specialist and Director, Tentacles Consultancy
January 2024 – Present
Independent consultancy focussing on effective engagement with people who live in social and supported housing. I work with organisations and contractors in the housing and care sectors share power and create a qualitative approach to engagement, creating lasting change and satisfaction.

Key responsibilities

- Keeping up to date with best practice and regulatory change including Tenant Satisfaction Measures, Consumer Standards, CQC and Ofsted.
- Setting and embedding a connective culture using Insights Discovery.
- Providing coaching, advice and support.
- Creative thinking for short term interventions that have a long term impact.

Career Break
July 2023 – January 2024

Head of Customer Engagement, Home Group
Customers from Rented, Supported and Leasehold Properties
November 2019 – July 2023 (Redundancy)

I designed and delivered a comprehensive accountability framework to ensure that Home Group heard and acted upon customer feedback through engagement, complaints and insight. The National Equality Standard (NES) assessors described the results as 'industry leading'.

Key responsibilities

- Overseeing the Engagement, Complaints and Insight Teams
- Creating and leading the engagement plan for Home Group
- Responsibility for the implementation and monitoring of the Complaint Handling Code and associated KPIs
- Working with customers to create exciting and interesting methods of feedback.
- Leading on Tenant Satisfaction collection, analysis and the implementation of Tenant Satisfaction Measures.
- Positively promoting the benefits of customer involvement to all colleagues.
- Contributing to the strategic plan to ensure customer partnerships are front and centre.
- Leading on the Managing Unacceptable Behaviour Policy and finding constructive ways to work with people who have challenging behaviours.

Key achievements

- Designing and delivering a programme to include customers in procurement of maintenance and gardening services.
- Involved almost 4,000 individual customers in shaping, changing and influencing services one year.
- Creation of a National Development Group; a group of customers covering all tenure types who worked to create a design guide (which we believed to be the first in the sector) to ensure any developments met customer needs.
- Reaching beyond standard expectations for engagement with the support of the Executive Team; 100% customer involvement in all recruitment, customer board members and customer guests at every meeting, compulsory attendance at Life Swaps with customers to improve diversity understanding.
- Co-creating complaints training with customers.
- Developing future-proof customer satisfaction surveys which meant minimal disruption at the inception of Tenant Satisfaction Measures.

Operations Manager, Home Group
Customers from Rented, Supported and Leasehold Properties
November 2017 – November 2019

Responsibility for rented and supported stock in the Yorkshire area with line management of 10 managers.

Key responsibilities

- Leading on quality and consistency, ensuring our 'customer promise' and other quality standards are delivered, including CQC KLOEs where applicable.
- Leading on Anti-Social Behaviour in the Yorkshire area.
- Complaints and working collaboratively with colleagues to find a solution.
- Customer Viewpoint and Customer Assessments, ensuring actions and outcomes are carried out and communicated effectively.
- Liaison and collaboration with commissioners and partners.

Key Achievements

- Created a pilot that led to a Financial Inclusion Team covering the whole organisation.
- Significantly improved staff morale and credibility of leadership as demonstrated by 100% satisfaction scores on external questionnaire.
- Developed mental health awareness for colleagues, improving responses to Anti-Social Behaviour.

Business Contracts Manager, Home Group
Care and Support
July 2011 – November 2017

Responsibility for implementing and delivering services for a variety of supported services across West Yorkshire and Lancashire.

Key responsibilities

- Driving up quality and consistency, ensuring our 'client promise' and other quality standards are delivered, including CQC KLOEs where applicable.
- Building and maintaining relationships with key stakeholders and commissioners.
- Designing and implementing innovative practices to ensure the organisation is a market leader.
- Lead responsibility in the area for Equality and Diversity, Colleague Wellbeing and Client Involvement.

Key achievements

- Designed and delivered a flagship service for people with mental health conditions.
- Won the Legendary Leader award at internal awards ceremony following a nomination from my whole team.

More information on previous roles available on request.

Key Qualifications/Education

- BSc Hons Psychology
- Introductory Certificate in Management - NEBS Management
- Certificate in Management in Health and Social Care Organisations – Leeds Metropolitan University
- Lead to Transform - Institute of Leadership and Management
- Level 4 NVQ in Leadership and Management for Care Services
- Manage for Results - Chartered Management Institute

- ILM Level 7 Certificate in Executive Coaching (in progress)

Key Skills

My strengths include my ability to co-produce effectively with people using services. Also, my energised, motivating and creative approach. It is important to bring fun into the workplace, to deliver messages in ways that engage people and make them memorable. I have been known to dress as a dragon to do this...

However, I am also able to tailor my approach to the situation and pride myself on my skills in working with key stakeholders, including MPs and commissioners. I am comfortable presenting to others and have had success at a number of housing conferences.

I pride myself on being a proactive ally for all diversity groups and ensure I am always learning so I can be inclusive. Most importantly, I am warm, supportive and I am always willing to get stuck in.