



# Spotlight on...

**Anti-stigma workplace  
champions**

**Making ongoing and sustained change is the most effective way to tackle mental health stigma and discrimination in the workplace. Transforming an organisation's culture, policies and practices requires a joined-up approach with the voices and experiences of employees at the heart of it.**

**Many organisations are already recognising the benefits of supporting and empowering passionate employees to champion communication and support initiatives in the workplace. A network of anti-stigma workplace champions can help break down stigma-related barriers, foster inclusive and engaged workplace cultures, and support the effective and successful delivery of mental health improvement activities.**



# What is an anti-stigma workplace champion?

An anti-stigma workplace champion can be any individual that is passionate about tackling stigma and discrimination to improve mental health in their workplace. It could be a single employee, a group of volunteers, a paid role at management or leadership level, or an executive sponsor.

The key is that an anti-stigma workplace champion must be:

- Passionate about tackling the stigma and discrimination experienced by people with mental health problems in the workplace.
- Confident to role model mental health inclusive attitudes and behaviours, speaking openly and actively engaging with colleagues on the subject.
- Have time and access to other resources, to lead on or advocate for anti-stigma activity like campaigns and awareness raising, training and policy reviews, etc.
- Able to empower colleagues to talk openly, and safely share their own experiences.
- Able to persevere despite internal barriers and other challenges.

Organisations can increase the success and impact of mental health and wellbeing initiatives, by empowering passionate employees through an internal workplace champions scheme, and ensuring any existing workplace champions are using anti-stigma approaches.





### Examples of activities anti-stigma workplace champions might lead on:

- Working with others to arrange activities in the workplace related to mental health, wellbeing and challenging mental health stigma and discrimination.
- Encouraging colleagues to get involved in these activities.
- Completing See Me's e-learning modules, and other relevant training in workplace anti-stigma approaches, and encouraging colleagues to do the same.
- Sharing information and campaigns about mental health awareness, tackling stigma, and wellbeing and support at team meetings, via e-mail, putting up posters etc.
- Making and fostering links between existing internal networks and groups. For example, equality, inclusion and diversity network, health and wellbeing groups, etc., to emphasise a focus on tackling mental health stigma and discrimination. This can also support your organisation in moving away from considering protected characteristics in siloes.
- Modelling good practice around opening up supportive and compassionate conversations about mental health.
- Feeding back any issues that have been identified as potential areas for improvement.
- Sharing their own lived experience of mental health problems if safe and appropriate (if they have any), and championing the inclusion of those with experience of mental health problems in events, initiatives and other relevant activities.
- Having the knowledge and confidence to support implementation of the organisation's policies and procedures, especially those related to mental health, and where to signpost colleagues for support if they disclose struggling with poor mental health.

### What an anti-stigma workplace champion does not do:

- Provide mental health first aid or a listening service to distressed colleagues.
- Carry out suicide prevention interventions when a colleague is in crisis.
- Disclose their own mental health problems on demand.
- Pressure others into disclosing mental health problems.
- Act as an advocate or representative for colleagues during any grievance or disciplinary meetings.
- Replace or duplicate the role of Human Resources or line managers.
- Carry out duties in their own time, including working through break times, or staying later without remuneration.
- Take on unnecessary costs that should be covered by the organisation, such as administration or equipment costs.

**Some workplace champions may already be trained in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) and/or Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST), but employers should not blur the boundaries between these very different roles.**

**Role modelling a supportive attitude is not the same as providing therapeutic support or implementing specific mental health interventions.**

### Anti-stigma workplace champions can benefit the organisation by:

- Acting as positive role models for inclusive mental health behaviour and language.
- Supporting the organisation to embed positive changes in attitudes and behaviours towards mental health.
- Instigating and supporting initiatives to improve workplace wellbeing.
- Supporting the creation of an open and honest workplace culture where colleagues can talk about their feelings, and ask for help without fear of being judged.
- Supporting the organisation in delivering its wider mental health plan or strategy.
- Demonstrating the organisation's commitment to creating a mentally healthy workplace, free from stigma and discrimination.
- Increasing employee engagement in initiatives and feedback processes by ensuring key messages reach **ALL** colleagues, especially those in non-desk-based or public-facing roles.
- Increasing access to employment for people with experience of mental health problems, and increasing talent retention by creating a mental health inclusive culture, free from stigma and discrimination.

# Setting up an anti-stigma workplace champions scheme or network

## Do...

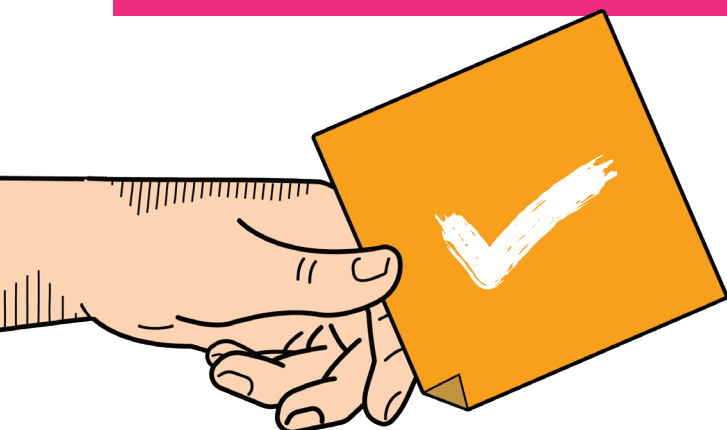
- ✓ Ensure you have buy-in and support from senior decision-makers in the organisation before you start.
- ✓ Involve employees with experience of mental health problems in designing, planning and evaluating your scheme/network.
- ✓ Refer to See Me's 'Supporting Workplace Champions' guide, linked in the key resources section, and follow the eight principles.
- ✓ Create a clear role description and recruitment process with the help of your HR team (if you have one).
- ✓ Create a plan to communicate the scheme/network and what the role is for, in various formats that are accessible to all employees regardless of role, shift pattern and/or learning style.
- ✓ Offer the option of an informal chat to answer any questions employees might have about the role.
- ✓ Plan to review the scheme after its first six months and annually thereafter.

## Don't...

- ✗ Ask champions to disclose their experiences of mental health problems as part of the recruitment process. The role should be open to anybody passionate about creating change, regardless of personal experiences.
- ✗ Delegate the role to managers only. A successful champions scheme relies on passionate employees that have volunteered for the role, and that represent all sections of the organisation, regardless of job title.

### **The See Me in Work programme identified that a workplace champions scheme is most impactful and creates the most engagement when:**

- Champions have a good understanding of mental health stigma and discrimination, and access to training that includes the voice of lived experience.
- Everybody in the organisation understands the purpose and remit of the role of the champions.
- Champions feel safe and know they are supported to challenge stigmatising language and discriminatory behaviours from colleagues, managers and senior leaders within the organisation.
- The organisation's senior leaders 'walk the talk' by acting as champions and role-modelling mental health inclusive behaviours.



# Key resources and reading

- **See Me in Work e-learning:**  
[www.seemescotland.org/workplace/resources-and-e-learning/e-learning](http://www.seemescotland.org/workplace/resources-and-e-learning/e-learning)
- **Supporting Workplace Champions, See Me:**  
[www.seemescotland.org/media/m1pbu1o2/a-guide-to-supporting-your-champions\\_final.pdf](http://www.seemescotland.org/media/m1pbu1o2/a-guide-to-supporting-your-champions_final.pdf)
- **Working on the problem – A case study from a See Me volunteer:**  
<https://report.seemescotland.org/gary-macdonald>
- **Workplace Mental Health Champions, Mind:**  
[www.mind.org.uk/media-a/6077/section-two\\_workplace.pdf](http://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/6077/section-two_workplace.pdf)
- **Wellbeing Champions training course, Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH)**  
SAMH's workplace training team offer a course specifically designed for those who wish to support their organisation at a strategic level with the introduction of organisational wellbeing initiatives and supporting all staff to identify wellbeing needs within their roles/team. For more information, please visit the SAMH website: [www.samh.org.uk/get-involved/workplace/workplace-training](http://www.samh.org.uk/get-involved/workplace/workplace-training)





**Find out how See Me in Work can help  
your organisation at:**

**[www.seemescotland.org](http://www.seemescotland.org)**

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