



Evaluation of the Leeds Mindful Employer Network

FINAL REPORT | MAY 2026

Executive Summary

The Leeds Mindful Employer Network supports workplace mental health in Leeds. It is a free resource for employers in the region to help promote mental health initiatives, strategies and resources within their organisations. Employers who are part of the Network benefit from regular communications, events, resources, and one-to-one support. The Network uses NHS-backed 'Mindful Employer' branding and encourages Mindful Employer Charter signatories.

Currently, over 530 local employers are part of the Network. The Network is commissioned by the Leeds City Council Public Health Team and delivered by Leeds Mind. It has been running since 2013.



Mental health difficulties affected 776,000 UK workers in 2023/24, leading to a significant loss of working days. In Leeds, poor mental health is estimated to cost around £500 million a year. This figure mainly reflects reduced economic productivity—when people are unable to work or work at full capacity—as well as increased spending on benefits and support services.

The Leeds Mindful Employer Network falls under the umbrella of “Workplace health and wellbeing initiatives that are free at the point of use to workplaces” (WHISPA). WHISPA aim to provide flexible, accessible support so organisations can promote mental health awareness, share effective practices, tackle employee stress and anxiety and improve their wellbeing more broadly.

Evaluation approach

The Network was evaluated by a research team from the University of Edinburgh as part of the NIHR¹-funded PHIRST² programme. It looked at what Network members do as a result of being part of the Network, what the perceived impact is of the Network and how the Network could improve. The evaluation involved a survey for Network members (58 respondents) and focus groups and interviews with employees (46 employees across organisations that were Network members and non-members).



¹ National Institute for Health and Care Research. ² Public Health Intervention Responsive Studies Teams.

Findings

How members translate Network membership into action

- Most common ways Network members engaged: Receiving the newsletter and bulletins, signing the Mindful Employer Charter, and attending meetings and events.
- Common Network-inspired activities involved communication and cascading of information and resources, introducing wellbeing-related staff roles, developing or amending policies and strategies, training and actions for line managers, hosting events and workshops, and making changes to the physical work environment.

Perceived impact of the Network

- The perceived impact of the Network was very positive especially on reducing stigma, supporting Human Resources (HR) professionals, and influencing policies and procedures within member organisations.

Barriers and challenges for Network members

- Time for event participation.
- Confusion about what the Network offered.
- Financial and time constraints were the most significant barriers to implementing Network-inspired changes.

"We are a growing organisation, but HR is just [one individual]. So for her to be aware, for her to connect with others, to be aware of what offers are right there, what she can potentially link the staff into, I think that's massive. [The Network] is hugely important for her role and then subsequently helping the whole organisation."

Leeds Mindful Employer Network Member

"And I think being part of the Network, having that sort of badge, if you like, shows a commitment to keeping wellbeing and mindfulness as a priority in the organisation."

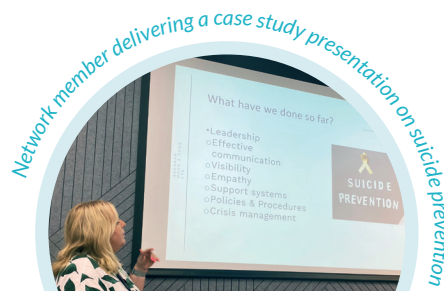
Leeds Mindful Employer Network Member



Recommendations

The Network can further improve member engagement and impact through:

- Increasing online engagement through enhanced website, social media, and resource sharing.
- Hosting events at varied times and locations (including online) to increase accessibility and diversity.
- Expanding access to Network resources for all employees within member organisations beyond those in managerial/support roles.
- Providing more clarity on what the Network offers, and how it works together with the Mindful Employer branding and charter.
- Focusing more on specific topics such as living wage support and marginalised communities.
- Positioning the Network as 'good for business'.



Hospitality-focused Network event



Opening Talk at 2024 Conference" ©effyimages



Potential impact of this evaluation

As the only free local network of its kind in the UK, the Leeds Mindful Employer Network offers a local, innovative and low-cost model for supporting and enhancing workplace mental health. The evaluation of the Network highlights its positive impact, whilst suggesting enhancements for broader engagement. These insights are crucial in amplifying the Network with partners across Leeds and aligning with local strategies such as Leeds Ambitions. Beyond Leeds, this evaluation can influence other public mental health initiatives across Yorkshire and nationally. The insights will help enhance the reach and impact of the Network and provide a blueprint for other local authorities or third sector organisations looking to implement or adapt similar interventions to support employee mental health.



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<https://phirst.nihr.ac.uk/evaluations/leeds-mindful-employer-network/>

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