

# Wellbeing and resilience in the workplace during Covid-19 and beyond

Project Lift Community Event  
1 October 2020

# Wellbeing and resilience in the workplace during Covid-19 and beyond

Here in Project Lift, our purpose is to offer a different way of looking at leadership at all levels, in all roles, in working collaboratively and choosing to work compassionately to help our staff meet these challenges.

We have all heard so many different experiences, perspectives and stories about wellbeing over these recent times, both through personal and professional connections. And it is great that wellbeing continues to be in the spotlight given how COVID-19 has affected everyone, in so many ways. We also know leaders have a key influence on culture, or how we experience our working environment and relationships in the workplace. Taking care of ourselves and one another can take its toll and it's especially important that we notice, listen and respond with kindness and compassion to ourselves and each other.



This pack provides an overview of the discussions

## We set out to:

- Understand from the community what **'good leadership' is in the context of putting wellbeing at the heart of leadership**
- Provide a **space to listen to challenges, thoughts, concerns, ideas, questions** around this topic
- Provide **connection opportunities** for the community members



# Who joined us?



Project Lift exists to support leadership **at all levels and at all stages, in all roles across health and social care in Scotland**. A core aim of the community events series is to broaden Project Lift's reach and connect to more of the system, and so these events were open to all.

We were joined by **73 colleagues** from across health and care in Scotland.

Participants joined us from across the system, including those working in organisational development, management, physiotherapy, administration, pharmacy, HR, improvement and speech and language therapy.

This included a range of organisations across Scotland, including Healthcare improvement Scotland; local NHS organisations in Greater Glasgow and Clyde, Grampian, Highland, Orkney, Borders, Fife, Lanarkshire, Lothian & Tayside; local government, and NHS Education for Scotland.





# Section 1: Welcome and introductions



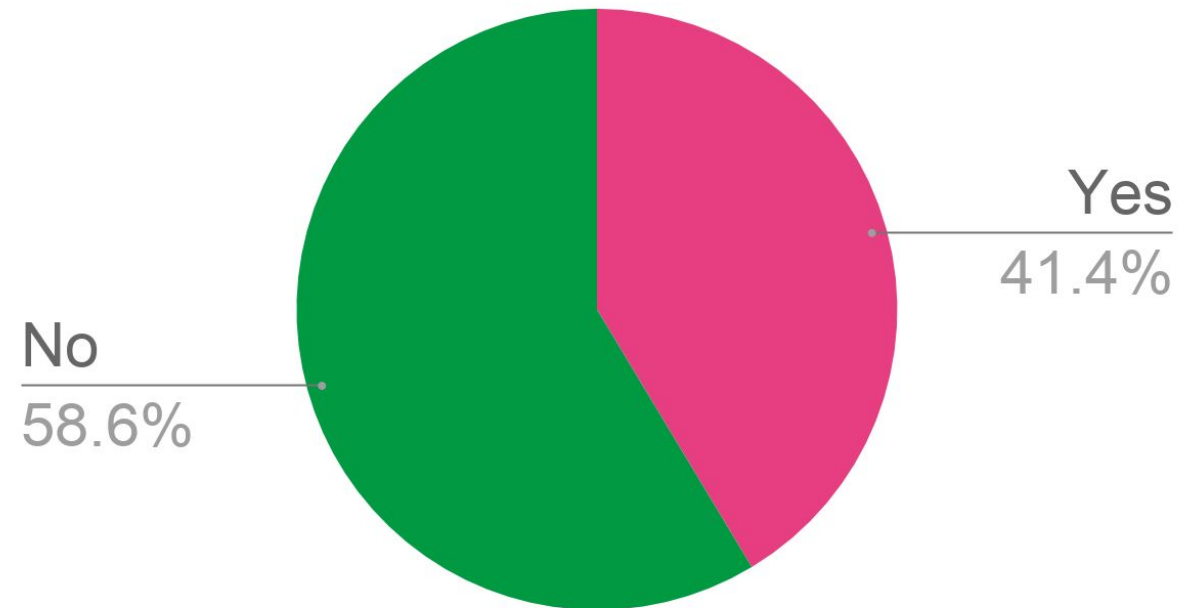
We kickstarted the session with an introduction from Jenni Jones, **Principal Lead at Project Lift**, who welcomed the group and provided an introduction to [Project Lift and its ethos](#), and framed the session.

To gain an idea of how much people know about Project Lift, we began by asking attendees:

**‘Have you attended a Project Lift event before?’**

There was a mix of responses, but for the majority, this was their first Project Lift event.

Have you attended a Project Lift event before?



# Section 2: Opening perspectives

To kick off our conversations, we heard from three speakers, who shared their story on: **“Putting wellbeing at the heart of leadership”**



**Pat Armstrong**  
Chief Executive,  
ACOSVO

Pat discussed the pressures of Covid-19 on the voluntary sector and how this has meant focusing on wellbeing is more important than ever. She explored the importance of leaders looking after their own wellbeing in order to support others, and shared the work ACOSVO does to support leaders, such as facilitating peer support, having a safe space when away from work and having clear steps for sizeable amounts of work.  
*‘It can be a really lonely place as a leader’*

Ralph spoke from his own experience of managing his own wellbeing as a leader, and shared his experiences of stress and burnout. He shared the importance of creating an environment where people are able to prioritise their wellbeing and speak out about how they are feeling, and the importance of role modelling this as a leader. He talked about noticing signs of struggle and being honest about how we are when not at our best.

*“Leading myself” seems more helpful than ‘self care’*

*“There is no such thing as a heroic leader”*

**Ralph Roberts**  
Chief Executive,  
NHS Borders



**Ailsa Sutherland**  
Group Manager,  
West Lothian Council

Ailsa discussed the importance of really listening to colleagues to understand how to put wellbeing first. She highlighted that the high speed of change was difficult during the first wave of Covid-19. She stressed the need to have coping strategies as a leader during a time where people are having to adapt quickly, and to have the safe space to share these with colleagues.

*“We’re all having to adapt and change, and we need more coping strategies”*



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# Section 2: Reflections from participants

Our speakers' opening perspectives inspired a lot of discussion from participants, who shared their reflections...

## On leaders looking after themselves...

"I think as a manager sometimes we can feel a responsibility to 'fix' everything for our staff rather than feeling ok with just listening and pointing people in the right direction/offering guidance and ideas."

"It's easier to be open in the last 5 years than at any other time in my 30+ years in the NHS. It's not weakness but absolutely a strength."

"The under-reporting of the impact of stress and burnout is a real challenge to our understanding and creating a "better" work environment - your honesty sends a powerful message."

"It's equally important that leaders take care of themselves too, respite is essential."

"A wee quote that has stuck with me is "comparison is the thief of joy" - we all look at others and compare ourselves (usually unfavourably) and forget we are all individuals both personally and professionally."

"It's important for us to acknowledge that life pre-COVID wasn't exactly a bed of roses ie end of COVID isn't the end of the challenge"

"Heard a good comment the other day on another platform - work is a thing that you do, not a place that you go - something to bear in mind, especially now."

## On creating the right culture...

"The hubba hubba hubba lunch is for wimps, the Gordon Gecko approach to management is not right and should be challenged and driven out."

"Love a good mantra. I personally use... 'It's possible; I can do it; I'm worth it'."

"Culture - Just how we do things around here... especially when no-one (important) is looking"

# Section 2: Reflections from participants

## On role modelling...

"I'm constantly encouraging people to take their lunch break and I take mine."

"Love a great role model, reminded of 'what you permit, you promote'."

"Lencioni on building trust - as a leader you need to go first, you need to share, be vulnerable before others will follow."

"Eddie Fraser shared on our last event - we need to see each person as an individual in their own situation at work and their own personal situation - we are not all the same, dealing with the same things, how can we see individuals and come together?"

"If we don't know and create the space and time to have those conversations then it opens up space for assumptions..."

## On understanding and measuring how well colleagues are...

"We are also in the early stages of a Joy in Work project."

"I check in regularly with my staff on an individual basis and as a group, informally and through supervision. I feel it's vitally important to be human with our staff, they will not share difficulties if we are not listening."

## On other resources participants have found useful ...

### Resources shared by participants

- [This example](#) of a survey used to scope and understand staff wellbeing
- Article ['Your 'Surge Capacity' Is Depleted — It's Why You Feel Awful'](#)
- Resource: [Learning from Excellence](#)



# Section 3: Breakout discussions

We then went into breakout rooms to explore our reflections and discuss our own perspectives on putting wellbeing at the heart of leadership.

Reflecting on what you have heard and your own experiences, discuss:

1. In your experience as a leader, what can you do to encourage wellbeing and resilience at work and among your teams? Why is this important?
2. What are the barriers to leaders prioritising their teams' (and their own) wellbeing and resilience?
3. What should we all be doing more of to encourage and enable leaders to put their teams' and their own wellbeing and resilience at the heart of their leadership approach?

# Section 3: Breakout discussions

## Putting wellbeing at the heart of leadership. Key themes from our discussions

### The importance of relationships

- Relationships was a key theme discussed across many groups. 'Knowing' your team well is ever more important, so that you can notice, sometimes subtle, shifts in their behaviour and be able to support them. Listening to your team, and being human was a key theme.

### Role modelling putting wellbeing first

- Role modelling was a common theme across most groups. Some people shared examples of where they've noticed they've struggled with this, for example not taking a lunch break, squeezing in meetings one after the other or emailing late at night, which can create pressure on the team.
- Role modelling can be powerful, through showing vulnerability and being your authentic self and this can give permission to others to be open.
- The theme of self awareness linked to this. A number of groups discussed of working in the evening, which for some can be convenient and fit with work/life balance. However, it can create pressure on others to respond. This is where it is helpful to be aware of how your own behaviour can impact others.

### Self leadership

- One group discussed what 'leadership' means, and how you don't need to be a manager to be a leader - leadership is for all and at all levels.
- They discussed some of the challenges of being a leader, such as the stress and the focus on others' needs and less on yourself. They shared how it is important to be able to recognise stress and be able to own it.

# Section 3: Breakout discussions

## **Putting wellbeing at the heart of leadership.** Key themes from our discussions

### **Experiences during COVID-19**

- The impact of the pandemic was a key part of discussions. Many were working in already pressured environments before COVID-19, and the effects of not having a break over summer are being felt. Going into the winter will be a challenge. Many have also moved jobs or teams during this time, which had effects on social bonds, which wasn't fully acknowledged at the time. This has been a challenging time for many, with feelings of loss, uselessness or isolation. However, it was recognised that there have been positives for some, such as working from home being more suitable for some people.

### **Understanding needs**

- Flexibility and adaptability as leader was a topic discussed in many groups, and the key theme to these conversations was really understanding what matters to the individual. People find different things important and restoring, and really understanding what matters to your team members is important, rather than deciding this from the top.
- One participant shared how helpful surveying their staff was to understand their needs, and many participants discussed ways they have opened up these conversations with the teams.

### **Joy and humour at work**

- Encouraging joy and humour at work was important to many participants. They shared many ways how they have deliberately created spaces for this, such as time for social calls or having tea breaks with colleagues, but many also discussed the importance of just being human and authentic at work.

# Section 3: Breakout discussions

## **Putting wellbeing at the heart of leadership.** Key themes from our discussions

### **Challenges of remote working**

- The impact of virtual and remote working on wellbeing was a big topic. Working from home can make teams feel less integrated and working virtually reduces human connection, especially when people don't use cameras. It can also create a sense of 'always being on' and always contactable, making it difficult to separate work and home life.
- Many participants shared their advice on ways to focus on wellbeing in the virtual working world, which is summarised on the next page.

### **Mainstreaming wellbeing and kindness**

- Some shared how they felt that things are changing around wellbeing, and during this time there has been real acts of kindness highlighted. Some felt that the language of empathy and kindness is becoming more common, wellbeing now usually a part of strategic thinking, and leaders have been allowed to become more authentic.
- However, it's important that wellbeing isn't just a 'buzzword' - but, as one group discussed, is around becoming more routinely social in how we work.

Throughout this event series, we are asking 'what is good leadership?'. We'll take these key themes with us across the event series, add to them and refine them as we seek to answer this question.



# Section 3: Breakout discussions

Throughout the discussions, many people shared useful practical tips and advice for how they prioritise wellbeing at work:

- Create informal spaces for conversation and connection, such as with a semi-structured social call with a conversation topic to get people talking. Keep these calls to a small number of participants to provide space for all voices.
- Maintain daily contact, such as by having check in and out calls during the day for the team. A call at the end of the day helps to ensure people sign off after that rather than extending working into the evening.
- Schedule protected time to take breaks throughout the day, rather than having meetings running into each other.
- Create joy and humour at work, such as 'Cake Fridays'
- It's okay to say 'I don't know'.
- Set up of a #notatwork network – to enable those who have to work at home eg shielding/caring duties to connect in and feel valued through different ways to contribute.
- Use surveys to understand how your staff are feeling and what is important to them - one example can be found [here](#).
- Encourage people to use cameras in video calls, and check in with those who have cameras off often or are quiet in calls.
- Be visible in leading by example.
- Larger spaces such as a Facebook page, or a organisation lunch-and-learn can be helpful to open conversations.
- Add a discussion on wellbeing in Personal Development Plans / Conversations.

# Section 4: Closing reflections

We asked participants  
**‘What strikes you  
from the  
discussions?’**

“Prioritise the human at  
work”

“The need for self  
compassion”

“These events are inspiring to me, they remind me of the need to be kind to myself as well as others, not sure when last took a lunch break yet always tell other to! We are all human, we all have things we are good at and learning still to do. Lots of ideas/resources shared. Role modelling advice rather than just the talk - my prompt and learning from today, thank you, has been great to hear from you all.”

“It is striking me that joy, respite, connection, can be found in moments or in the simple (but most joyful moments) of life. Watching out for them and taking a couple of minutes to enjoy can boost my sense of wellness!”

“I’m wondering if in places where things have improved, whether the memory of how things were before is keeping some people stuck and making it harder for them to accept that it is “safe” to slow down, attend to your own needs etc”

“I’m taking away paying attention to allowing time for maintaining ‘old connections’ even when people moved to new teams”

# Section 4: Closing reflections

Finally, we closed the session by reflecting on all of the conversations so far, and thinking about our next steps. We asked participants: **“One practical step I will take away to put wellbeing at the heart of leadership is...”**

“To encourage coaching and self-reflection”

“Good reminder to put time for me in the diary”

“Practice what I preach!”

“Be kind to myself as well as others”

“Lead Myself”

“Will ask about wellbeing at every check - we have huddles every morning”

“Will take away some of the more human approaches to leadership and self management, great session, enjoyed speakers and group very much”

“I am going to put a focus on leadership and wellbeing in our key messages from the Wellbeing Service over the next 6 months - an underlying reminder to “lead yourself”. Thanks you for a great session.”

“Start with “me”. Trust, honesty, balance and a culture of true wellbeing in my team and wider needs to start with my own wellbeing.”

“To take care of me. Brilliant event, just what I needed today”

“I will be more mindful to ensure I model self care to my staff, I think I role model what not to do (at times)”

“That it’s ok to show the chinks in your armour”

“Love the idea of the 1/2 hour wind down meeting. Also, thinking of a team development session for my team of admin staff - focusing on our purpose and our value in the organisation and encouraging fellow administrators to take time for personal development and wellbeing”

“Can’t lead if I’m not well and look after myself”

“It is ok to make time for walk/run in daylight hours!”

“Cut off meeting at 5pm”

“Being more visible for my team”

“Clare Haughey’s letter of March 2020 contains core wellbeing messages that continue to apply to all, including leaders. Themes such as good communication, connection, self-care and kindness are vital.”

“Adding wellbeing as an objective in appraisal discussions”

“One of the speakers shared about when they have to work in the evening they include in their emails that they are working later out of choice and there is no expectation of a reply until other days, stopping a sense of contagion of immediate reply out of hours”

“Role model self care and consider mechanisms for peer support across my team and organisation”

# Thank you and evaluation

Finally, thank you so much for being a part of this Project Lift event.

Thank you for your energy, perspective and contributions to the session, and for helping us to explore what good leadership means.

If you have any questions about anything in this pack or any of the events in our series, feel free to contact us at [hello@kscopehealth.org.uk](mailto:hello@kscopehealth.org.uk).

## What our participants thought...

**90**

% of participants would recommend an event like this to a colleague

Average Score:

**4.5/5**



# Upcoming events in the series

