
CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Support through sunflowers: Growing a community's awareness of hidden disabilities

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Lonan Challis¹, Wendy Smith, Rob Kelly, Paul White, Anne Mills

1: Scholl Academic Centre, Isle of Man

Introduction

Some disabilities, which are not always obvious or visible, can make it difficult for people follow regulations such as social distancing. Enabling employers, employees and the public to understand these needs can avoid miscommunication and adverse incidents.

The nationally-recognised Hidden Disabilities Sunflower aims to support those with invisible needs. The Sunflower lanyards are a discrete sign for those who come into contact with the wearer, who can then choose to offer support people who may not ask for help [1]. In 2020, some organisations on the Isle of Man (IOM) began supplying Sunflower Lanyards but there were disparities in access.

Aims Objectives Theory or Methods

In partnership with Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme Limited, Compassionate IOM (CIOM) aimed to give all persons on the IOM with invisible needs access to Sunflower Lanyards. Hidden Disabilities Sunflower and CIOM held three, free, online training events for IOM organisations. Attendees learned about hidden disabilities, the purpose of the lanyard and how to offer support to wearers. To promote the training, the communication strategy included social media, newspapers and Government media for its employees; a large proportion of the population. Businesses who were unable to train all employees could train a few to educate the wider workforce through cascade training.

Highlights or Results or Key Findings

Compared to most work undertaken by Hidden Disabilities Sunflower, which usually involves educating individual corporations or departments, the partnership with CIOM enabled the geographical location of the IOM to become the first Sunflower-friendly Island. Over the sessions, 220 people attended from corporate, third sector, education, retail, Government and public sector. Of those who completed the end of training survey ($n \approx 50$, approximately 23% of attendees), 100% were satisfied with the training (score of 7+ on a scale of 1-10) and none were dissatisfied. All were happy with the timing and structure of sessions. Overall, 84% were 'very likely to recommend' the Sunflower to other businesses and associates and none said they would not recommend.

One participating business had a branch on the Island of Jersey, where staff were also invited to attend the online training. The training inspired wider networks on the Island, leading to Jersey becoming a second Sunflower-friendly Island.

Conclusions

Knowing how to identify the Sunflower lanyards, and what they represent, is crucial for success. A whole community effort is needed to support those with hidden disabilities to live independently and feel connected. Through the free training programme, we enhanced the community's capacity to support one another in daily life.

Implications for applicability/transferability sustainability and limitations

The training of 220 public-facing employees created an inclusive culture for people with additional needs. Cascading from this, and with community action, we hope the awareness of hidden disabilities and the Sunflower symbol will become more widespread. However, this requires the community to adopt and share the knowledge.

Reference list

1. Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme Limited. About the Sunflower [webpage on the internet]. [cited 2021 June 25]. Available from: <https://hiddendisabilitiesstore.com/about-hidden-disabilities-sunflower>