



# Wellbeing at The Housing Ombudsman Service

## About HOS

The Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) is set up by law to look at complaints and resolve housing disputes. They work with both tenants and landlords (social and private) and offer a free, independent and impartial service.

HOS encourages landlords and residents to resolve complaints together at the earliest possible opportunity. They improve their service by learning from outcomes and help individuals and organisations to do the same by learning from best practices. They exist to promote positive change in the housing sector.

## The Challenge

HOS staff often have difficult conversations with their clients; the cases are sometimes complex, with multiple interactions over an extended period. Clients can face financial problems and emotive issues relating to their homes. They can be distressed, angry and anxious, which can be stressful for HOS staff.

As a result of covid-19, HOS staff were also faced with the challenges of home working, particularly a lack of face-to-face contact with supportive colleagues. Like many staff, they sometimes struggled with the blurring of work and personal boundaries, loneliness, anxiety, fatigue, concerns about health and the provision of homeschooling for their families.

## Our solution

We created a series of well-being courses tailored to different groups within the HOS. Modular and delivered online, these three distinct and complementary courses provided an overall well-being programme.

All staff attended a well-being course which focused on fundamentals, including health and happiness discussions. We facilitated honest and open dialogue and introduced a shared language for colleagues. The course was particularly helpful for new staff recruited since the pandemic's start; they had yet to go into the office to meet their colleagues and build their support networks.



## Our solution

We explored how anxiety and low mood impacted staff and used exercises from a positive psychology perspective that helped build optimism and gratitude. We reflected on the day-to-day activities that staff already did to maintain their wellbeing, affirming the strengths they already possessed. We explored their ambivalence towards the desire to connect to friends and the sometimes challenging reality of finding the energy to do this. We encouraged staff to take practical actions such as doing things for other people and making time to relax. We provided evidence-based insights on sleep, diet and exercise that improve physical, mental and social health.

For HOS managers, we designed and delivered a 'motivating staff working from home' course. We built on existing good practices in motivating teams and added factors to consider during a lockdown, such as their team's affiliation and social contact needs. We used a variety of motivational theories and helped managers reflect on what their teams and organisation expected from them. We also helped managers reflect on their challenges and where they might get motivational fuel to engage their teams.

All staff were invited to attend a 'managing family and work dynamics' course based on attachment theory, designed to improve their close relationships. We considered issues and provided tools to help with the blurring of work and home, switching off from work, interacting with their extended family, homeschooling, dealing with psychological threats, managing feelings of guilt, anxiety and the sense that you are never good enough.

We ran 39 well-being modules for more than 100 staff over the course of 3 months to support their well-being. We used short videos, virtual break-out rooms, group discussions, skills practice and scenes from daily work life. Exercises between and after modules kept energy and engagement high and provided a stimulating learning experience.

## The Impact

As a result of these courses, staff could better talk about negative feelings such as low mood, anxiety, loneliness and frustration and, where appropriate, share with colleagues, line managers, family and friends. Staff had an increased capacity to reflect on their behaviours and become more aware of what they could change to improve their wellbeing. They tried several practical exercises to change their behaviours, thoughts and feelings.

Following the courses, HOS appointed PEAR as their preferred supplier for wellbeing training and commissioned one-to-one coaching support for staff.



## Feedback

*Our goal as an organisation last year was to support our colleagues during the pandemic with the stress due to Covid-19. I reached out to PEAR to deliver wellbeing courses. The reviews from colleagues who attended have been overwhelming, and we have decided to continue using PEAR as our preferred supplier.*

Anthonia Adedoyin, HR commissioning manager

*Just wanted to say I found the course really insightful, especially the last two sessions. It was great to be given the opportunity to learn new things and also see how we can use them in our everyday lives. I am very glad I signed up for it!*

Rosy M, participant

*Just a quick note to say thanks again for running the sessions. They were really engaging; I genuinely got a lot out of them and enjoyed the chance to be open in the discussions. No doubt the stuff we all discussed will be helpful going forward as well.*

Jack G, participant