

Accelerating Inclusion Through Allyship

Case Study





A new national programme is helping senior leaders in local government to become allies and use their influence to create genuinely inclusive working environments

Ever been in a meeting and someone has spoken over you? Or perhaps you were in the same meeting, it happened to a colleague and you didn't notice.

Incidents like this often go under the radar or are written off as trivial, but for those who experience it they're part and parcel of feeling invisible and under-valued in the workplace.

A new national programme organised by West Midlands Employers (WME) seeks to help senior leaders in local government recognise behaviour that excludes and become champions for inclusivity. It's about using their position to influence others and rethink policies, processes and practices that prevent people from fulfilling their potential.

'It's not just thinking about one characteristic, it's about what it means to create an inclusive environment,' explains programme leader Jenny Garrett OBE. 'What do you as a leader need to do around developing knowledge, bravery and influencing skills? Courage is a strong part of the programme because allies need to recognise and challenge inappropriate behaviour.'

The first cohort of 10 senior leaders from eight local authorities across England recently completed the programme and it's fair to say the experience has left an indelible impression. Indeed, when asked what they'd do differently going forward, one participant replied 'everything'. [Hear some of their thoughts.](#)

After kicking off with a face-to-face session, the group completed five online modules over the course of eight months covering the foundations of allyship, how to overcome barriers, building circles of trust, having 'courageous conversations' and putting allyship into action as an advocate.

The programme included support throughout from Jenny as programme designer and facilitator as well as a team of experienced coaches and guest speakers. A series of action learning sets took place between the modules, providing a safe space for participants to discuss real-life situations and how they could apply what they had learned in their respective organisations.

'What really pleased me was everyone who took part had very busy, senior roles and they committed to being part of this programme and saw it as an important thing to do,' says Jenny, who leads training and coaching company Reflexion Associates.

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is essentially about opening our eyes to the barriers many people face every day due to a variety of forms of disadvantage, whether it's related to their race, gender, sexuality or disability.



'I think it was an eye-opening journey for them. They were a very inspirational group and were looking for answers everywhere, trying to be the best they could be despite having a lot of stress and pressure on their shoulders.'

'I'm confident that they are now equipped with the tools to drive allyship forward in their organisations, influence others to become allies, champion inclusion corporately and cascade it outwards.'

The allyship programme has been embraced in parts of the private sector where companies can see a clear link between their inclusiveness as employers and the bottom line.

While the drivers for public sector organisations are different, Jenny believes local authorities in particular are ideally positioned to harness allyship to great effect.

'The senior leaders who took part have the potential to have wide-ranging influence on internal colleagues, councillors and communities. It's challenging because they all require different approaches to how they are influenced. 'That's why allies need allies – they can't do it alone. They have to work on themselves and on their own mindset, think about what they can potentially influence and recruit fellow allies so that everyone is doing the work. It's about embedding allyship so it's everyone's job to be speaking up, supporting and challenging. I do feel councils ought to be a beacon for allyship and inclusion.'

The programme is now open to reservations for the cohort of 2024.

Michelle O'Neill, principal consultant for leadership and OD at WME, believes councils that embrace allyship will see far-reaching results.

'While local government as a whole has moved forward in addressing inclusion, we know that progress is too slow. This programme gets to the heart of public sector efforts to drive inclusion and create working environments that allow everyone to thrive so that we smash through the ceiling for disadvantaged groups and ensure councils are truly representative of the communities they serve. 'Ultimately, it will help organisations to create more inclusive workplaces that attract and retain the best talent.'

Feedback from participants



"I found the programme really opened my mind. It challenged my perspectives and what I understood about myself as well as about other people that I work alongside. Lots of surprises but really important and challenging ones that have helped me to improve the way I work as a leader."



"There are a number of tools that we developed as part of the programme which I'll be able to take back into the workplace. Tools around building psychological safety within my team, improving that sense of belonging amongst the people I work with and also being able to call out or call-in unacceptable behaviour and really demonstrate that I'm acting as an ally to my colleagues."



"It's such a powerful tool to make a difference to people and understand there are so many different perspectives that influence people's lives and that every day even just a few words to someone can have a really positive or negative effect. So to think about those perspectives and how we look at our own behaviours and culture, the way we do things and how inclusive we are within our organisations is absolutely critical because it means we value everybody around us."



"If I was telling colleagues about the allyship programme I would say go for it. Make it a priority. Whether you manage staff or work with people it's really important to learn and open your mind to some of those changes, question your own practice and your own biases. It's really important stuff."

About WME

West Midlands Employers is a not-for-profit, public sector organisation collectively owned by 32 councils in the West Midlands. It's one of 9 Regional Employers' Organisations in England. WME's vision is to advocate, build and champion a resilient and diverse public sector workforce for an ambitious West Midlands region. Its wide range of services supports this vision.

Visit www.wmemployers.org.uk

Find out more

If you'd like your organisation to take part in the programme, please contact info@wmemployers.org.uk

