

PRESS RELEASE

Workplace Learning Advocates show their worth winning national awards

Celebrating everything that's great about learning at work is part of the day job for Workplace Learning Advocates – as learning champions they play an important role in raising aspirations, promoting learning and skills development and supporting learners. However, today is an extra special celebration for Workplace Learning Advocates as colleagues at SPP Pumps and Oxfordshire Workplace Learning Advocates Network receive awards in recognition of their work and colleagues at the Rum Story in Cumbria receive a certificate of achievement. These latest achievements cement Workplace Learning Advocates as a key resource for developing learning in non-unionised workplaces.

Oxfordshire Workplace Learning Advocates Network has been selected as an Adult Learners' Week Learning for Work Project Award winner for the South East. The collective efforts of the Oxfordshire Workplace Learning Advocates Network have enabled many individuals to return to learning by opening up a rich variety of opportunities. Many community-focus organisations including children's centres, local charities and care homes have benefited from the Workplace Learning Advocates approach.

HR Manager Mike Bardsley says "Workplace Learning Advocates have developed an important role within the business community in Oxfordshire. They have inspired employees to learn new skills and develop themselves whatever their position in the company. Employers have seen the benefit through the establishment of a workforce culture of learning and peer support and the people involved have, without exception, gained confidence from taking up new opportunities."

Oxfordshire WLA network's nominator, Lucy Nichol of Oxfordshire Skills and Learning Service said: "*The network has made a difference to the lives of so many employees. This is the only initiative in the area that links small and medium sized organisations with local training providers in order to promote effective learning cultures in the workplace.*"

SPP Pumps in Coleford, Forest of Dean is also celebrating after winning a national adult learning award for its pioneering approach to learning at work at a recent Education Innovation Conference in Manchester and presented by David Owen, CEO of G FIRST, the Local Enterprise Partnership. SPP Pumps became involved with WLAs, when engineering manager Laura Hurcombe trained as an advocate. In addition to running money management sessions for staff and families there was a session on understanding and helping children with school maths.

Laura said, “SPP are committed to supporting their employees and their families to achieving their full potential at work and at home. We recognise our responsibility to support our employees and our community in raising our employees of the future.”

The Rum Story in Cumbria has seen real cost benefits from being involved with the initiative. Wendy Black, the WLA says “This is a real bonus for the organisation as we currently have limited financial resources for staff training and development.”

Workplace Learning Advocates is a national grassroots initiative taking learning at work into non-unionised workplaces. To date over 600 WLAs in seven regions have been trained and over 450 employers of all different sizes and sectors have engaged with the approach.

Frances Graham from Workplace Learning Advocates said;

Unionised workplaces have successfully used a peer learning approach for many years. Until now, there has been no equivalent of this key role in the non -unionised, mostly smaller workplaces that make up the vast majority of businesses in the UK. Workplace Learning Advocates (WLAs) fill that gap and I'm delighted that their achievements have been recognised once again”.

Workplace Learning Advocates is delivered in partnership by:

Workbase Training

Workbase Training began in 1980 as a project for tackling under performance and under achievement in the workplace and winners of a National and a Regional Training Award for pioneering employee development and workplace literacy and numeracy and workplace learning. It specialises in developing communication skills for low skilled and low paid employees to help them get the most from development opportunities. Workbase has created a number of tried and tested models for literacy and numeracy at the workplace which have been used by providers including colleges, trade unions and private training organisations. <http://www.workbase.org.uk> or frances@workbase.org.uk

The Johnston Partnership

The Johnston Partnership started to deliver their Learning Advocates Initiative in non-unionised workplaces in 2004 in Cumbria. Liz & Graham Johnston have worked in the field of Information, Advice & Guidance since 1988. The company specialises in training employees and community based volunteers in information and advice skills. They also use a range of support models to encourage non- unionised companies to upskill their workforce. <http://www.learningadvocates.co.uk> or Liz@learningadvocates.co.uk