

Case Study – Joseph Rowntree Foundation/Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust Menopause Support Group By Margaret Wood, Menopause No Longer Taboo

In 2017, a number of women approached Anne Mwangi, Head of Diversity and Inclusion at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation/Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust (JRF/JRHT) expressing their need to feel more understood and supported at work by their line managers and colleagues when they were experiencing menopause symptoms, such as needing to leave the room because of suddenly feeling too hot. Anne formed a small working group comprising these women. They undertook research and created guidance for managers and staff with a list of what would work well and what they should try to avoid doing in order to provide support.

The initiative was launched later in 2017 during International Menopause Day. This followed publicity targeted at line managers by the communications team and, more generally, on the organisation's website. The team from Leicester University headed by Professor Joanne Brewis who produced [a government sponsored report in July 2017](#) were present at the launch, which was to a packed house. Personal experiences were shared and developing a menopause policy discussed, all of which were recorded and then posted on their intranet so that anyone unable to attend could have access. This high profile launch generated interest in the Menopause Working Group and more women joined. They meet formally every quarter and more informally over a cup of tea or coffee.

In October 2018, another well-attended event was held at which video clips were used to very effectively stimulate discussion. There were individuals of different ages and genders who gained insight into how the lives of older women were impacted by menopause symptoms on their daily lives, both at work and home. To celebrate this event, a banner advertising it was put up in the window of the head office building and a range of posters were put up in various sites.

The Menopause Support Group has an intranet site with a range of information on the menopause with links to resources. The group has bought a selection of books available to borrow, with different styles and approaches to suit individual tastes.

The number of members of the Menopause Support Group fluctuates with people leaving the organisation and others joining. Some women, rather than wanting to meet formally on a regular basis and share experiences, prefer to catch up on a more ad hoc basis at coffee breaks or lunchtimes. The group exists to support the needs of women in whatever way suits them best.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation/Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust employs around 800 staff, some of whom are based in head office but others, such as care staff, work at outlying sites, with differing work patterns. This makes attending meetings at head office impractical for some, but the sites are encouraged to set up their own informal groups and guidance has been designed to encourage participation.

The organisation has similar support groups for BAME, Disabled and LGBT employees.

Some of the success of the initiative is that the topic of menopause was introduced sensitively from the outset. Care was taken in the way messages were sent out, being aware of the need to tread carefully in introducing a subject that has, up until now, been considered taboo and reluctance to talk about it persists with some women as well as men.