

Inspiring change through the Social Care Workforce Race Equality Standard

A conversation with...

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Tricia Pereira 00:04

We're going to talk a little bit this morning around International Women's Day and the inspiration around International Women's Day. And also the synergy with the Social Care Workforce Race Equality Standard, and just what being part of the development and the progress of the Race Equality Standard means for us, as Black women, Black women leaders in our own right in our own organisations, but also as Black women who are juggling work responsibilities, but also just living really positive, healthy lives. The theme for this year's International Women's Day is around raising awareness about discrimination. It's about celebrating women's achievements, and collectively for us to take action to drive gender parity. And really, the main theme for this year is around inspiring inclusion. And it talks about when we inspire others to understand and value women's inclusion, that we really forge a better world. And when women themselves are inspired to be included. There's a sense of belonging, relevance, and empowerment. And so when I think about the themes of International Women's Day, as I said, it really has a synergy with the ethos of the Social Care Workforce Race Equality Standard, because International Women's Day, as they say, it belongs to everyone everywhere, and so does the Social Care WRES. And inclusion means everything for everybody, and it ensures that everyone's valued, and everybody feels that they belong, that they're listened to, and they're heard. So really taking collective action and shared ownership, for not only driving gender parity, but also race equity and equality, that's what makes

International Women's Day and the Social Care WRES so powerful. So I've been involved in the Social Care WRES since 2018. And I became the Advisory Group Chair in 2021. And I'm going to first talk to my colleague, Gerry McMurdie. Gerry, tell me a little bit about how you became involved in the Social Care Workforce Race Equality Standard, as an advisory group member, and just what it means to you.

Gerry McMurdie 02:16

So I became involved, as I originally was a member of the COVID task force that was set up in 2020. In the first, after the first wave, and a taskforce was set up. It was the last task force to look at the impact of COVID-19 on Black and Asian social care workforce and communities. And as a result of the work we did there, Trisha, Sophie, you were also part of that, as well as Cedi, our excellent Co-chair. We were invited to support the work to implement a Social Care WRES. We felt given that the experiences and the impact that the taskforce had in terms of raising people's voices, to senior government advisors, ministers, we thought would be a way to continue to make a real meaningful difference and impact. What was very evident was that social care has a very diverse workforce. But at a certain level, it's very much like the NH snowy white peaks. And many of us have been working in social care and health for many, many years, my own mother worked in social care and health, and really not that much had changed. So the Social Care WRES and the opportunity to work as part of the advisory group was an opportunity we felt we couldn't afford to miss. It was an opportunity to really address equities, inequities in social care and the workforce, for the betterment for all the people who draw upon care and those that want to work in social care, that were wanting to stay in social care, but maybe felt it wasn't them anymore. Because a key issue for social care is recruitment and retention. There's a real opportunity that the Social Care WRES has a positive influence on that as well. And we think it's already starting to do that. So those were the big reasons I wanted to do that.

Tricia Pereira 04:35

Thank you. Thank you, Gerry, and Sophie, what are your views on International Women's Day and the theme, but also how that interlinks with the ethos of the WRES.

Sophie Chester-Glynn 04:45

Yes, thanks, Trisha. And thanks for also organising. I think that for me, there's definitely not enough attention on the amazing work that women of all ethnicities do in social care. It's one of, and this is Skills for Care own data, so social care workforce is one of the most ethnically diverse in England workforce and where ethnic minority staff take up 23% of the workforce, making it more diverse than the overall population. So I think it's, very gendered, there are

men, obviously, who work in the sector, but also majority of them are women. And there are a lot of issues with pay and conditions and just respecting the valuable work that women do in this sector. So I think that bringing together International Women's Day really brings a focus on the work that women do, I mean, every day should be International Women's Day, to be honest. But if it's an opportunity and excuse to celebrate what we do, and the theme this year, for International Women's Day is inspire. I think it's just wonderful that we're able to have these types of conversations, hopefully inspire others, and the Social Care Workforce RES it's just so inspirational for me anyway, because I'm able to have these conversations, I'm able to think about how we are supporting people within our own organisation in everything that we do, inspire, bring up support, all of these things are so important, because sometimes you are the only person who another woman will get support from or a woman from a marginalised background, will get support from. If you make it, you can inspire others, you can help bring other people up. And I feel very lucky to be around a lot of women, you know, even on this call, who I know do that actively. And the WRES really does focus on how we can support people and recognise what people are going through whether it's racism in the workplace, whether it's being disproportionately singled out for extra work, but not having enough support, all these things. And it really brings into focus and makes our leaders really think about how they are supporting their workforce in all the wonderful diverse forms that the workforce comes in. And I think it's just it's great that we can marry the Social Care WRES up with International Women's Day in that way.

Tricia Pereira 07:25

Thank you. Thanks, Sophie. And now you're right data is important. It really is. But it's the action that follows on from understanding the data that really makes the res and any other activity really impactful, especially in galvanising change. So Liz, can you tell us a little bit about what you've been doing in Hertfordshire, because I know you've been one of the original test sites for the Social Care WRES, and you're still championing the Social Care WRES. So how's it working out for you?

Liz Fergus 07:57

Thanks, Trisha. So I suppose I can start by saying, I started my role as the EEDI, equity, equality, diversity and inclusion lead in Herts. County Council Adult Care Services department back in November 2020, at which point, we were putting ourselves forward to be amongst the first phase WRES sites and I was really enthused by the fact that we were stepping forward to do that. I work in a Shire Council. And I think sometimes the perception of the Shire Council is that there isn't a huge amount of ethnic diversity in that council. But across adults and children's social care, around 70% of the workforce, bit more probably, is female, and in adult

care services, now 29% of the workforce is from an ethnic diverse, ethnically diverse background. And when I started my role, it was over 25% of the workforce, from an ethnically diverse background. And so I think it's really important that we recognise the intersection of race and gender and all other characteristics that people inhabit in their lives. And, and seek to work to address inequity where we see it, and we do see it in social care across the country, and in my own organisation. And so it was really positive that we've been able to use SC-WRES as the focus point, one for kind of highlighting and establishing that these challenges exist. I think sometimes it's easy to see that they're there, but they're not acknowledged. So I think SC-WRES has enabled us to acknowledge the challenges that we face, and then take some active work to address those challenges. We've got six actions in our action plan and one of the things we've been able to do, and this has benefited the whole council, is introduce a third party harassment, bullying and abuse policy. And that came out, a lot of the impetus for that was from the WRES work that we've been doing, and what we were able to see from looking at our data, really try and embed equity, equality, diversity and inclusion into how we practice social care.

Tricia Pereira 10:51

Do you know what Liz that is really heartening to hear, it's really positive. And what's really positive for me is the amount of the number of councils who wanted to join up to become initial WRES sites to test the metric when it was first being launched and developed by the Chief Social Workers office. But also in this phase as well, we had so many councils who are stepping forward. Sophie, Gerry, do you have anything, any reflections that you'd like to add?

Gerry McMurdie 11:18

I think some of the feedback we've had from the group meetings we've had with other council staff has been positive. And they've actually acknowledged that it's enabled, and given a space and time for certain conversations, to start, and then to use that in a meaningful way to address factors in recruitment, processes in recruitment, and have a much more inclusive and progressive recruitment policy. So it's highlighted and shone a light in areas of policy and practice, that perhaps people didn't expect, they thought they were doing okay in. So this is why it's been a really positive force. So it gives a kind of an assurance process, to check, confirm, but also use it as an internal audit and review. Because you can then make some really meaningful, sustainable changes. Now, bearing in mind credit to these councils that have done this with pretty much no money. You know, the NHS WRES had a lot of money thrown at it. And it's another example of the disparity and lack of esteem, that social care, social services has. But I think most councils to their credit, and the staff, in the councils and Skills for Care supporting this, have done a phenomenal job, in the work they've done so far,

despite all of that, because people know it's the right thing to do. And it works if it's done with with commitment and vision. Councils have been very, very creative in making their money go further, they've got used to having to do that. But you know, there is a need to look at that and doing this in a sustainable way to make this effective, but also really impactful for everybody, whether they are somebody who needs social care, we've got a population that's also extremely diverse across the country, who, you know, they pay, they're paying their taxes, when they expect or may need that support, they should have an experience which makes them feel valued. They feel seen and heard, regardless of who they are, where they live, what language, religion, skin colour they have. So this is critical to ensure that we have a society, not just social care services that are equitable, that everybody feels valued, and feels that they're included and they're seen.

Sophie Chester-Glynn 14:08

I think that for me, it's just wonderful to see how you can point out the issues then have that action, that people can actually do something from that. But sometimes actually, what the WRES has done is actually point out in black and white, some of the issues that people are facing and might talk about colloquially. But sometimes, leaders don't really see that as evidence they need to see it in black and white. And I was looking at some of the highlights from last year on the WRES. And things like staff with a Black, Asian and minority ethnic background were relatively almost one and a half times as likely to enter the formal disciplinary process than staff from a white ethnicity background around. And then these two stats staff with a Black, Asian and minority ethnic background were relatively more likely to be experiencing harassment, bullying and abuse from people who use social care services relatives or the public. And that same group are relatively 1.3 times more likely to experience harassment, bullying, or abuse from colleagues, and 1.9 times more likely from managers compared to white staff. So you've got this issues that people, minoritised groups are facing in the workplace from different angles. And I think people are feeling that, but maybe don't feel empowered to go to their managers or shout out to say, this is what's happening to me. And it's, and it's a real thing. But when you have something like the WRE, that forces people in leadership and power positions to make a change, because it's staring them in the face, that this is not only just the reality that people are talking about, this is a real reality that they can see and that they are forced to do something about. So I just think it's fantastic. And, you know, thinking about the International Women's Day, the fact that the majority of those people experiencing those, that harassment, those negative experiences and abuse, are women. It would be good really for something like the WRES to be made a standard that has to be done throughout social care, because it is so gendered. And because it represents a workforce that's just so incredibly diverse.

Tricia Pereira 16:36

One of the ways that evidence is gathered for the WRES is staff engagement and staff surveys, and the importance of safe spaces where people, all staff members can speak up and can talk and share. Because when you think about the impact on everyday discrimination, everyday racism, it's the traumatic effects and impact that it has on individuals. So you're right, being able to speak up, being able to have the confidence to speak up and to, to know that you will be heard, is fundamental, it's crucial. So Liz, what are some of the the opportunities that you have been developing within Herts. to encourage staff engagement.

Liz Fergus 17:26

So we run a series of ways in which we engage with colleagues across adult social care and children's social care. So last year, in October, we ran a conference, and the focus of the conference was the WRES and what we found out in doing the WRES, and some of our other work on equity, equality, diversity and inclusion. So colleagues across adults and children's social care, were invited to take part in that conference. And it was a really great event, very engaging, people contributed some of the work that they're doing individually, inspired by the WRES, and we're planning another one for this year. When we were developing our action plan, we made sure to speak to our staff network group, I was one of the committee members of the staff network group at the time, which helped that but it was really important to engage with colleagues in the staff network group, I held sessions which colleagues across adult social care and children's social care, we're invited to take part in so we've tried to maintain a range of different ways that people can engage with the WRES, be informed about the WRES, understand what we're doing, why we're doing it, and what the outcomes from it are. We've also run surveys as well to gather some not just quantitative data, but qualitative data, so, I think it's really important that we're not just considering the quantitative data, but actually understanding experience, because it's experienced that we want to change as well as, you know, some of the numbers and where people are represented in the organisation. It's really important that we change people's experience. But I just wanted to reflect on some of what Sophie was saying about power. I recognise that in this role, I have privilege. I was born in the UK lived here all my life. I've worked in social care for a long time, I can use all of that, to help me do my work. And I know that many of my colleagues don't have that experience. Many of the people that we work with in our community don't have that experience. So for me, it's about using the power that I have, and using the power that's given to me and handed to me by leaders in my organisation, to then make change and use other people to create change in this journey. So you don't do it by yourself. One of the things I've learned in doing the work I do is that it's always evolving, I am always evolving, my peers are always evolving, the workforce is

always evolving. So it's always a journey we're always learning. But the WRES is one of the ways in which we're able to take ownership and be accountable for achieving change. And I think that's really fundamental.

Sophie Chester-Glynn 20:40

One thing I would say, though, that I've just been interested in considering how we have to often barter or argue for better support or recognition for women and in the non white community, through the lens of economics and money, and we have to almost quantify what we do especially in care, and I find that deeply frustrating. And I haven't finished it yet, but I'm reading this book, about who cooked Adam Smith's dinner. And it's quite funny, because obviously the philosopher economist, Adam Smith, and they just write in the introduction and he argued that, you know, people do everything, the economic man, everything's based on the economic man, and how this economic man made bread and meat for profit, not out of the goodness of his heart, but you know, to make profit. But it's ironic that Adam was a bachelor who lived with his mother for most of his life, a woman who cooked his dinner every night. So he's basing a lot of his theory on half the population. So I would urge people, especially our male leaders, don't feel that you have to be talked to through the lens of how much is this policy of being inclusive or diverse or supporting belonging going to help the country or the area or the local authority economically, please open your minds to arguments that are just arguing for a better quality of life or better recognition. We're more than just pounds and pennies. And also I have another book, I have to plug if people have time to do any reading is a book by my friend, April-Louise Pennant, *Babygirl, You've Got This!* And it's really looking at the lack of support, the experiences of Black girls and women in the English education system. And I think it's interesting to sort of, again, look at experiences and be attuned to that, and not just what a sector of society can do to the rest of society economically. So I think the WRES definitely helps us bring that to the fore.

Tricia Pereira 23:03

Thank you. Thank you, Liz. Thank you, Gerry. Thank you, Sophie. And actually, I want to take a moment to celebrate you and all of your achievements, because I find you such an inspiration, every one of you. I feel really lucky, I feel really blessed that I'm in the room with you actually, that I get the opportunity to work with you. Because you're just totally, yeah, you're so inspiring for me, and for everything that you do and everything that we have to go through to progress change. And in the words of Dr. Maya Angelou, you're just phenomenal, phenomenal women.