

An Interview with Martyn Souter

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Martyn Souter talks about the Inspire Improvement Fellowship

The programme was amazing from start to finish. When I was on the Inspire Improvement programme, I was a new team leader with little management experience. I'd not worked in any management posts and had been a clinical nurse up until that point.

The Fellowship came around at a really good time; it was the start of my leadership journey.

I think the programme is great for people who have been leaders for quite a long time and want to challenge some of their understandings around facilitating good leadership, but I think it's also equally as good for people that are just starting their leadership journey. It helps set a really strong foundation, particularly around understanding the impact of values and



leading a values-based culture; that was the biggest thing that I took away from the programme.



I think the programme really helps to support leaders to adopt a 'facilitative leadership' approach - investing in staff by promoting leadership at all levels, which I think is really important. I've always said to my staff that if facilitating service development and changes were left solely up to me, it would consume my entire day, and I probably wouldn't make quality decisions, compared to tackling these decisions

as a team.

I think sometimes there's a bit of a hesitancy at senior leadership level to involve staff in decisions relating to service development because they might have wildly different ideas from what's mapped out within the expectations from governing bodies. I think a key solution to involve everyone in leadership and decision making is to prioritize a shared team values base and drive innovation from those values, within the scope of influence that we are provided.

I am now in a Lead Nurse position, having been promoted soon after completing the Fellowship. When I was doing my interview for the post that I'm in now, I heavily referenced a lot of my learning from the Inspire Improvement Programme. At senior management level, there's a lot of focus on transformational leadership and involvement. Everyone, regardless of their bands and or their job title, are leaders in the service and I think the fact that I came in with that understanding and drive really helped me to get the post. I am now fortunate enough to be in a position to do what the Inspire Improvement Programme was really empowering me to do, but on a much larger scale, which is great.

I never set out to be in a leadership position. The push to get the team leader position in my last job was because it was a newly commissioned service which I felt really strongly about, in terms of what the new service could achieve for children and young people. I felt a push to put

my hat in the ring to make sure that the service was developed in the right way. It wasn't until I got into the post that I realised that developing a service is one thing, but I was also managing a team and to deliver the service in the right way, I had to make sure we were all on the same page in terms of what we wanted to achieve.

My passions lay in providing the best service for children and young people experiencing mental health problems. The biggest learning point for me during the Fellowship was how I could achieve that through leadership. The programme showed me that to achieve the change that you want for the client group that you provide for, it's really important to empower the team. That really motivated me to continue being a leader. My initial plan was to do my team lead position for a year, develop an innovative service, and then return to clinical work. But when I saw the impact that informed leadership could have on services, it drove me to keep going down that path. So the Fellowship helped develop and motivate me within my leadership journey and changed the course of my career for the better, which I'm very appreciative of.

Another important aspect of the programme was the peer network. I was the only Scottish person in the group and the only mental health nurse. On the first day, I was wondering if I was going to be able to relate to this group of people because we came from such different backgrounds geographically and from a speciality perspective. But what the programme showed me is that, leadership, if you strip it down, it doesn't come down to what specific job you're doing. It's about the values that the leader has. And I think what was really great is that the programme challenged us to consider our own values and also intentionally modelled that within the group by helping us to develop shared values as a group. I was pleasantly surprised to see just how much my peers and I had in common.

Thanks Martyn for sharing your thoughts and experience.