

UNISON North West Supporting Learning and Development for School Support Staff

From Monday 24th to Friday 28th July UNISON North West hosted a full week of short courses for school support staff. A total of 150 teaching assistants, learning support, admin support and midday supervisors enrolled onto a diverse range of workshops throughout the week.

Members started the week with a one day 'Promoting Positive Behaviours' workshop in Manchester which was so popular we are hosting further sessions in Cumbria and Manchester in the Autumn. Teaching assistants, lunchtime supervisors and finance and admin support gained new skills in how to promote positive behaviours in classrooms and corridors. Tutor Jeremy Brigham, a deputy Head teacher from a special behavioural support unit explained, "School support staff have an indispensable role as the eyes and ears of the school and can make a real difference in creating a positive learning environment for our young people and staff". Jeremy went on to describe some of the appalling conditions of poverty our young people live in and the importance of children receiving a proper meal during school lunchtimes. Jeremy recommended the establishment of regular school forums to allow senior leadership teams to hear the views of those closest to the running of the school – the support staff – and for their views to be taken into account. The course can be run within school settings, members were encouraged to speak with Head teachers and employers about effective use of scheduled INSET training time and how to make use of the UNISON learning and development offer.



Over in Liverpool, members were busy up skilling their teaching strategies with maths expert Stephanie Lawrence of School Improvement Liverpool, a group which works with school maths departments to improve outcomes for learners across the city. Stephanie explained changes to the curriculum before offering some excellent resources to add to a 'toolkit' of hands on activities for supporting maths in the classroom. Cathy Gilroy, a teaching assistant, commented, "Really enjoyed the course, excellent communication from the course leader. Topics were all relevant and has given me a renewed enthusiasm for supporting in Maths classes". Further workshops are planned.





On Tuesday morning at Merseylearn Liverpool, school staff joined transport workers and community police officers for a workshop on Polish language and culture delivered by Gosia McKane, project manager of Merseyside Polonia, an organisation which supports bridge building between communities. Two Merseytravel staff members who are from a Polish background joined learners for lunch. While from differing backgrounds, all learners shared a common goal of wanting to help and support Polish people in their

communities by learning some basic phrases and understanding more about Poland. Members took part in Show Racism the Red Card, in both languages.

In the afternoon, Schools staff joined Joy Rowlands, a tutor working with the Open University, for a session on Autism Awareness.



On Wednesday members travelled to Preston for workshops on Mental Health Awareness and Dyslexia Awareness delivered by Cath Roberts from the Manchester College. Regional schools lead Keith Bradley attended the day and presented certificates to members. Keith commented, “A fantastic turnout today, everybody enjoyed themselves. We look forward to offering further learning and development opportunities for our members through our excellent partnerships with providers and access to the Union Learning Fund”. Teaching Assistant and UNISON rep Cheryl Parker commented, “Can I just say what an amazing lady Cath is. She gave an outstanding service to all who attended the course. Cath’s knowledge on mental health and dyslexia was brilliant. I certainly would be interested in the three day course for mental health, this lies very close to me. Everyone introduced



themselves at the beginning of the sessions which was great. There was great communication from the group, especially in the Mental Health workshop. Keep the courses going, they are brilliant!”

On Thursday 20 members attended a confidence and self esteem workshop called Power to be You in Manchester delivered by the Workers Educational Association. Learners gained new skills in developing a confident and assertive persona. During a break time discussion led by UNISON, members asked about



what they should do in schools which have no workplace rep and explained the difficulty sometimes of raising issues in schools. Regional Learning Organiser Tom Jenkins explained, “A workplace rep is vital to have in every school. If there is no rep in your school you must hold a meeting of UNISON members and elect one. Your local UNISON branch and regional office will support you and provide the relevant training necessary to perform the role, we don’t throw people in at the deep end, rather we provide a network and support structure for reps’

development. The membership learning and development offer from our union presents an excellent opportunity to sit down with school leaders and make a strong and positive case for supporting members”.



The Friday sessions brought the week to a close with British Sign Language and Managing conflict workshops at the Manchester College. Deaf tutor Dipti Patel from the Manchester Deaf Centre delivered an outstanding course in basic BSL. Learner Jane commented, “I didn’t realise I would learn so much, outstanding tutor!” In the afternoon, learners took part in a discussion led workshop around managing conflict and dealing with difficult situations, mostly to do with relationships between school staff. Members explored ways

of dealing with stressful situations, often leading to discussions of how UNISON can help with developing a positive and collective response to challenging circumstances to the benefit of the whole school community. Learners expressed interest in further workshops including a suggested residential weekend on this and other issues, which UNISON will explore.

Members in schools should contact their local branch and regional office for advice on how to tap in to the UNISON schools offer.

