

Northwood Tissue: Success Through People

CASE STUDY



In May 2024, Northwood Tissue were the worthy winners of the first Paper Industry Gold Award for EDI for their Success Through People initiative. Andrew Large, Director General of CPI recently visited Dawn Roberts, Human Resources Director of Northwood Tissue, to find out more about the initiative and how it has transformed Northwood Tissue.

Andrew: Thank you very much for meeting me today Dawn. Can I start by asking you when the Success Through People initiative started?

Dawn: Thank you for coming to see us! The initiative was agreed by the Northwood Board in 2023, and we have been full steam ahead with implementation ever since.

Andrew: And why did the Board come to that decision?

Dawn: There was clearly a moral argument to making all Northwood colleagues feel valued and creating an environment where they can thrive. There was also a business argument. Our EDI work is an integral part of a wider HR Strategy that aims to reduce attrition, improve our safety record, increase efficiency and strengthen our reputation in the local community.

The EDI strategy was designed to raise awareness, further improve our diversity and representation from local communities and further develop our employee experience, enabling colleagues to be their true selves.

Andrew: What exactly did you and your colleagues do to implement the Board's decision?

Dawn: At Northwood we've taken a number of specific actions aimed at increasing the diversity of the workforce, and reinforcing the existing wide range of colleagues that we have. For example:

An employee portal launched in September 2023, known as MyNorthwood, which provides access to employee benefits, a wellbeing portal, payslips, a holiday booking system, a communications hub, near miss reporting, the Company Handbook, policies and procedures and much more; all accessible in one handy application available via mobile phone, tablet and desktop. The portal particularly benefited shopfloor colleagues who can now readily access everything they need remotely at any time of the day/night.



Dawn Roberts

We also started monthly menopause affinity group meetings, sharing knowledge and information on all things related to

perimenopause and menopause; plus, a Menopause hub available via MyNorthwood provides useful resources to colleagues and their managers.

To improve the candidate pipeline diversity, we now insist on at least 20% of the shortlist being female. Assuming all candidates meet our selection criteria, has led to appointing a female Site Manager, an 11% increase in female directors and a 2% increase in hiring females in the past 12 months.

Last September, we signed up for the Living Wage, to improve fairness in our pay rates. Investing in colleagues' financial wellbeing has benefited 121 colleagues (20% female).

Andrew: How much did this work cost Northwood and how did you secure implementation?

Dawn: The total cost of the work was around £176,000. We have instituted an Annual EDI Report, which is a useful driver of progress and we have undertaken a lot of upfront measures, such as seeking a more gender balanced approach to recruitment, all of which are bearing fruit.

Andrew: Are there any particular examples you would like to highlight for this case study?

Dawn: Two highlights include an interview 'Celebrating our Sisters' during Black History Month with Evelyn Koomson a Reworker who originated from Ghana and moved to the UK in 2018 and a personal message on World Autism Awareness Day from Sam, the son of our Telford's HSE Manager. Neurodiversity is a significantly underappreciated issue, and I was very proud of Sam's message, and also the reaction of colleagues and the greater understanding and awareness they have shown.

Andrew: What were the most important results you achieved?

Dawn: The greatest impact has been on attrition. With 141 leavers in 2023 compared to 205 in 2022. Average annual labour turnover improved by 65.6% (33.91% to 22.27%); whilst headcount rose by 10.6% (759 to 840 colleagues).

With an increase in demand for our vacancies, the time to hire has decreased from 40.9 to 28.2 days. The quality of applications has increased too. In just four months 97% (819) of colleagues downloaded and started using MyNorthwood. In the past two months, MyNorthwood has had 1,972 click-throughs and 165,479 users logged in more than once, including 266 unique users clicking on the platform - showing there is a demand for the service/benefit.

Since the introduction of the Menopause Affinity Group, 75% of attendees have said their knowledge of the symptoms of perimenopause and menopause

CELEBRATING OUR SISTERS EVELYN KOOMSON

Reworker, Northwood Hygiene Products Ltd.



Q: Please can you share with us a bit about yourself?

Born in Kwanyako, Ghana, I'm one of 1 of 6 siblings. I moved to the bustling Accra at 19 and began as a seamstress. I opened my own store and was able to take on 4 apprentices. For many years I was buying and selling items in between jobs too. (business women!)

I met my husband in 2000, which led to our beautiful traditional wedding in Ghana, followed by our official marriage in a methodist church 1 year later. I made the move and joined my husband in Italy where I worked many seasonal jobs. We relocated to Croydon, UK, in 2018. Later moving to Telford after being invited to a friend's Christmas celebration.

Q: Are there any women you admire?

Michelle Obama – I think her self-sufficiency, creativity, and conscious living, inspires women to be independent and confident.

Gifty Anti – A remarkable journalist and women's advocate. She waited until age 46 to marry, refusing to rush or compromise, even when success intimidated men.

Q: What has your experience been like at Northwood?

I actually came to Northwood to cover Theresa for 2 weeks. I joined the Warehouse via agency and one long year later I was given a permanent contract. (They must have sensed I was leaving the day they gave it to me) But I love my job and the people we work with in the Warehouse.

Q: What is some advice you would give to your younger self and other young women?

Be thoughtful and intentional with your life decisions. Live and grow independently and jump in, even when things are out of your comfort zone.

has increased. 75% said they are more easily able to talk about their experience with others. 100% said the group had had a positive impact on morale and 63% of attendees have taken steps to improve their perimenopause and menopause symptoms.

Andrew: How did you engage with your Board to ensure they supporting the initiative?

Dawn: The original proposal required a business case with ROI and the Board made a quick decision as they see that Northwood's success depends on an engaged workforce. Now, over 18 months on, they are delighted with the results and pushing us to do more.

October 2024