

Investors in People

Retaining Accreditation Follow-up Report

Northern Ireland Guardian Ad Litem Agency

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On behalf of: Investors in People

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Award Level: Bronze

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1. Executive Summary

The Northern Ireland Guardian Ad Litem Agency (NIGALA) provides a service for children and young people who have allegedly been abused and neglected and whose futures are being decided by the courts in the respective arenas of public law and adoption. These children represent some of the most vulnerable in society and guardians ad litem endeavour to ensure that their needs remain the focus of court proceedings and that the outcome is the best that can be achieved.

NIGALA was first assessed and recognised as an Investors in People organisation in 2006. It attained Bronze accreditation in 2009 and was successfully reviewed at this level in 2012. A 3-year review visit was conducted in June 2015, during which a cross-representation of senior leaders, managers and staff, 21 in total, were engaged in discussions over a 3-day visit. The findings indicated that there were gaps in evidence requirements within the Core Standard; therefore, it was not possible to confirm reaccreditation at that time. As a result, the Agency moved into a period of Retaining Accreditation, and subsequently produced an action plan to address the identified areas of concern and to confirm a commitment to return to the Standard. The main areas that resulted in the retaining accreditation process were linked to leadership effectiveness, staff not feeling valued for their contribution, or being able to confirm that improvements had been made to people management and development practices. This feedback was supplemented by the results of a Staff Climate Survey that was externally facilitated in May / June 2015.

In line with the rules for Retaining Accreditation, a follow-up visit was arranged for June 2016, and this report has been compiled following discussions with 10 members of staff and the Chair of the Board. Founded on evidence submitted and feedback from staff, I have been able to establish that NIGALA has made significant progress against its action plan; and ongoing Investors in People accreditation is now confirmed.

There were undoubtedly some difficult messages arising from the Investors in People Review and Staff Climate Survey; and it has required thoughtful work across the Agency to generate an improved level of trust. This visit has demonstrated a commitment to providing effective opportunities for staff engagement and participation over issues of concern within which challenge can be pursued in a mature way.

There is an evident allegiance to the shared values and vision, and the direction set out in various frameworks, strategies and policies to ensure that the Agency continues to deliver services as effectively and as efficiently as possible, within the resources that are available. Staff have been proactively involved in corporate planning and reviewing the mission, vision and values.

Unquestionably, the work of NIGALA provides a real sense of ownership; with feedback from people confirming how they are being encouraged to put forward ideas, opinions and suggestions. This is manifested in the range of committees and working groups. The efforts to encourage partnership working to find solutions to challenges is evident; through both formal consultation and staff engagement, which is rebuilding and strengthening relationships.

People reflect that the change in leadership has resulted in a return to a positive culture where senior managers are seen to be open and accessible, willing to listen to ideas and take action where appropriate; and importantly encouraging an environment of trust, respect, involvement and value for the contribution that staff make. Externally facilitated work is ongoing with the Board and Senior Management to ensure they are able to coach and develop their teams, build a shared vision and help nurture a positive climate of high engagement.

I am therefore delighted to be able to report that the consensus of opinion is that substantial progress has been made. This is in no small part due to the personal approach of the Acting Chief Executive and the combined efforts of the Senior Management Team in committing to a programme of change and seeing this through. The following quotes have been used to illustrate the findings:



“There has been a tremendous change in leadership approach”

“It’s a completely different working environment ... There’s not the same anxiety or stress ... People are more relaxed”

“The mood is completely different ... The atmosphere is different ... Positive, calmer, lighter”

“The Agency is really trying to rectify the issues ... Particularly through involvement and respect for staff”

“We have picked ourselves up, dusted ourselves down and are moving forward”

“We now have perspective and hope”

“The air of threat and oppression has lifted ... This has all gone ... We are back to what we were before”

The narrative in Section 3 of this report provides a summary of actions taken since my visit in 2015; and includes some non-attributable quotes from staff to demonstrate their views on progress achieved.

Section 4 contains a small number of high-level development points in support of the Agency’s improvement journey. These relate to furtherance of activities associated with core values, leadership style and capability, and overarching people strategy; with consideration of the requirements within the new Investors in People Framework.

The content of this report needs to be considered in conjunction with the feedback and recommendations in the Investors in People Report dated 8th July 2015.

2. Assessment Outcome

The results of this follow-up visit confirm that NIGALA has made sufficient progress to enable the organisation to move out of Retaining Accreditation and to be accredited at Bronze level.

This accreditation is valid for another 2 years. A full assessment must take place no longer than three years from the original due date of reaccreditation in June 2015. We will hold an interim review within 12 months.

Stephanie McCutcheon



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3. Summary of Findings

To meet the NIGALA vision staff need to be well-trained, motivated and engaged; and therefore there is clear acknowledgement that the vision and strategy can only be delivered through staff within a framework of best practice people management and development. This section provides a summary of some of the actions that have been taken or are underway in response to feedback from the 2015 Investors in People Review and Staff Climate Survey. Due to the limited time on site and small engagement sample, it is not possible to comment on the effectiveness of these actions in detail; further analysis will be conducted during the next full assessment in June 2018.

As a result of the findings from both the Investors in People Review and Staff Climate Survey, the output reports were shared with staff and focus groups hosted. The combined key themes that emerged from the workshops were leadership, management of change and engagement of staff. A comprehensive action plan was created and presented to the Board. The incumbent Chief Executive at that time subsequently left the organisation and the appointed Acting Chief Executive and Senior Management Team reviewed and updated the action plan. All senior managers now attend Board Meetings to assist the Board's understanding of staff related issues.

Sessions with staff have been hosted during which the future plans for the Agency were discussed and activities conducted to gain input into corporate plan priorities, as well as to review the vision and mission statements, and core values. People believe that this signifies a commitment to *communicating and working together; aspiring and improving; and being respectful*.

Effective communication and engagement with staff is now high on the agenda. Whilst a range of fora has always existed within NIGALA, people now reflect positively on the leadership approach and interactions during meetings and sessions. Examples were provided of away days and internal meetings; working groups for caseload weighting and children and young people's participation; Information and Governance Committee and Social Care Governance Committee. Professional Development Groups are continuing to operate and are viewed as having improved. The HSC Leadership Centre has facilitated engagement sessions focusing on *"growing a culture of continuous learning and improvement"*. The following quotes support the consensus of opinion.



"There is now a sense of vision and leadership ... We know where we are going"

"We all met up to discuss the mission, vision and values ... We were all part of this ... It wasn't done in isolation"

"The Professional Development Groups are better organised and regular ... They have been invigorated"

"A place on the Social Care Governance Board opened up and there was a lot of interest ... Capitalised on this by setting up a Social Care Governance Forum"

"There are work streams associated with the Social Care Governance ... People now want to get involved"

"They take time to update staff on what has been discussed at Board Meetings"

One of the other actions that is being considered is the introduction of a Staff Forum. A survey was issued to gain views on whether a forum of this nature would be welcomed and what its remit should be. 94% of respondents felt a staff forum would be useful. Work is also ongoing on reviewing the current performance framework with specific regard to supervision. High-level plans indicate a desire to re-run the Staff Climate Survey to provide a quantitative measure of staff views and perceptions.

The Senior Management Team has undoubtedly experienced a challenging time, and there is recognition of the need to provide support with *“sense-making, recovery, high performance development and re-contracting and re-connecting with the Board”*. External support has been sourced to design a programme of Systemic Team Coaching for the Senior Management Team with active engagement of the Board. The overall aim is to build collective leadership, and move towards greater shared responsibility and mutual accountability. Significant investment has been approved and work is well underway through 1-1 meetings and exploratory group sessions with the management team and the Board. This will result in shared feedback and planning, followed by individual and team coaching.

Plans are underway to recruit and appoint a new Chief Executive. It is fair to say this is causing a degree of trepidation for staff; which is acknowledged by the Board, and therefore the aim is to widen involvement in the recruitment and selection process.

Looking to the future, it will be important to establish consistent, values-led leadership as the Agency moves forward and has certainly listened to staff about what this means to them. Feedback during this visit has illustrated that *‘green shoots’* of recovery are there to build upon to ensure staff are passionate about working for the organisation, proud of the difference they make and inspired to continuously improve. This is reflected in the comments below:



“There is an element of stability”

“It’s now respectful, collaborative, consultative”

“Senior management are really making an effort and it’s appreciated”

“It was traumatic but there has been a tremendous amount of change”

“The levels of trust and respect have been rebuilt”

“It’s more relaxed, people are brighter ... Better atmosphere”

“It has changed ... It was pressured and people were threatened ... Now everybody seems happier”

“People are not so tense ... It’s calmer ... We are very lucky to work in a place like this”

“It’s back to the way it used to be ... If there are issues we can raise them ... We support each other”

4. Areas for Future Focus

The environment that the Agency operates within is a demanding one, and there are challenges in making changes necessary to continue to be successful now and in the future. As agreed the output from this review is limited due to the methodology and small sample size, therefore this section has been presented to encourage the direction of travel and not to mandate detail. The high-level development points are in addition to the recommendations contained within the 2015 Investors in People report, and are set in the context of the new Investors in People Framework.

The Investors in People Standard has evolved to keep pace with modern practices. The sixth generation (IIP6) was launched in September 2015; and we will use this for your next assessment in 2018. The new framework reflects the latest workplace trends, leading practices and employee conditions required to create outperforming teams. The framework focuses on 9 key indicators, underpinned by a performance model. Each level from **Developed** and **Established** through to **Advanced** and **High Performing** describes the practices and outcomes required for higher performance and higher accreditation. The assessment methodology has been refined to use a blend of desk analysis, online assessment and face to face engagement. A summary of the key changes are noted below:

- *Leading and Inspiring People* is a priority area and the Standard refers to passion, trust, transparency, active role model behaviours and two-way communication.
- There is greater emphasis on *Living the Organisation's Values and Behaviours*.
- There is increased emphasis on *Empowering and Involving People, Managing Performance*, as well as having a culture where people are motivated to perform at their best by *Recognising and Rewarding High Performance*.
- *Structuring Work* is a new area of focus which talks about clear accountability, decision making authority, definition of skills and capabilities, collaboration and sharing of knowledge and information.
- *Building Capability* combines a number of key areas such as recruitment, career development, resource and succession planning, as well as learning and development.
- *Delivering Continuous Improvement* has been strengthened, and includes 'learning from efforts, mistakes and success', as well as being 'passionate about innovation'.
- There is a new focus on *Creating Sustainable Success*, which builds on change management, involvement, business impact, social impact and horizon scanning.



You can download information on the new Standard and conduct a self-assessment online to measure your performance against it. These can be accessed at:

<https://www.investorsinpeople.com/resources/achieving-investors-people/introduction-sixth-generation-standard>

<https://www.investorsinpeople.com/online-self-diagnostic>

1. The core values of an organisation are those values which form the foundation on which people perform work and conduct themselves. They should represent the guiding principles of the organisation's culture, including what guides staff priorities and actions. Values underpin the culture of an organisation, so are critical to achieving strategic goals; and culture has such an impact it can make or break any organisation's success.

IIP6, now has a pillar dedicated to values, which tests that *People and leaders act in line with the organisation's values at all times; and that they have the courage and support to challenge inconsistent behaviours*. The three themes within the indicator relate to: *operating in line with the values, adopting the values and living the values*.

Work has been done on reviewing and redefining the NIGALA values in collaboration with staff. Looking to the future:

- What actions need to be taken to maintain momentum and to ensure a values-led culture within which staff are clear about the values and behaviours expected of them?
- What changes need to be made to ensure the core values are aligned with HR practices so that staff are recruited, developed and performance managed in line with the core values?

2. Challenges dictate a more collaborative and shared form of leadership, and this concept was highlighted as a future imperative so that the Agency can be agile and responsive. This type of leader adopts a facilitating, outcome-driven style and bears the primary responsibility of nurturing talent that aligns with strategic direction. This is not just about individuals but helping people to recognise how everyone is working to deliver against a set of top level objectives.

Within IIP6 there are two indicators of relevance here. Indicator 1 – *Leading and Inspiring People (Leaders make the organisation's objectives clear. They inspire and motivate people to deliver against these objectives and are trusted by people in the organisation)*; and Indicator 3 - *Empowering and Involving People (There is a culture of trust and ownership in the organisation where people feel empowered to make decisions and act on them)*.

An externally, facilitated development programme is underway for the Senior Management Team. With this in mind:

- How can the concept of shared leadership be communicated to other managers and staff so that everyone is clear on the expectations of how they will be led and managed in the future?
- How can the desired leadership style be reflected within the recruitment and selection process for the new Chief Executive?
- What changes will the Board make to demonstrate its commitment to leading and inspiring people, and to the core values?

3. The aims of any HR strategy are to ensure that an organisation’s vision and plans are delivered through staff within a framework of best practice people management. The NIGALA *People First Strategy* was created in 2015, and identifies the priorities until 2017.

In light of the challenges faced and future focused action plans:

- Is there an opportunity to update the People First Strategy to reflect the core values, alignment of HR practices to these values, and desired shared leadership style?
- What needs to be done to take forward the concept of a Staff Forum and how should this be reflected in the People First Strategy?
- When is the best time to re-run the Staff Climate Survey and what quantitative metrics need to be defined to provide a measure of improvement and staff satisfaction in the future?

5. Next Steps, Key Dates and Acknowledgements

There is merit in arranging a meeting to consider the feedback in this report. The objectives for this meeting would be to answer any queries arising from the report content and support action planning for continuous improvement.

I have included the key milestones in the table below:

IIP Accreditation	Feedback Meeting	Interim Follow-up Visit	Accreditation Expiry
28 th June 2016	August 2016	June 2017	28 th June 2018 *

*the accreditation expiry date reflects the period of retaining accreditation from June 2015.

Investors in People wants to make sure that all clients receive a consistently high standard of service. Following the assessment, you will be asked to complete a customer satisfaction questionnaire to get immediate feedback on the experience you have had. A further questionnaire will be sent to you by the Investors in People National team 6 to 9 months after the assessment which will focus on the value and impact on your organisation.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks for the positive way in which the Senior Management Team engaged with me throughout the period of Retaining Accreditation; demonstrating a commitment to continue to use Investors in People as an improvement tool and to encourage staff to engage with the process even in a time of ongoing change. I look forward to continuing to work with you to support the transition to Investors in People Generation 6 Framework.