

Halifax Opportunities Trust

Website: regen.org.uk

Location: Halifax, West Yorkshire

Founded: 2000

Legal structure: Charity and company limited by guarantee

Description of services: Support covers the areas of employment, learning, wellbeing, enterprise, inclusive integration and children and families

Employees: 84 full-time, 99 part-time

Volunteers: 35 (plus 9 volunteer trustees)

Overview

The aims of Halifax Opportunities Trust (HOT) span from relieving poverty and unemployment to promoting community safety and improving health and wellbeing. They are practically addressed by services which help people to find new or better jobs, learn new skills, start or grow businesses and help raise their families.

Good work practices

Good working conditions are crucial to creating a skilled and motivated workforce. As part of a [research study](#), Middlesex University explored good work practices at HOT across seven dimensions. The findings also informed the development of a '[Pathways to good work](#)' [toolkit with Locality](#) which sets out the practical steps that community organisations can take to improve quality of the jobs they provide.



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Good work for me is about what the work is achieving. So for me it is really important to achieve some form of social justice or social improvement. [...] So good work for me is being fairly recompensed. It is about having conditions of work, where you are not under too much stress, and what I mean by that is you've the time and the skills to do your job properly. You have colleagues who are genuinely enjoyable to work with. [...] and if you're dealing with anything really difficult, that you have the support structures around you to help you cope with that. And I think investment in training and development and a recognition of that is important.

CEO

1. Meaningful work

An important part of HOT's strategy is to ensure that all staff have a good understanding of how they are contributing to the organisation's social mission:



I think we are lucky that we work for an organisation where, whatever you do within HOT, you can see what you do is leading to in some way. And our intention is to improve people's lives, so you can see the reward for what you're doing.

Staff member

Good work needs to provide variety and interest, and allow employees choice and flexibility in how they fulfil their roles. As the CEO argues, "in terms of how you do your work, I still think that the more you provide people with the sort of independence to take decisions within their work that's really important. So I still don't think we're doing it enough, I still believe that fully and I really want to continue to push that right across the organisation".

2. Voice, democratic governance and inclusive culture

The aim is to give staff a voice in decision-making as far as possible but the CEO also recognises how approaches to team working can also be influenced by the preferences and styles of different managers, with some being "much more collaborative and some much more sort of top-down". However, as she also emphasises, there are "parts of HOT, without a shadow of a doubt, with some very good examples of collaborative team decision-making". The employment support team, for instance, discussed collectively how to continue their work during the Covid-19 pandemic and to keep in touch and continue their friendly workplace culture during lockdown:



So what we as a team do now, we meet every morning actually on Zoom. [...] I mean it's not a meeting, it's just, 'Here we are, how are you doing, how are you feeling ...?' So we do that every morning at 10 [...] some people are eating breakfast [...]. We're trying to keep connected as far as possible without actually having a physical office. [...] We enjoy that, we look forward to that bit of wellbeing ... it's just to lighten the mood a little bit, so we try to keep it as fun and friendly as possible, well, as it normally is in the office ...

Staff member

3. Contracts and job design

Most staff are on permanent contracts with only a few on fixed-term (full- and part-time) contracts, depending on the nature of the role and how it is funded. Sometimes fixed-term contracts are extended, with full employment rights accrued after two years. Short-term contracts can be a source of concern from the perspective of job security, but staff understand the challenges faced by the sector:



It's only short term, so I'm kind of getting to the end of [my contract] now. [...] No, I'm not really [concerned] because I have a feeling that they will extend the contract, so I think I'll be okay.

Staff member

4. Pay and benefits

HOT is an accredited [Living Wage Employer](#) and has reaped the benefit of paying a decent wage in terms of staff commitment and retention. The organisation also has a relatively flat structure and deliberately does not have huge pay differentials. Benefits are paid in line with, or above, statutory requirements.

5. Skills and development

Providing opportunities for better utilising and expanding the skills of staff are an important part of the organisation's ethos. HOT also deliberately gives job opportunities to people who might face employment barriers in a traditional business. As the CEO explains, "we will take on people who haven't got all the skills and experience but if they've got the approach and the personality, we give them a chance". This is illustrated by the journey of one staff member who started with HOT as a volunteer and participant in an English language class. She successfully applied for a job at HOT, was encouraged by her manager to attend courses in teaching and business administration, and now applies her new knowledge and teaching skills.



HOT always says that it lives up to its name, because they always provide you with different training and educational opportunities. My experience of working here is very good, 'cause if you come here as a new migrant and nobody tells you about your skills and then gives you the opportunity to apply those skills in the community, then you won't be able to build your confidence, but I think HOT they do really well in this.

Staff member

6. Flexible working, work-life balance and family-friendly support

HOT provides both formal and informal flexible working options to help staff to fit their personal lives around their jobs, such as requests for support when needing to respond to urgent child- or eldercare issues or domestic emergencies. Requests for more regularised changes to work hours can include needing an hour in the middle of the day to collect a child from school. Other staff have reduced their hours from five to four days, or work their full-time hours in four days. Flexible working options are provided to staff across most job roles, although options are more limited where staff need to be present during certain hours, as in case of the nursery.

7. Health and wellbeing

HOT is a [Mindful Employer](#) which means they take their employees' wellbeing very seriously and are committed to promoting good mental health across the organisation. A free, dedicated, confidential helpline is available for staff to access practical advice and support if feeling upset or worried about anything. As a [Disability Confident](#) committed employer, HOT recruits and retains disabled people and those with health conditions.

Taking stock and looking ahead – pathways to more good practice

HOT has three members of staff on leadership and management training, at levels 3 and 5.

HOT's HR adviser has developed in-house training for managers about various aspects of line management and staff support.

Covid has shown that HOT can support more flexible working practices but also highlighted the importance of regular informal interaction with colleagues, which many staff have missed during the pandemic.