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SWORD workbook:

Sense of appreciation

Dartington

KFP 2: Sense of Appreciation

Promoting a culture in which your workforce feel appreciated is the second Key Foundational Principle for organisational resilience. This is when:

People feel valued and that their individual talents and skills are noticed and appreciated.	Leaders are approachable, genuinely interested in workers and trust them to do a good job.
Leaders understand the pressures of the work and the need to support people to prioritise self-care and ensure a healthy work-life balance.	Leaders listen and engage with workers and provide constructive feedback.

Strategies for fostering a sense of appreciation

Feeling appreciated at work, especially if you have gone 'above and beyond' what is expected in your role, is extremely motivating and offers protection from stress and burnout. Without this recognition, workers can see themselves as just a 'cog in the wheel' and feel taken for granted. This in turn can affect performance and the extent to which workers can meet the needs of people accessing services.

Feeling unappreciated when doing emotionally demanding work can generate feelings of resentment that can over time lead to burnout. The cycle of emotional exhaustion, cynicism/compassion fatigue and lack of personal accomplishment that characterises burnout can impair practitioners' wellbeing, personal relationships and effectiveness at work. There are also major implications for retention of the workforce. Feeling undervalued or unappreciated is one of the most common reasons for social care workers leaving their job (Department for Education, 2021). It is therefore crucial to show appreciation for work well done. Feedback should be authentic and evidenced-based, not tokenistic. Just saying 'thank you' is not enough as it does not demonstrate genuine regard for the individual and their talents. To be effective, praise should be sincere and recognise someone's unique contribution or skills. This helps people feel that the work they do is noticed and appreciated.

To provide authentic feedback, leaders need insight into the everyday working lives of individuals and teams. One way of doing this is to 'walk the floor' on a regular basis and listen to what people are saying about their successes and challenges at work (see Box 2.1). The learning gained will help ensure that your expressions of appreciation and feedback are sincere, personalised and well timed (see Quick Win 2.1). Walking the floor can also help develop other aspects of organisational resilience; it will be particularly useful in building and communicating a shared mission and vision and facilitating a learning environment, as well as enhancing cultural competence and an appreciation of the diversity of the workforce (see KFP4 Mission and Vision). It may also help you spot signs of distress where individuals may need additional support (see KFP5 Wellbeing).

Box 2.1: Walking the floor

Managing via email and formal meetings is the norm in many organisations. Workforce surveys often indicate that leaders are not sufficiently visible and this can be a strong source of dissatisfaction for workers. KFP1 Secure Base provides tips on introducing an effective open-door policy, but another way to encourage spontaneous questions and feedback is to walk the floor. Put simply, this is the habit of stopping to talk to people face to face. Research for Community Care (Schraer, 2014) found social workers would value more opportunities to engage in open dialogue with leaders. Walking the floor helps leaders be more visible, connect with their employees, share ideas, and invite suggestions for how things could be improved. It also allows them to express their appreciation to people in a personalised way.

Make walking the floor part of your routine:

If possible, ring-fence some time in your diary each day to drop in on people for an informal chat. This need not take long: even 30 minutes will do, and you can visit different teams on a rotating basis. It is best to schedule your walkabouts at different times of the day to avoid them becoming too predictable.

Do it alone:

Walking the floor works best when it involves one-to-one conversations. It is often better to give praise to workers individually to stop them becoming self-conscious and embarrassed.

Visit everybody:

Only dropping in on some people may be considered favouritism and can generate gossip and resentment. Try to spend roughly the same amount of time with each person.

Listen more than you talk:

Ask about their accomplishments; say something positive and offer praise.

Take the rough with the smooth:

As well as providing feedback and praise, be open to criticism from the workforce. The Community Care survey found that social work leaders needed to 'dig deep' to establish how people really feel about working for the organisation.

Be persistent:

During your first walkabouts, you may find that people feel awkward and do not communicate freely. Do not be discouraged, as repeated visits will eventually pay off. When done well, simple gestures of appreciation can be hugely motivating and replenishing for employees (see below), increasing morale and enhancing workers' ability to manage setbacks.

Go beyond work:

Knowing people as individuals does not mean only being aware of their strengths in relation to the job they do. Leaders need insight into employees' personal circumstances and any challenges they face (while ensuring their privacy is not invaded). When handled sensitively and in confidence, this can help people feel understood and appreciated and any necessary accommodations can be put in place.

Walking the virtual floor

Managing a workforce that is dispersed means that leaders must walk around virtually rather than physically, using technology to engage people. The guidance provided above will be useful, but virtual meetings will need to be planned – and will therefore be less spontaneous. One-to-one meetings are recommended but visiting online team meetings on a rotating basis will help leaders remain visible and provide opportunities to connect with the workforce, share ideas and express appreciation.

Providing clear and authentic feedback is vital in fostering a sense of appreciation. This will highlight workers' strengths and achievements and identify areas for development. Quick Win 2.1 provides some tips for giving effective feedback.

Quick Win 2.1: Tips for giving SMART feedback

Be direct

Make sure the feedback you provide is clear.

Be specific:

Focus on what you have noticed that people have done well, or what they could improve on. If any improvement is required, let them know that it is linked to a specific issue not their general performance.

Be real and be realistic:

Your authenticity will ensure that feedback is well received, so avoid giving feedback unless you really believe it is necessary or deserved. Make sure you give concrete and constructive feedback that is realistic and will help people achieve a goal.

Timely:

Feedback should be provided at the right time. If you wait too long, it may seem random or ill considered. Moreover, praising every small action can appear overly ingratiating and superficial.

Leaders also need to develop an organisational culture that promotes good practice regarding self-care. Showing appreciation also means ensuring that people who have worked additional hours have time to recuperate and that nobody (yourself included) works 'out of hours' too often. This means that you need to notice the extra hours worked and build in mechanisms to ensure that people can maintain a healthy work-life balance. KFP5 Wellbeing has guidance on supporting work-life balance for you and your employees.

Listening mindfully

Effective communication is essential in fostering a culture in which people feel valued and that their individual talents and skills are appreciated. It has been estimated that the average person remembers only around a quarter of what somebody has said directly after the conversation (Shafir, 2003). Mindful listening underpins effective communication; it helps people retain information by reducing the 'noise' of their own thoughts so they can really hear what other people have to say. Because listening mindfully means listening without judgement, criticism or interruption, this also helps the speaker feel understood.

Box 2.2: Tips to help you listen more mindfully

Be fully present:

Focus on the person you are listening to without any disturbance. During remote meetings it is easy to slip into the habit of multitasking but be as present and focused as possible and avoid any distractions. Before you start the meeting, take a few moments to clear your mind to make room for the other person's point of view. You could practise a few relaxation techniques to help you 'focus on the moment' during the forthcoming conversation (e.g. try the breathing exercise suggested in KFP1 Secure Base or a 'mindful pause' described in KFP5 Wellbeing).

Actively listen

This is important for all meetings, whether face-to-face or online. Active listening can be more challenging in online meetings as we do not have the usual visual cues that help us identify other people's emotions and reactions. This means we can lose conversational threads and 'miss the point'.

Consider doing a mindfulness course:

Research with social workers (Kinman & Grant, 2019) found that mindfulness training can improve their listening skills and their ability to determine what people are really saying. Mindfulness also had many positive consequences for personal wellbeing and job performance.

Cultivate empathy:

We tend to see the world through the lens of our own experiences, beliefs and personality. So, try to understand the situation from the other person's perspective. You do not have to agree with them but validate their perspective by acknowledging their views.

Listen to your own cues:

Be aware of the thoughts, feelings and physical reactions that you experience during a conversation and how they can divert your attention from the other person. Several things – such as our past experiences, our motives, our preconceptions, and negative self-talk – can make us focus more on ourselves than who we are talking to. Feeling impatient or frustrated (particularly if our 'inner chimp' makes an appearance – see KFP1 Secure Base) can make us interrupt or dominate the conversation. Thinking about what we are going to say next can also prevent us listening carefully and attentively. Switching off your self-view during online meetings can increase focus and avoid self-consciousness.

Using Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a strengths-based, positive approach to leadership development and organisational change. Developed by Whitney and Cooperrider (2012), AI is a framework that helps implement positive systemic change from a position of respect and mutuality, enabling individuals and organisations create a shared vision for where they wish to be. AI differs from the more commonly used deficit approach (i.e. what is going wrong and what can be improved), as it offers a strengths-based, optimistic strategy that 'appreciates' what has gone well and envisions what could be developed in the future.

AI is a particularly appropriate method for fostering a sense of appreciation in organisations. Its flexibility will also help enhance the other KFPs that underpin a resilient organisation. AI can also be a useful framework for supervision.

The AI model involves a four-stage process:

1. What is currently going well?

2. 'Dream' about how things could be improved

3. Design a strategy for how these dreams could be realised

4. Consider ways of delivering the change

AI can be used at an individual, team or organisational level. Its premise is that harnessing people's experience and skills provides a stimulus for change. AI also helps build positive relationships within organisations by encouraging a shared understanding of members' contributions and how they can shape change.

Based on a resource developed by The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and NHS Education for Scotland (2016) (which can be found **here**), Box 2.3 outlines how organisations can use AI to inform organisational change. Moving away from a problem focus to one that acknowledges and builds on success is likely to be useful for social care leaders, who are often tasked with implementing change initiatives. A constant change of direction that overlooks what has worked well in the past is unsettling and demotivating. AI techniques will be particularly helpful during times of crisis and uncertainty and can help shape post-COVID regeneration to 'build back better'.

Box 2.3: Using Appreciative Inquiry to implement change

This approach to planning change involves engaging with people to consider how to build on good work. It may seem a simple exercise, but AI can be a powerful tool in helping people move from being 'stuck in a rut' to a position where a new future can be imagined and realised.

The approach involves working in pairs initially to discover strengths. These are then shared and small groups begin to imagine and plan for the future of an organisation. The four key steps to using AI are outlined using the example below:

1. Discovery

What has been your best experience of social care work? Think of a time when you felt:

> Most engaged, alive and enthused by your work

> That it worked well for people who access services.

Now think:

> What made this possible?

> What did 'good' look like?

> What was important to its success?

2. Dream for the future

Imagine it is a year from now, and your team or service is working very well. It may have achieved formal recognition for its work – e.g. best teamwork, partnerships with families, or enablement-based practice with adults.

> What are you doing differently that enabled this change?

> What is it like to work in this team?

> What does 'good' look like?

3. Strategising

To move from dreaming about the future to a more concrete strategy and plan, you should now consider the steps you need to take to achieve this goal. These need to be SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound).

> What is going to make this possible?

> What will you have to do differently to make this work?

> Who do you need to help you to get there?

> What else might you need to pay attention to?

> What might be the signs that you are moving in the right direction?

4. Implementation

> How are you going to implement these plans?

> How are you going to communicate your plans to others?

> How will you know if you are continuing to move in the right direction – how will you measure success?

The principles of AI can also be used as a framework to guide a more narrative approach. The Tree of Life exercise (Box 2.4) is a playful and creative tool that can be used by teams and individuals to help people communicate what they appreciate about their work, their colleagues (in their own team and beyond) and their organisation. When conducting the initial research was effective in helping individuals identify their contribution to the wider vision and mission of their organisation (see KFP4 Mission and Vision for more information), and to refocus on what drives them to continue working there. Many of the research participants have subsequently used the exercise in their own organisation with considerable success. More resources on AI can be found **here**.
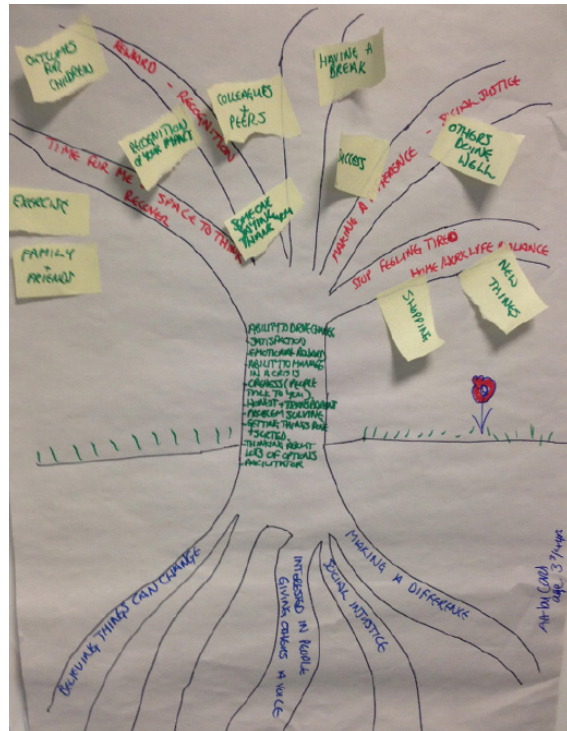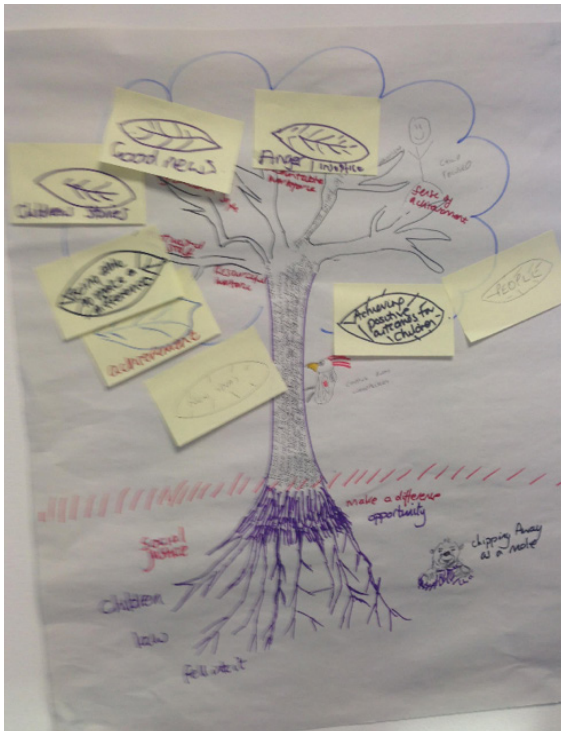
Box 2.4: The Tree of Life exercise

The Tree of Life is a narrative therapy tool that was designed by Ncazelo Ncube and David Denborough (for more information see **here**) for young people with HIV. It aimed to encourage the children to believe in their own abilities, acknowledge their dreams and stand in a safer place from where they could talk about their difficult experiences in ways that were not re-traumatising, thereby enabling them to feel stronger in themselves.

The Tree of Life has since been adapted to various settings to help individuals and organisations recognise their strengths and create co-produced knowledge about how to respond to new opportunities. Here, it is used as an exercise to help workers reconnect with their professional identity and appreciate their values, strengths and resilience. It also helps people explore how strengths can be used to overcome potential difficulties, or storms in their career.

The exercise may appear simple, but it can be a very powerful tool. It can take several hours to do well or can be simplified if less time is available. Figure 2.1 shows examples of completed trees from social work leaders.

Figure 2.1: Examples of completed trees using the Tree of Life exercise

Box 2.4: The Tree of Life exercise

Materials needed:

All you need are brightly coloured felt-tip pens, Post-it notes and flipchart paper. Experience suggests that any initial reluctance to 'play' tends to be overcome quickly, and even senior leaders will soon be actively creating amazing and meaningful visual images to stimulate discussion.

Instructions:

Explain that participants should draw a tree − step by step − to represent themselves, their team, or their organisation. This can be done individually, in pairs or in a group. Encourage participants to be as elaborate as they wish. Let them know that they can share as little or as much as they want to in their drawing (but the content should be anonymised when sharing later). They should begin by drawing the roots of the tree, then the ground, the trunk, the branches, and finally the leaves. Below are some questions to guide their drawing (these should be adapted for group work). Let participants know when to move from section to section (allowing about 10 minutes for each section).

Aim:

The aim of the exercise is to help people appreciate that understanding individual and collective strengths can enable us to build a sense of individual, team and organisational resilience. This will also foster a sense of appreciation for our individual and collective skills, values, and professional hopes and dreams.

Roots

> What shaped your life and your decision to work in health and social care?

> What brought you into the work? Who influenced and inspired you?

> What aspects of your past influenced who you are today? What keeps you grounded?

Trunk

> What are your skills and values?

> What drives you in what you do?

> What are the 'non-negotiable' codes that guide the way you act?

> What values have you learned, or what do you appreciate from those who have influenced you?

Branches

> What are your hopes, dreams and wishes for your career, your service and your organisation?

> Throughout your time in this type of work, what have you contributed that has made you proud?

> What do you want to achieve for your organisation?

Leaves

> What brings you energy in your work?

> Who and what helps keep you going when things get tough?

> What brings you energy outside of work and are good things to focus on?

Feedback

Once people have done this individually or in their small groups, ask them to share and discuss with the wider group. Asking people to put their trees on the walls around the room can be particularly effective. Describe this as a forest; remind people than an individual tree is more susceptible to storms, while a forest is far more resilient.

Storms and challenges ahead

Invite the group to think about the challenges or storms that are on the horizon:

> What storms and hazards do you face?

> What is the likely impact of the storms?

> Are there ways of weathering the storms that will allow you to hold onto your values?

> How can we use our collective strengths, visualised by the trees, to weather the storms?

Appreciating workers as individuals: using one-page profiles

KFP1 Secure Base recognises the importance of workers feeling appreciated as individuals if they are to feel that they truly belong in an organisation. Nonetheless, leaders often find it challenging to learn more about their employees; some people prefer to keep their personal lives private, while others are all too happy to share details. One-page profiles are often used by social care professionals to underpin person-centred care, but they can also be a useful team-building exercise and a way of getting to know employees as individuals. These brief profiles allow people to understand each other better and to appreciate their skills and talents. One-page profiles can also be used to gain insight into people's preferences, likes and dislikes – from simple issues to more complex ones.

One-page profiles offer several potential benefits:

> Profiles can help us see people as rounded individuals, rather than just an employee who does a particular job. This can help us recognise and celebrate each other's unique gifts and talents.

> Knowing people's preferences means we are better able to support each other, so teams will work more effectively.

> Understanding potential barriers in communication can improve relationships between individuals and teams.

> Profiles enable better matching of colleagues to mentors to support the development of their skills and wellbeing.

> People can feel better understood; this, in turn, helps them feel they belong in that environment.

Figure 2.2 shows an example of what a one-page profile could look like, although they can be customised for your own purposes. Profile templates that are co-produced by team members are likely to be particularly effective. These could be completed by pairs of colleagues, in supervision, in team meetings, or in longer workshops.

More information on one-page profiles can be found **here**. Also see Wellness Action Plans in KFP5 Wellbeing.

Figure 2.2: Example of a one-page profile

My one page profile

My name

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....
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My photo

What people appreciate about me

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How to support me

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What is important to me

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Recognising and celebrating success: sparkling moments

As outlined in KFP1 Secure Base, a psychologically safe organisation encourages people to discuss their errors openly to consider how practice might be improved. It is also crucial to recognise and learn from what we do well and spot and celebrate success. Sharing success stories not only helps others solve similar problems but can also inspire them to excel. Showing respect for another person's achievement will also boost their self-esteem and engagement and strengthen working relationships.

Nonetheless, while people are often open about their perceived failures, they can be reluctant to disclose their achievements for fear of appearing arrogant or boastful. They can find it difficult to share their accomplishments and may struggle to celebrate their successes. This can lead people to focus only on things that have gone wrong, rather than those that have gone well. This is not only demotivating, but means we are restricted to learning from errors rather than success.

'Sparkling' (or 'peak') moments is a technique that helps people share their success stories.

Sparkling Moments

Sparkling moments have been described as the cracks in the doom and gloom when the sun shines through. They are the times when you felt your best self; you may have achieved something at work that you thought made things better for someone and enabled progress. Identifying sparkling moments is a very effective way to recognise the individual skills and strengths that underpin such achievements and how these can be used to improve outcomes for people who access services in the future.

The Sparkling Moments technique is described in Box 2.5.

Box 2.5: Celebrating success: The sparkling moments technique

One person (A) asks the other person (B) a series of questions:

> What did you do when you were you 'at your best'?

> What skills, knowledge and attributes did you use?

> How did you feel?

Person A listens carefully and notes down the skills, knowledge and attributes that Person B describes, as well as any key themes or behaviours that emerge from their description.

When Person B has finished speaking, Person A should provide feedback on the specific skills and attributes that have emerged. They then ask Person B:

> What have you learnt about your key skills?

> How could you use these to manage a problem you are experiencing right now?

> What steps could you take to maximise the opportunity for more experiences like this?

Participants then swap roles, and Person B asks the same questions of Person A.

The 'sparkling moments' technique has been used extensively in training sessions with social care practitioners to identify times when they have shone. It can be particularly effective when used in peer coaching (see KFP3 Learning Organisation). The technique can also be useful in team and one-to-one meetings to encourage people to talk about their strengths and resources and how these can be applied to meet new challenges. Quick Win 2.2 highlights another strategy that can be used to celebrate success in team meetings. KFP3 Learning Organisation considers how Serious Success Reviews can help recognise achievement at an organisational level. The appraisal process also provides opportunities for conveying a sense of appreciation and letting people know that their achievements have been noticed.

Quick win 2.2: Celebrating success in team meetings

It is important to ensure that positive feedback is shared with colleagues. Sharing personal success stories in team meetings (whether face-to-face or online) is a good way to celebrate achievements and embed the learning gained. To do this successfully, it can be helpful to ask employees to send details of their achievements to team leaders in advance, as people are often reluctant to speak up in public – especially about their successes. Asking team members to record examples of inspirational practice that they have observed in their teams can also motivate others and encourage learning and personal growth. In time, celebrating achievements should become embedded in the team culture. It is also worth considering celebrating non-work achievements as this can also help people feel valued.

Being grateful

Practising gratitude means appreciating the good things that other people bring to our everyday lives. Gratitude has a positive impact on wellbeing – it can reduce stress, enhance physical and mental health, improve sleep and increase vitality (Wood et al., 2010). Grateful people also tend to be more empathic, optimistic and emotionally resilient and are better able to meet personal and professional goals. It is therefore important to build gratitude into our daily life to improve our own wellbeing and that of the people around us. Gratitude is also beneficial at the collective level; organisational cultures that are built on a foundation of gratitude are not only more satisfying to work in, but also more efficient and creative (Fehr et al., 2017; Waters, 2012).

As emphasised throughout this workbook, it is crucial for leaders to express their appreciation for the contributions made by workers to make them feel valued. A culture of gratitude will strengthen relationships between individuals and build trust and respect. It is important to adapt your style of recognition, however, as some people may find a public display of gratitude embarrassing and prefer to be acknowledged privately. Expressions of gratitude from colleagues are especially effective, so consider introducing recognition programmes that allow people to appreciate peers. Remember, however, that such schemes can misfire and reduce commitment and productivity in employees who believe their hard work is unnoticed and unappreciated. Some guidance on setting up employee recognition schemes can be found **here**.

There is evidence that keeping a gratitude journal (where people write down the positive things in their lives) or focusing on things for which they are grateful before going to sleep, can have wide-ranging benefits (Emmons et al., 2019; O'Connell et al., 2017. Some templates, ideas and apps for keeping a gratitude journal can be found **here**. Learning about employees as individuals (for example, through an open-door policy and walking the floor) can help build a gratitude-rich culture. Quick Win 2.3 outlines several ways to show your gratitude to workers.

Quick win 2.3: Ways to show your gratitude

Here are some ideas that can encourage a culture of gratitude to develop in your organisation. It is important to recognise that what is rewarding for one team may not necessarily be so for another, so teams should be encouraged to set up their own 'menu' of ways to express their gratitude and celebrate achievements. Remember that ideas that are imposed from above can seem inauthentic or patronising.

> A simple 'thank you' from a line manager can boost feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy in workers. A hand-written note of thanks or a card can demonstrate genuine regard and make a big difference. When expressing gratitude, always make sure you are clear what you are saying thank you for.

> A box of chocolates (or even a home-made trophy) for somebody who needs cheering up or who has done something well can be effective.

> One option is to use a Jar of Joys (as suggested by Catherine Watkins for **Community Care**) where team members write down their small successes on slips of paper and put them into a jar. Eventually the good work that people do will fill up the jar. People working remotely can use a 'virtual' jar of joys and take it in turns to read success stories out during team meetings.

> Celebrate birthdays but recognise that this may cause discomfort for some people. For example, buying cakes for the whole team can be expensive and excluding.

> End the week with a team gathering or celebration (or a Fika session – see KFP1 Secure Base). Make sure these events are inclusive, so avoid visits to the pub or 'get togethers' at the end of the day that may exclude people with caring responsibilities.

One practitioner attending a training session run by the authors reported that their local authority celebrates newly qualified social workers successfully completing their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment by presenting them with a personalised mug (see below). This is an example of a simple, low-cost initiative that can foster a culture of expressing appreciation and celebrating success and achievement, helping early career workers feel they belong in the organisation.