

Fact sheet 5 Case study How to Start a SOG (Self Organised Group) in your Branch

Vikki Walton Cole explained how her branch, Surrey County decided to set up the Disabled Members Self Organised Group.



The Branch was noticing in their casework that increasingly disabled members were on disciplinary processes and that having a poor experience of this was not unique.

The branch asked for and looked at EDI (Equality Diversity and Inclusion) data from the employer and found that their anecdotal evidence had data to back it up.

The branch decided to send out an equality survey to members to ask if anyone would like to join self-organised groups – if they wanted to receive information via email about SOG's and equality issues. This gave the branch up to date records, helped the branch with other self-organised groups, black members, and LGBTQ+. Statistics improved, more engagement followed and a flow of information as the survey also highlighted the importance of self-identifying disability to UNISON, thinking about any long-term health conditions and changed circumstances, considering self-identifying to the employer to gain reasonable adjustments.

A few core people put themselves forward from the survey and the disabled members SOG meets a couple of times a year.



That core of active people has given Vikki a team of activists who have made progress and they meet on Teams or Zoom and have small in person meetings - they try hard to meet everyone's access needs.

When disabled members cases come in there are more confident stewards that are comfortable to deal with these cases, Vikki is known as the lead in this area – members know where to go for help. Vikki has used the staff forums to highlight the good work of UNISON and recruit some of these forum members to Unison membership, many more disabled members have disclosed and are becoming empowered to stand up for improvement in their working conditions.

One of Vikki's proudest achievements is the centralised reasonable adjustments process which give equal access for staff, they can self-refer, and the work journey is more equitable. It was noticed by the branch that the situation was quite different depending on which department you worked in and whether your manager understood access to work. Vikki did the research on this and found discrepancies – presented this to the council and now the process is centralised and there are even improvements in budgetary considerations because of bulk buying.

There are better policies and practices, and the data analysis has really paid off.

Vikki is extremely pleased that so many members are now having a voice and are empowered to stand up for themselves – there are allies looking out for and thinking about improvements for equalities there is now an EDI policy and action plan.

There is always more work to do but it is rewarding that improvements are showing through.