



### *Johnnie Johnson Housing Trust*

As a small to medium sized Housing Association dedicated to providing quality housing and service, we recognised our 250 staff were our key asset. We achieved the Investors in People award and have had two further accreditations since 1997, and consider we are a good employer and have evidence to support that.



Good employment practices included items such as flexible working and we realised the employment and business benefits of enabling staff to achieve improved work/life balance. The employment continuum is often about the needs of the organisation and needs of the individual. However, we recognised that there was a limit to the amount of support we could give individual staff internally.



We had launched our Stress at Work policy in 2001 and although had a confidential counselling telephone helpline (provided by our insurance company), we had no idea of the effectiveness or quality of this service. There was no feedback from this service, whether or not it was being used and if it was, for what reasons. As a Senior Management Team we felt unaware of what was going on and thought we needed a better feel for what was happening.



Increasingly, any personal counselling needs required by staff was falling onto the Personnel Managers' shoulders. This was proving difficult due to a geographically dispersed workforce and the fact that the role involved other tasks and objectives that needed to be met. The Personnel Manager realised that some sort of Employee Assistance Programme was required and set about to identify a suitable provider. A few national names were identified but the counselling service appeared secondary to the services offered.

We found out about Oasis, through marketing material posted to the organisation and from an initial enquiry we found a highly responsive organisation who appeared concerned about the individual. A meeting with all concerned was quickly arranged.

We chose Oasis because they appeared to be able to provide the service we were looking for, were flexible to our needs, responsive and well placed in our areas of operation, but most of all, were focussed on the human relations side of management. This key aspect shines through out the organisation.

We decided to go with Oasis for a first year and try the service out and see what happened. We were unsure to what extent it would be used – nor exactly what for.

The service was launched in October 2001 and we recognised how important it was that this was done properly – Oasis gave presentations to three groups in different parts of the country and we are sure this helped people to understand how to use the counselling service.

### ***Benefits of the Service***

This is another information source which helps us to monitor the effectiveness of our management policies and practices, as well as identifying potential areas of stress in the organisation. We can take “pre-emptive” action to prevent either any problems developing or worsening; we have a clearer idea of the collective ‘health’ of the organisation in staffing terms; and it provides qualitative information to the quantitative health indicators such as absence and labour turnover levels.

There is now a lot of word of mouth recommendation of the service and when things crop up there is a greater willingness to use counselling. Managers have encouraged referrals and many find it beneficial to have such a “management tool” available.

The reports we have received every six months have been very useful and a reassurance that what we thought was happening, is actually occurring. They have confirmed our expectations and highlighted one or two areas to pay attention to – for instance, we have commissioned an Occupational Health audit this year and are rolling this out through the rest of the organisation in 2004. The reports and issues raised have also helped us to focus on our training needs – both present and future.

The anecdotal feedback we heard from the beginning was very positive. Comments employees have made about the assistance they have received have included:

- *“The sessions gave me strength and courage, and helped me regain my self-respect”*
- *“I became more aware of potential problems before they arise in the future”*
- *“Physical stress symptoms reduced – useful to be able to “offload” issues and see the way forward”*

We have no hesitation in recommending the service to other organisations – and have already done this!

**Bronwen Jones, Personnel Manager**