



## Skipton Building Society

Skipton Building Society is a long-established financial services organisation with its Head Office based in North Yorkshire and a branch network spreading from the North of Scotland down to the South coast. August 2003 saw Skipton being awarded the new Investors in People Leadership and Management model – the first large organisation in the UK to gain this award. This is a reflection of the high standards to which the Skipton works with and through its people - from the Chief Executive downwards, Skipton Building Society is passionate about its people.



During the mid-90s, the entire Human Resources team were trained in counselling skills primarily to assist with the effects of trauma following armed raids at branches – at that stage there were between 8 and 10 incidents a year, although this has now significantly reduced to only one or two.

There was a growing realisation that personal issues can impact considerably on people's work performance. For example line managers may have noted that someone who had previously been a "good performer" was behaving out of character. By working closely with Human Resources it was recognised that setting targets to improve performance was not the answer – in order to bring about sustainable resolution in these situations there was a need to understand the problems and uncover the true picture. The important element was to find the root causes of the individual's difficulties.



As the organisation continued to grow and demand amongst staff increased it became apparent there were two key issues which were having a fundamental impact on the ability of the Society to successfully manage these issues internally :

- Resources – the ability within the team to deal with problems. Whilst Human Resources staff were equipped to deal with the initial problem, they did not necessarily have either the time, bearing in mind some of the logistical considerations, or the advanced level skills to follow all cases through to a conclusion.
- The Human Resources function had the reputation of being open and approachable. However, at times their role is inextricably linked with the management of disciplinary and redundancy situations, giving rise to additional anxieties for staff, however unfounded those are.

The move from an ad hoc referrals system to a more structured and comprehensive provision was a natural progression. Having conducted a detailed analysis of a number of different providers Skipton chose Oasis for a number of reasons:

- Oasis is a nationally recognised provider of counselling provision
- Oasis has high credibility – Skipton had received excellent positive feedback from colleagues
- Oasis has provided a high level of support – there were real success stories walking around Skipton. Some people visibly looked different and they were able to talk about their experiences of counselling
- The nature of the relationship Skipton had with Oasis over the past several years was important – it has always been comfortable and non-confrontational. The key contacts at Skipton have always stated that they know they can give feedback honestly and it will be heard
- Oasis also has other areas which the Society could access – so some people attended a mentoring course which was fundamental to the establishment of an organisation-wide mentoring programme which has become embedded as part of the Skipton culture

The Skipton's recruitment literature focuses heavily on not only the benefits and career opportunities which are available for its people but also positions the area of well-being as a major part of the employment package. It is part of a holistic approach to managing their people and Oasis plays a crucial part in the well-being aspect of the individual.

The Senior Management Team are very supportive of the service and feel it represents good value for money. The mid-year report was taken to the SMT, which quantified in a generic and confidential format the benefits accruing to both individuals who had accessed the service and to the Society. The reports play an important part in validating the investment and are a useful means of measurement and a useful tool to persuade other group companies of the benefits of this service.

The stress policy has been in place now for over two years and is supported by stress awareness events and workshops, many of which have been run by **Oasis Peoplecare**.

One of the benefits of the service has been Oasis' ability to be flexible and create a bespoke aspect. For example when the Skipton acquired a new subsidiary and merged another during 2003, Oasis provided counselling and assistance for people who were directly affected by the change and this helped to normalise abnormal sets of circumstances.

Some comments people have made who have used **Oasis Peoplecare** have been :

- *"Helped me to focus and work towards a goal and learn how to move forward"*
- *"To view things from all angles"*
- *"To do what I want to do and not what others want me to do"*
- *"Without this help my job would have suffered greatly and my health been affected"*
- *"I have understanding of my problems and more self-belief"*

The relationship with Oasis has developed over time to the extent where they are viewed as an extension of the Society, however they retain the very important attribute of being seen as an independent and, therefore, confidential resource to be accessed at times of need by anyone within the organisation in a discreet and personal manner.

There is no doubt that the Society values this service highly and consider it, not only to be an integral part of its portfolio of people management services, but also one which adds significant value to the business.

**Chris Worts, Human Resources Manager**