

## Building a commitment to service excellence

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets has promoted best practice in key customer service issues, such as dealing with challenging customers and preventing or defusing awkward situations, using an innovative Steps training programme.

### Objectives

*"We already provide a high standard of customer care but we have restructured our customer service teams and we wanted to get people together to reinforce the message that each customer is an individual,"* said Claire Symonds, Customer Access Service Head at the council.

### Approach

Steps delivered the afternoon sessions at three conference training days which the council ran for the 150 employees who deal with customers either on the telephone, in a contact centre, or face-to-face in one of the council's four one-stop shops. As the council provides a 24/7 front-line service, it was difficult to take people away from that, so we ran three events with fifty staff attending each day.

Held outside the work environment, the conference events highlighted the council's future plans for developing its customer service and reinforced its published standards for customer care. Facilitated workshops were also held to encourage the customer service professionals to work together more effectively.

*"Prior to the events, Steps interviewed staff in our contact centre and one-stop shops and they used this information to develop some very impressive drama scenarios which they acted out at the conferences,"* said Claire Symonds. *"These scenarios provided practical demonstrations of customer service skills. They were very realistic and they highlighted some challenging situations."* The interactive scenarios presented by the Steps actor-facilitators showed staff in a fictional council dealing with enquiries and also with angry and abusive customers, both face-to-face and over the telephone.

*"The Steps actor-facilitators involved the staff and drew out different approaches to the issues presented,"* said Claire Symonds. *"The scenarios were very engaging and they brought key learning points to life, for example by showing how to deal with stress and manage your own emotions. It was a very entertaining and memorable way of using the experience of the staff to develop best practice customer service."*

### Outcomes

*"We received overwhelmingly positive feedback from the conference days,"* said Claire Symonds. *"The drama sessions highlighted best practice in customer care and we believe this will have a positive impact in further enhancing the professionalism and effectiveness of our teams. This is important because our customer service staff are the faces and voices of the council and if they give a good impression, it reflects back on the council as a whole."*