



The care exchange - Series 3 Episode 7: Power our carers through renewable energy Ben Ashton

Hosts: Pia Rathje-Burton and Wendy Adams

Pia Rathje-Burton 00:08

Welcome to the care exchange Skills for Care podcast for managers in social care. I'm Pia Rathje-Burton.

Wendy Adams 00:13

and I'm Wendy Adams.

Pia Rathje-Burton 00:15

Today on the podcast we have Ben Ashton and he is the founder and managing director of Good Oaks home care. This is a homecare organisation in Portland Dorset. Good Oaks Home Care also has a number of franchised offices across England.

Wendy Adams 00:29

Ben started his career in social care as a frontline worker in his early 20s. And following that experience, he started good oaks homecare with his business partner when he was just 22 years old.

Pia Rathje-Burton 00:42

Yeah, so looking forward to chatting to Ben, and on with the show.

Pia Rathje-Burton 00:54

So welcome, Ben to the care exchange.

Ben Ashton 00:58

Hello, thank you very much for having me.

Pia Rathje-Burton 01:01

We wanted to have a chat to you because so many, so many things to talk to you about. So yeah, thanks very much for joining us today. And the first thing we really wanted to talk to you about was so good oaks, homecare. It was the first UK carbon neutral homecare company is that right?

Ben Ashton 01:23

I think that's right. As far as I know, there might be you. Someone might want to get in touch with me. If not, it's there. As far as I can tell. Yes, definitely. The first carbon neutral homecare franchise, I'm pretty sure we're pretty sure we're up there in terms of the first ones. I don't know of anyone who beat us to it. But yeah,

Pia Rathje-Burton 01:41

yeah. And obviously, environmental sustainability, may be more in people's minds. Now managers mind, particularly because of the new CQC quality statement that's obviously sort of kind of coming in. So we just thought we wanted to find out a bit more about that. So obviously, I know you did that a couple of years ago, didn't you? I don't know when you started the process.

Ben Ashton 02:02

That's right. We started 2018 actually was our first year we came carbon neutral. Yeah.

Pia Rathje-Burton 02:09

And what did you have to do? What do you how do you become carbon neutral? What does that mean?

02:16

Good question. So yes, so there's a few different phases to it. I think the first one is, you know, everyone says, everyone says the old adage is you can't, what you can't measure, you can't, you can't manage. So the first thing is to sort of measure what you're doing. And then work out how you can reduce your impact wherever you can. So reducing your carbon footprint and your emissions, and eliminating what you can and then what you're left with, then you can then offset that by investing in projects that take carbon out of the atmosphere, or the equivalent amount of carbon out of the atmosphere. So whether that's sort of, we generally split our investments between local tree planting and like, international investments in green projects, so maybe like a hydroelectric dam, or solar panels or that kind of stuff. So yeah, so we started 2018. And we really thought we were going to be just ahead of the curve, really, we sort of thought we might have a year or two where we were slightly ahead, but people would catch up. And actually, interestingly, we, there's still not many people talking about it in the care sector at the moment. Maybe that's partly because of you know, there's a lot of urgent things in the care sector every single day, you know, that a lot of crises, and I think, often the urgent sort of shunts important stuff out the way and you know, that that meeting about becoming carbon neutral, maybe gets kicked down the road? Because you know, all the other things sort of come on top of it, really. So. Yeah, so So we, I think the first thing to do is to really try and reduce what you're putting into the atmosphere. And then offsetting is the sort of the next step to that, really.

Wendy Adams 04:13

So how did you how did you you said you measured that you started off by measuring it and then looking at how it reduce it? What what practically, do you do differently to other home care organisations?

Ben Ashton 04:25

Yeah, so actually, I'm probably you know, over the last, since we've started, I would imagine nearly every company has a rostering software, you know, care management software. And in that software, you can find so much data in terms of your carers' travel data, for example, you know, how many miles they travel per per period and one interesting metric to look at in the in the homecare space is to work out how many visits you did in a month and how many The how many miles your carer has travelled in the month because our rostering system is linked to Google Maps, and it has all their routes and everything, so you can see exactly what that looks like. And that gives you a, you know, miles per visit metric, which you can then start to manage a little bit more, because often, you know, coordinators always going to be trying to make the most efficient routes possible. But it's not necessarily like a smart target, it's more of a general ambition, as opposed to like something more, more concrete. So being able to say, you know, at the moment, we're doing two and a half miles per visit, can we reduce that down to two, and then work from there really is one way of trying to reduce your footprint.

Pia Rathje-Burton 05:47

Okay, and what does the type of car that the person is driving, does all affect it as well?

Ben Ashton 05:56

It does. Yeah, so obviously, I think, really, the vast majority of carers on the roads are driving their own cars, and generally they're going to be petrol or diesel cars, often, maybe slightly older vehicles, and, and the nature of their most most care is probably in the communities is done in some suburban or urban areas, and there's a lot of start stop journeys and engines never get warm. And so that means the less efficient, more polluting and everything. So it's definitely a huge sort of issue for the sector that no one talks about, you know, there are so many carers on the road every day that you don't see because they're just a normal normal cars. So our next phase of our carbon journey is to, we're getting car charging installed in our, our offices. And we've literally just, we're expecting it to be delivered soon. But it's a yeah, we're investing in a sort of pilot of a, it's, it's not technically an electric car. Because it's too small to be a car it's like a little it's technically a quadricycle that our our management team are going to use to get out and about and visit clients and do all the reviews and assessments that they need to do. So we're going to trial that and see how it goes, whether that's gonna be the way forward for us or not, I hope it is. They look great. We test drove, I expected a milk float, half milf float If you can imagine that. Which I think could be a really, you know, I think more and more of those things will be coming into the market. And I think there's gonna be big, big improvements. And I think we're very keen to, to hopefully not have to offset anything eventually and just be able to, you know, power our carers through renewable energy. So yeah, that's, that's the thing, the next next step.

Wendy Adams 07:57

So I'm assuming you also, you know, promote walking and cycling amongst your carers. Is this well received and how to get your staff on board with this whole environmental sustainability aspect of their job?

Ben Ashton 08:15

It's a really good question. I think obviously, active travel is really, really important. And I think it really varies depending on location. So some of our London offices, our carers use Boris bikes to get around works brilliantly. You know, because it's much more densely densely populated, the clients aren't so far

away from each other, where we are in Bournemouth and Poole, very difficult to get around on bike because there's no, no bicycle lanes, and you do have to come up with a solution that works all year round as well. So, you know, in the depths of winter, if someone's on a, on a scooter, it's quite, can be quite tricky sometimes. So. Yeah, I think carers often have more, more practical worries about their job in terms of, you know, stability of income, the support that they're getting from the office, the quality of the care they're providing to the clients, and I think, just human nature, I think the the carbon neutral aspect can drop down that list of priorities sometimes. So it's about trying to find something that genuinely works for everyone. They're not sort of forcing your own sort of solution on people that might not be able to sort of, yeah, go forward with that.

Wendy Adams 09:40

I'm guessing though, that might be a real unique selling point for your organisation because one of the things that I talked to lots of managers about in recruitment is about how do you you know, you're all in competition not for work, but for employees, actually, and one of the things that we've got to be a lot better about is about what what The unique selling point of your organisation, and I'm guessing that there will be people out there who think you know what actually one of the things that's really important to me, is doing the right thing for the environment. And therefore, actually, the reason why I would choose Good Oaks, as opposed to another organisation, is because they share my values. And you know, this notion of value based recruitment is something that Skills for Care, talk a lot about about people choose to work for organisations who hold the same values that they do. So you know, I'm guessing that that it may be very difficult to measure, it may be something that does inspire people to come and work for you, because they feel this as an organisation who holds dear the same sort of things that they do.

Pia Rathje-Burton 10:49

And I suppose, particularly younger people, I know, my my own teenagers, they're very environmental aware. And I'm much more than I was at that age, you know, it's likely you can imagine that younger people would particularly go oh, if I have to choose, I would go.

Ben Ashton 11:04

Absolutely, yes. You're absolutely right. I think it is much higher up people's awareness. In the younger demographics. I think, you know, if you're late 80s, and you're in hospital having had a fall, and you're looking to choose a care company, carbon neutrality might not be top of your agenda, necessarily. But I think for people who are looking to make a sort of more conscious decision about who they work for and with and the impact that they have on the planet, I think, yeah, often, unfortunately, we're still one of the only sort of options if someone does want to do something that that is less has less of a footprint than than other sort of other jobs. Yeah, we are one of those employers, I think it does. You know, the fact that we are a caring company means, you know, we're not just caring for our end users or clients, we're also caring for them for the wider community, like, locally with our tree planting, but globally as well with, you know, we're all in it together, really. So I think we all have to try and do our bit. And you have to be right, you know, we've even in the last five years that we've been carbon neutral, the interest in it every year is definitely more I would say, yeah.

Pia Rathje-Burton 12:29

And I suppose I suppose your values are sort of everywhere, aren't they? You know, we always say that with value based recruitment, we want to be what we will recommend to have value in every part of your organisation. And if you're saying what are my values are to be caring? I'm also caring for the planet kind of goes together, doesn't it? It really

Ben Ashton 12:50

does. Yeah, I think, you know, we're all we're generally caring for, for the elderly generation, but there are, we're also need to be caring and responsible for our care professionals generation and their kids generations as well, because they're the ones who are going to be inheriting what we leave them. And I think, yeah, it's a, it's definitely very, you know, top of mind. At the moment, as you can just tell by the weather over the last, you know, couple of years, things are definitely changing. And now's the time we I think we all need to start doing doing a little bit more potentially,

Wendy Adams 13:27

I think what I like about how you've described it, is you really pragmatic about it, as well, because there'll be some managers sitting listening and thinking, well, it's all well and good, you know, but we live in a very rural area. And it's not possible to have our staff, you know, out and about on bikes or walking because of the geography. And I think what you've described is you recognise that, you know, you're not, you're not saying, well, actually, we'll have our our workers cycling for miles on end, because it's good for the environment, when that's not practical, in all weathers. And I think, you know, that, that comes out as a really practical approach. Because I think sometimes it's easy to say, well, this doesn't work. There's not an easy solution to this for us, so we won't do it. Whereas what you've said is, well, actually, there isn't an easy solution. But this is what we'll do to make a difference and I really like that.. Yeah, absolutely.

Ben Ashton 14:19

I think it's, you know, it doesn't have to be all or nothing, either, it can just be little baby steps to start with, you know, and often the baby steps are win-wins all around, you know, reducing the miles that carers drive is great for the company because it reduces their costs. It's great for the carers, obviously, and also really good for the planet. So, yeah, that's a quick way um, you know, a lot of companies going paperless now, which obviously has huge advantages when it comes to the actual being able to monitor care more effectively as well as, you know, less trees being chopped down. And yeah, so this little Citroen this little vehicle that we've got and actually If you're buying it privately, you can get it for £19.99 a month now, which is, you know, half the price of an iphone for a little, you know, electric car. So I think these kinds of things will completely change how we do it will completely change how we deliver care in future, but I think will make it much much easier for for other companies to make that transition. Definitely.

Pia Rathje-Burton 15:23

And in terms of that the carbon neutral carbon, you can't offset. So you're talking about planting trees. How do you do that? You know, I'm assuming you're not out there digging.

Ben Ashton 15:39

In no, we're not. So we work with a third party like a creditor. So someone comes and basically, make sure we're not marking our own homework, we definitely get someone who can properly robustly check what we're doing and make sure we haven't missed anything, because I think it's not, you know, that there is there is a case of there is greenwashing out there where people make claims that they probably can't necessarily back up. So yeah, we work with a company called carbon footprint, who is a big project every every year in the summer, there's sort of getting bigger and bigger as we grow that, that we you know, collate all this data and send it all over. And then once it worked out our sort of tonnes of carbon that we've we've produced, we then can work out how we can offset that.

Pia Rathje-Burton 16:33

And in terms of sort of, kind of the, the office and stuff. So you talked a little bit about not using paper and stuff. Like there's other things that home care organisation could do sort of kind of in the office to try and reduce?

Ben Ashton 16:46

Yeah, I mean, a really, really quick, easy win is changing your energy supplier to a renewable one, because that's, if you're not in a serviced office, that that's generally something that you can you can quickly do. I think paper is a big one. Working from home, I think can potentially depending on who else is in the office, I think either it can increase your carbon footprint or reduce it, you know, if your heating office and your home that's probably increasing your carbon footprint a little bit. But yeah, I mean, it interesting when you before before this, before this podcast, I did a bit of googling just to just have a look at some stats about the home care carbon footprint, and there's nothing out there in terms of what what, you know, the actual as a sector, what we're producing. So we actually did some sort of, yeah, some calculations based on on lots of different assumptions from different data sources. And we think just the workforce alone, the carbon footprint of just the home care sector is half a million tonnes of co2 a year. And that's the equivalent to like 180,000 homes being heated every year, the extra, you know, so it's a big, it's a big emitter. And yeah, I think there's little little things that we talked about, all definitely help chip away at that.

Pia Rathje-Burton 18:16

Yeah. And probably that quality statement, and you know, it's gonna be in the forefront isn't a you know, I'm sure most most people are probably doing something, but actually having to start thinking about, well, how can I evidence, what I'm doing? And as you said earlier, you may not do all of it at once, you might just have a plan, aren't you? And you might just say, Well, this year, we're going to go paperless next year, do this, but you know, you could do you don't have to kind of listen to this and think, Oh, my God, you know, how am I going to, you know, become carbon neutral in the next six months? That, you know, you could kind of do in the stages? Couldn't you?

Ben Ashton 18:52

you can you can. And actually, yeah, obviously, the regulator is getting involved, which is fantastic. And actually, one of our new franchise partners is applying for funding with a bank that we haven't worked with before. And now that now they're really asking lots of questions around our environmental sustainability plans and our green credentials, which is great. So I feel it feels like businesses are coming under more pressure from the consumers and the workforce. But now also the regulator and

funders, and it was all sort of slowly joining together. And I think hopefully, that will start moving the needle.

Pia Rathje-Burton 19:30

Really interesting. So the just changing tack a bit. So just maybe just kind of go going back in time a bit. So obviously we heard in the introduction there that you started Good Oaks after you'd worked as a frontline worker. Was there sort of things that you'd sort of seen that you wanted to change? Or what was the sort of kind of thinking behind it?

Ben Ashton 19:52

Yes, so yes, absolutely. So I really stumbled into the care sector by applying for lots of different jobs and care was the only one that got back to me. And you know, the interview was, Do you have a car? Do you have a criminal record? Yes or no or no? And yes, whichever way around, it should be, you know, and I said, you know, other many other candidates for the role, because it's one of my first ever jobs. And she said, Oh, no, you've got the job, you know, you turned up, it's gonna, you know, you're fine. You're, you're through, watch this DVD. And then off you go. And that company was a great example of how not to run a care company, basically, you know, it's all the things you hear about. So yeah, as a carer, I would finish one visit at 9am. And my next visit would start at 9am, but 10 miles down the road, I got to try and work out how to do that. And yes, we basically we saw loads, we met loads of really caring people just not able to do the best job that they could do, because they just weren't properly supported. So we definitely saw a need for a quality care provider in the market or another quality of care provider in the market. And we knew that getting that the care, professional support and attracting retaining those, you know, those people was absolutely what the only way to provide really great quality care, really. So there's definitely you know, the values based recruitment that you talk about, because, you know, when clients talk about good oaks and, or their care provider, then they're not talking about the brochures, or the website or the portal or whatever sort of policies, it's about that person going through their front door, and actually really, really, potentially transforming their lives and making such a big difference to you know, their day to day. So that is completely at the heart of what you're having worked, as a carer, that was our ethos that we took into sort of starting up a good oaks

Wendy Adams 21:57

And it's interesting that you talk about starting as a frontline carer, and many managers that I speak to both Pia and myself have both started in those frontline worker roles, Skills for Care, we talk a lot about that succession planning and how do you think it helped you having done that job before the role that you're now in.

Ben Ashton 22:19

Yeah, I think it gives you a real understanding a deeper, very deep understanding of just how challenging and rewarding a care job can be. I think there is the ying and yang, you know, there are some amazing moments being a carer and some some really like really uplifting stuff. And there's also some really challenging stuff that you probably wouldn't get working at Tesco. So think that it definitely builds empathy and ability to Yeah, to sort of, to see the bigger picture and to sort of see, you know, work out how things actually are on the ground, as opposed to it being a more abstract concept that

happens away from the office, you know, yeah, I think that definitely is one of the most important bits for us.

Wendy Adams 23:14

And I think sometimes we don't sell that frontline role, as well as maybe, maybe we could. And I know, certainly, you know, I sit here sometimes, and I'm sure some of the managers listening to the podcast today will be sitting and thinking, You know what, I really miss that front line work, because I miss the chats and the laughs And yes, there was hard days and difficult days, but there's as many good days as there is bad days as well. And I think sometimes that's a bit about social care, that we we forget about and we lose amongst all the very real challenges that we do have with with care and how it works and all the challenges that we've got. But that bit about how it feels to go in and make a difference to somebody's world is something that I think we don't we don't shout about enough in social care

Ben Ashton 24:06

you're right, if you would choose in what sector to come and work in just based on news stories, and you know, what you read about in the papers, you wouldn't choose the care sector at the moment it's all feels very, very grim. And you know, a bit depressing sometimes when you when you read the news stories, I think, obviously, you know, bad news sells and a lot of it is you know, lobbying for more resources and there's a lot of people you know, saying how overstretched they are which which you know, absolutely is the case but yeah, you definitely, I think that positivity and yeah, shouting about all the all the amazing things that you can do as a as a as a carer and also all the other, you know, doors that you know, a career in care can open. Definitely isn't something that is talked about out enough in a more in a You know, I think because the sector is so fragmented, there's so many little voices, I think it is quite hard to get one like cogent message out there because I think lots of people are shouting, it's quite hard to get through the noise to actually work out what it's really like, sometimes.

Pia Rathje-Burton 25:23

And it's so so with that experience, and, you know, think is really great that you're, you're sort of kind of using that experience as you've moved it as your as developed good oaks, and you've obviously got the franchise as well do you, when you're recruiting And when you're advising the managers of the franchisor recruitment? Is that that kind of experience that sort of sort of still still sitting as a bit of a backpack for you?

Ben Ashton 25:46

It is 100%, you know, yeah, definitely. So we, we recently did some international recruitment, we, a few of a few of us went to Zimbabwe to recruit. And, yeah, I definitely use some of the experiences that I had, as some scenarios for the some group discussion and assessment days that we were doing. So, you know, what would people do if you know, so we would present a scenario where they're looking at someone who has a memory impairment, and they're very upset because their wife hasn't come home from work yet, but their wife actually passed away a few years ago. How do you deal with that situation, you know, and be able to really dig deep into that and say, Well, what about this, and I think having experienced it, you sort of do get a real sense of whether someone is going to be a good fit. And can you know, a lot of people can say what they think they want you to hear. But when you when you

present some situations it does. Yeah, that's the values come through, I think a little bit more. So. Yeah, it has been helpful in that regard, for sure.

Pia Rathje-Burton 27:02

And how did you find that international recruitment? So obviously, that's, I think, a hot topic in social care is international recruitment?

Ben Ashton 27:11

Yes, it is. Yes, it has been great. I guess my sort of takeaways are that it definitely can't and shouldn't replace local recruitment, I think a lot of people see it as the Easy, easy option and say, Oh, it's all very difficult to compete for, for workers, we're not going to try and think about how we can improve conditions and talk about all the great things that we do, we'll just bring people in from a different country. But I think that you really do need to focus on building that employer brand locally, and actually putting in the putting in the effort to, you know, making people care about you, as an employer and want to work for you. Because there are lots of people out there that are very caring, and you know, would love to do it, but you need to, yeah, you need to work hard to to make it something that, you know, they want, you know, that attracts them, but then also retains them as well. I'd say one interesting aspect is really different. power dynamic, I'd say between when you're recruiting local, locally in your local area, generally, the applicant has has all the power really because a good carer can walk into any care company and get a job really. So your, you know, the ball is in their court. And almost now it's you know, what can you offer me as a, you know, as a worker, but what does you know, what does the training look like? What does support look like? Absolutely, rightly, they should be asking those things. And it's very different. When you recruit internationally, I think more people are now trying to make a better life for themselves and their family and often potentially leaving quite difficult economic situations. And I think there is a vulnerability with that, that you have to really be careful. And really, you know, the power dynamic is almost the other way, really. So I think it's so important, if you are going to do international recruitment is to do it. Right. It's very easy to not get it right. And for it's not not be a sort of, yeah, a great experience for everyone is it could be potentially,

Wendy Adams 29:38

and from your experience, is there anything that you could say this is this is what's helpful about helping people to settle in a new area and feel part of a team and

Ben Ashton 29:51

yes, we did a big piece of work on the sort of pastoral care element when when someone's coming over so you know what We always, you know, we've heard horror stories of people being picked up from the airport and just driven straight to their first clients, which is obviously just an absolutely, woeful experience for everyone. So we really carefully planned their first two weeks in the UK, basically, when they weren't with the client for the first couple of weeks, they were doing a extended induction period, they we picked them up personally from the airport, and took them back to the accommodation, which was near the office. We provided obviously, all their meals, we took them shopping, because obviously, so we recruited from Zimbabwe. And our first group arrived in January, poor guys in the UK, which is pretty, pretty grim. So we took them shopping for extra coats. And you really have to, you know, sit with them, and everything is new to them. So setting up bank accounts and National Insurance numbers

and sorting out, you know, where the local supermarkets are, and where the where the shops are, and all that kind of stuff. Really important. I think getting used to British foods is tricky for them, I think is, you know,

Wendy Adams 31:21

getting used to British food in terms of eating themselves, but I'm guessing also cooking, and preparing it for the for the the people that you provide care and support

Pia Rathje-Burton 31:31

to think the same.

Ben Ashton 31:33

Exactly right. So yeah, when we were in Zimbabwe, that's one of the things that we were really anxious about was we were recruiting people to work in as live in care professionals. So they move in with a client for a few weeks at a time and look after them. And a big part of that role is cooking really nice, healthy home cooked meals. So yeah, we part of the assessment day was getting them to cook shepherd's pie as and you know, all those traditional English foods to see how they got on. Which was eye opening for everyone, I think them and us

Pia Rathje-Burton 32:10

grat idea I love it. Yeah, absolutely.

Ben Ashton 32:13

And when they came to the UK, again, we actually gave them a recipe book and spent time with them outside of the office, you know, we say, oh, tonight, we're all gonna cook together and eat together. And it's going to be toad in the hole, or whatever it might be. Just to get them, you know, used to doing the whole process from going to go to Tesco, doing the shop coming back. And yeah, I think that that really helps. And actually. Yeah, and sometimes I think clients is quite like trying different things as well. You know, I think if you get that if you get that sort of matching process, right, it can be really interesting for everyone. Yeah,

Wendy Adams 32:56

these are the sorts of things I think for some organisations embarking on international recruitment. You just don't think you just you can't predict some of these challenges. Until you until you start Can you, you know, again, I've you know, had some of those horror stories where, you know, people have been offering people fish curry for their breakfast at seven o'clock in the morning. And whilst if the customer wants fish curry for breakfast at seven o'clock in the morning, that's absolutely fine. But I think some of them were rather surprised when they have when usually they have cornflakes. And then you the new worker is suggesting, you know, curry curry at seven o'clock in the morning for their breakfast. It was just, you know, again, these are the things that you don't think about maybe needing to prepare international recruits for the way that you wouldn't do if that's somebody you've recruited from two miles down the road, who's who's always lived in that that area?

Ben Ashton 33:58

100% That's exactly right. Yeah.

Pia Rathje-Burton 34:02

It sounds like you have had a really, you really thought about you know, tried it was there things that you thought afterwards it we're gonna change that the next for the next kind of, I'm assuming you're going to have so arriving in stages, what was mistakes made or just things that you thought when fully thought about that?

Ben Ashton 34:20

I think it was really helpful for our team to actually go to Zimbabwe and see the country, you know, what the country is like that they were coming to coming from? Because, you know, to start with, when we were sort of brainstorming what we needed to include, and all this, we were, you know, there was some discussion as to do they have supermarkets out there and they 100% do and it's just really, you know, very much like our supermarket. So I think going out there was really interesting to work out what we need to spend more time on and what we need to spend less time on you Yeah, it's definitely evolved. And actually, now we've got more of a cohort. So we've got, we try and bring them over in small groups of three at a time. We always introduce them before, they're in the WhatsApp group before they come over so they can get to know each other and discuss what they're packing. And then sort of, yeah, get to know each other. But now, some of our initial people who came over and now part of their induction, so the first day they spend with someone who was one of the first people we brought over, who then shows them the ropes that actually tells them, I think it's much easier for her to tell them what it's like, than it is for us. Because, you know, I think we can't see the wood for the trees. You know, what, what's weird about English people and food and life, because we are English people. So yeah, that's, um, that's definitely a useful addition to our training. Definitely.

Ben Ashton 35:01

And you have about just ask us something about your franchises, I was really interested in that. That journey you kind of went on, so you're kind of had your own. And most people are quite happy with that you decided to do sort of kind of having starting franchises. And how many have you got now?

Ben Ashton 36:19

Yes, so we've probably got around. We've got 17 at the moment. But there's a few in the pipeline. So yes, hopefully some 20 ish. By the summer. Hopefully, we'll see how it goes. So yeah, no, it's been really, really a good experience, actually. And I think we really, the franchise model really worked well. For us, it works well for the sector, because it's such a regulated sector, I think there are lots of really caring people who would love to start a care business, but are so daunted by all the regulations and CQC. And even just getting through the application processes to start a company. So I think the sector really lends itself to franchising. But I think our approach throughout our whole company, we have what we call a sort of partnership approach, where it's how we how we sort of interact with our clients and their families, we try not to focus just solely on the end user, we didn't we try not to get completely fixated on that end user, but also be the sort of pro-active partners for the support network that are keeping that end user in, in their home, because often, they can't be at home without that support network around them, whether it's family or friends or other health, other professionals. So that partnership approach extends to how we do how we interact with our franchise partners, we it's quite a

collaborative thing. So you know, a lot of our partners have had care management experience before. So what the support that they need is quite different from from someone coming into the sector from a completely different sector. The support looks really different, depending on who we're who we're working with. But it's that collaborative approach really, definitely does lend itself well. And yeah, it's going well, moment.

Wendy Adams 38:14

Yeah, so we always have our time for care slot in every episode, and I would imagine, was what you've just described, your organisational and time saving tips going to be a good one. Because that sounds no pressure. But that sounds like you've got a lot on your plate. And what's your most time saving tip that you could share with podcast listeners?

Ben Ashton 38:41

Good question I've heard you and listened to your podcast a lot. So I was expecting this question. So I've got a short term one and a long term one. And very quickly, the short term one is just pick up the phone and talk to people rather than getting into lengthy lengthy email exchanges. Often it's so much easier to just short circuit, something and just either whether it's a complaint or a particular issue to deal with just picking up that phone rather than waiting for lengthy reply. That's the short term one. I think long term what I try and save time with is by actually investing a bit more time initially in in getting your team up to speed with sort of coaching and mentoring and really empowering them to take some stuff off your plate. And then, you know, I think registered managers often do for really good reason hold on to a lot of that responsibility because it is you know, they are legally responsible and I think that can be absolutely overwhelming a lot of the time so if you can empower your team to do some of the some of your jobs for you. That can definitely help and I think that will was a really helps develop their careers as well but hopefully frees you up to do a little bit more of a, you know, steering of the ship rather than frantically shovelling the coal, or whatever they use to power ships these days. But know that that kind of approach I'd say, is, is my tip.

Wendy Adams 40:19

I really like both of those, particularly your first one about picking up the phone, because I think over the years, I've worked for lots of organisations where sending an email has been the norm. And you get into that situation where you're emailing people in the same building, or in the same office even. And I think over the years, I've frightened lots of people by just turning up at the edge of their desk to say, Here I am, let's have a conversation. And, you know, it can be such a more helpful way of of, you know, solving a problem or getting an answer or so I absolutely love that one.

Ben Ashton 40:55

We've seen it countless times where you know, a little complaint has come in or something, and we just immediately pick up the phone. And often you can completely turn it around and you know, not get into that lengthy, you know, keyboard warrior kind of war and peace style correspondence And just Yeah, it's that human touch. Isn't it? Just actually, yeah, talking to people properly? Yeah,

Wendy Adams 41:18

definitely.

Pia Rathje-Burton 41:20

Like that tip.

Wendy Adams 41:21

And our final question. And again, if you're a regular podcast listener, you might have been expecting this one to imagine we're in a lift on the 10th floor going down with a group of registered managers. And before we get out, you want to tell them what you think is the most important. So what's your key message that you want to leave with those registered managers?

Ben Ashton 41:43

I was expecting these questions. Well, yes. Actually, I sort of cheated and asked our registered manager, Rachel, what she what her thoughts were on this So she emphatically said, don't stay in a job where you don't feel valued. Was Was her big, key message. She actually resigned yesterday. No, she didn't really!

Ben Ashton 42:15

But yeah, no, I really, I actually really agree, I think I think registered managers can have such a sense of responsibility for their clients, and even sometimes even more so for their staff. And often, they really put that those guys get ahead of themselves and their own, like, well being and job satisfaction and just general happiness. So I would definitely say there's so many opportunities for for registered managers out there, there's so many good employers, and there's a huge opportunity to go out and maybe create something of their own in the care sector. So yeah, what if you are in a job where you, you're really not not feeling that sense of you know, that you are a big part of the team, and that you are you are feeling really valued and looked after, I would try and do something about it.

Pia Rathje-Burton 43:12

I think that's amazing advice. And I would just add one thing to that, if you do leave, because you didn't feel valued, please tell your employer that that's why you're leaving, because they're never going to learn. They're just going to, you know, I was talking to provider not long ago, who was saying, oh, you know, had four registered managers in the last year and was kind of saying, oh, you know, that this person didn't do this. And this. And I was kind of thinking that there must be something else going going on. But nobody had said, and I think it's just really important, if you are and I know that can be scary, because we were worrying about references and all that kind of thing, but have a way of sort of saying afterwards, even if it's once you left, and you can say it nicely, you don't have to be horrible about you could just say, Well, the reason I left was because it didn't feel valued. I think that's a really good, good bit of advice. I love it.

Ben Ashton 44:00

Absolutely. I think it's better, you know, for that employee in the long run as well, knowing that, because otherwise, you know, they go through life wondering why they're getting going through six registered managers a year and blaming everyone but themselves. So yeah, absolutely.

Pia Rathje-Burton 44:16

You know, and then sometimes things just doesn't work out. And that happens. That doesn't mean that it's you know, but I think, you know, if you're having a regular turn, you need something what is going well, there must be something else going on. Absolutely fascinating. Ben, I've loved our conversation. So thank you so much for your time today. It's been brilliant. Thanks very much.

Ben Ashton 44:36

genuine pleasure. Thank you so much.

Pia Rathje-Burton 44:37

Take care. Bye. Bye.

Pia Rathje-Burton 44:48

So Wendy, what do you think of our conversation with Ben?

Wendy Adams 44:51

That was just so interesting, wasn't it? He had so much so many things to talk about that were different to you know, some The conversations we've had with other providers. So really interesting.

Pia Rathje-Burton 45:03

Yeah, that environmental sustainability, it's a, it's a topic that that's gonna grow, I can only see growing, you know, I am sure that this is going to be something that's we're going to be talking more and more about. Because it's, you know, as he was talking about, it's kind of coming from all angles, isn't it? Suddenly people are, you know, CQC asking about it, you're probably going to start getting other commissioners insurance, all those kinds of things are probably going to start asking, Well, what are you doing? What are you doing?

Wendy Adams 45:32

Yeah. And I think the point you made about younger people as well, you know, it's, this is an issue that's up there in priority for a lot of younger people, maybe who could be our workforce of the future.

Pia Rathje-Burton 45:44

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. And obviously, as I mentioned, when we were chatting to Ben CQC's quality statement, when when that start does have that environmental sustainability. We very recently recorded a webinar on those new quality statement, what is one of the registered manager webinars, and we did it in the in partnership with the outstanding society. And we had somebody on the webinar, a provider talking about her plans, what she was doing in terms of environmental sustainability. So really interesting to listen to both Ben and that webinar to sort of think Well, what are the things I can do and with that, we provided a complimentary recommendation checklist on environmental sustainability and and it just gives some suggestions about if you're a care home. And if you're, you know, a home care what aresome one of the things you want might want to start thinking about in terms of of meeting that and providing evidence. And just to say, so, on the on the webinar, the registered manager webinar on the CQC changes, there are the two there's two complementary checklists, so one on environmental sustainability and one on workforce equality, diversity and inclusion. But we have actually created recommendation checklists for all the new CQC quality statements. If you are a registered member

member, you can access them on our portal. And just a reminder, the membership is 35 pounds a year. What was the other thing that really stood out? For you, Wendy,

Wendy Adams 47:30

I was really interested in what you had to say about international recruitment, because international recruitment is such a hot topic, it is in social care at the at the moment. And obviously, uh, you know, I really liked what you were saying about social care providers not seeing international recruitment as being the only answer, this is one option, but you should also build your recruitment in your local area, as well. But in terms of international recruitment, obviously, we've got a load of resources on the Skills for Care website, which are both for those organisations who are already doing some of that international recruitment, as checklists and guidance. But there's also support on there for people who are just exploring the idea or thinking about this as an option. So we've got resources, like help sheets around becoming a visa sponsor, for adult social care providers, we've got information on there around safer recruitment, and the bite size guide to overseas recruitment. But I think we've also got information on there, including including blogs about how to support people. And that was very much one of the things that he talked about, about how to provide that pastoral support when people are coming to the UK from another country. And I think it is about learning from people like Ben, like learning from the resources on the Skills for Care website, you know, to try and make this as as positive and experience for everybody as it possibly can be. So I was really interested in what he had to say and his views on how that's gone. And is he's what he's planning to learn from that going forward. Yeah,

Pia Rathje-Burton 49:16

I really liked the fact that he got that the original people that came over to be part of the induction, you know, because they are going to be able to have that firsthand experience and be able to share their their learning, isn't it? You know what that was really, you know, how empowering so that for the first few people that arrived, then they'll be part of the induction to to train the next trainer next cohort.

Wendy Adams 49:38

And I like the fact that he talked about learning more about the country from where people were coming. Because, you know, how can we how can we work out what people don't know if we don't understand the country and the culture that they've come from? And actually, how much easier is it to help somebody settle into it? into our area and into our service, if we've got a good understanding of what, you know what their world looked like, before they came before they came to the UK to work.

Pia Rathje-Burton 50:10

Yeah, and even if you don't have the opportunity to go, you know, there's other ways of finding out about that country, you know, try and connecting with local people, though, you know, if the society from that from that area, just so you have some understanding of that culture, and how important would that person feel coming to you if you've actually taken your time to learn about their country? Great. Yeah. Good idea. Right. So, hope you have enjoyed this episode. Thank you very much for listening. Any all our resources we spoken about will be in the show notes, and there'll be links. There'll be links to the resources that we're talking about. Hope you've enjoyed today. Thanks very much. Bye. Thank you. Bye bye.