Disability Sheffield Centre for Independent Living

Testing innovative approaches to the recruitment of personal assistants

Disability Sheffield worked with Sheffield Hallam University to deliver six taught sessions about the personal assistant (PA) role, to increase awareness and support the ongoing recruitment of PAs.

Background

Disability Sheffield is a not for profit, disabled person's, user-led organisation that supports individuals who employ their own PAs.

Sheffield has ongoing issues with the recruitment of PAs. They wanted to work with local education providers to raise awareness of the role and advertise vacancies amongst students on relevant courses.

They did this by running six taught sessions as part of the curriculum for students on courses in the Health and Wellbeing Faculty.

They also did careers fairs and drop in sessions at the University.

What they wanted to achieve

The aim of the project was to share a broader understanding of the PA role to encourage more students to consider it as a career choice.

They wanted to:
■ encourage more students to consider becoming a PA whilst learning, or as part of their career path

■ empower more individual employers and PAs to share their experience and knowledge, and develop their skills by presenting the sessions
■ enable higher education providers to access learning resources to enhance their curriculum.

They hoped that this would achieve their overall aim of delivering a sustainable increase in the number of PAs available for employment.

What they did

Disability Sheffield had worked with local Universities in the past so already had a relationship with Sheffield Hallam University.

They recruited a coordinator to manage the project and developed a project plan. They also identified individual employers and PAs to get involved through existing contacts.

Originally they wanted to hold discussions with students to explore their perceptions of the PA role. However due to timetabling this wasn't feasible. They therefore sent out questionnaires by asking 20 tutors in the Health and Wellbeing Faculty of the University to forward it to their MA and BA students.

They found that some students had a lack of understanding about the variation in the PA role and were unaware of the opportunities for development and career progression.

They used the answers to shape six taught sessions about PAs, and developed supporting resources for each session.

The Learning and information resource gives an overview of each session, what they hope to achieve and how they can be used in different settings.

The sessions can be standalone or as part of a wider programme.

The sessions and supporting resources

Personal budgets and personal health budgets
■   Download the presentation.
■   Download the glossary of terms.

Terminology and difference
■   Download the handout.
This session explains the terms used to describe different social care roles and how a PA is different to other care workers.

What is the role of a PA
■   Download the overview of activities.
■   Download the 'What the PA role is' true or false handout.
■   Download the 'The importance of the relationship' handout.
■   Download the 'Scenarios: what the role of the PA is' handout.
This session explores the role of a PA and what values, behaviours and attitudes you need to do the role. It looks at a range of scenarios where there is potential for conflict or risk at work and asks people what they'd do to resolve it.

Being a PA
■   Download the handout.
This session looks at five main areas of care and support a PA might provide, and the types of activities that might be involved.

How to become a PA
■   Download the handout.
■   Download the 'Working as a PA – all you need to know' leaflet.
■   Download the 'How to register as a PA' leaflet.
This session gives information about employment. It explains how students can register as a PA in Sheffield.

Personal assistants sharing their experience
■   Download Alex's PA journey.
■   Download Francine's PA journey.
■   Download Lucy's PA journey.
This session is an audio of three PAs saying how they became a PA and what they do in their role.

The project coordinator trained the individual employers and PAs to deliver the sessions – including developing their presentation skills.

[Download the Good practice: supporting presentations trainer notes.](#)

They tested the sessions on the wider Sheffield individual employer and PA development group before delivering them to students. In total they delivered sessions two to five to over 60 students on MA and BA social work degrees.

The University helped to promote the sessions to students, including putting a link on the UniHub. The advert also linked to the Disability Sheffield website - 147 people viewed this advert and 51 clicked through to the application form.

They also attended a careers and employment drop in centre and an employment fair to promote the PA role, at which they spoke to 100 delegates.

What did they achieve?

> ☾ **[We've seen a] definite increase in being a PA, increased number of people using the PA register, queries [and accessing information] regarding becoming a PA.** ☽

They found that more people visited the Disability Sheffield website since the project started.

The number of people who visited their PA register webpage doubled from the previous quarter, and 21 people fully registered to be a PA with a further 19 who've partially completed the application form.

Following the taught sessions, 16 people requested a follow up call with more information and others have directly contacted Disability Sheffield about becoming a PA.

They also saw a 50% increase in the number of individual employers advertising their vacancies which means there are more employment opportunities for PAs registering.

The University now has a permanent live advert that promotes the PA register and vacancies, and Disability Sheffield can attend three recruitment events per year.

They've also agreed to deliver sessions two to five as part of four study skills days across the Faculty. Session one will become part of an adult pathway personalisation curriculum to strengthen their teaching.

What did they learn?

Disability Sheffield found that co-producing the resources and learning materials worked well as this gives more ownership to individual employers and PAs.

They also found that working with Sheffield Hallam University brought lots of benefits. The resources and sessions are influencing and enhancing the taught curriculum, and the input from those with lived experience added value to the sessions and stimulated discussion.

> ☾ **I found all of it useful, I had little knowledge on the role of personal assistants. I liked the presence of the service user and his PAs in the session having their say about their own experience"** ☽

However, they'd also suggest having a 'plan b' in case individual employers and PAs are absent due to sickness – always try and have a reserve.

They found that smaller groups worked better than large lecture theatres and would suggest groups of 25 people. They'd also recommend having adaptable resources for different sessions such as meeting, group discussions and careers fairs.

[Download the full recruitment model](#)

Skills for Care recommends

We have lots of resources to help individual employers and organisations who support them to recruit, train and retain personal assistants.

Information hub for individual employers and PAs

This hub has links to resources to support people who employ their own care and support. It also has a section for supporting organisations and PAs.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/iepahub

Individual employer funding

Skills for Care has funding available for individual employers to train themselves and their PAs.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/iefunding

Finding and keeping workers

This online toolkit has lots of resources to support adult social care employers, including individual employers, with their recruitment and retention.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/finderskeepers