Why are some employers more successful than others in retaining their workforce?

Good Practice from Domiciliary Care and Community Care Providers

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**CONTEXT**

The funding of social care, demographic change and personalisation are just some of the issues transforming the delivery of care services within the adult social care sector. Yet at the very time the sector is rapidly evolving, some organisations are grappling with high rates of staff turnover.

As the body supporting workforce development, Skills for Care has a strong interest in the retention of the adult social care workforce. Its ongoing work on this issue shows that whilst the overall level of staff turnover within the sector is high, some organisations are very successful at retaining their staff. So, Skills for Care commissioned a study to find out what it is that these organisations do that encourage their staff to stay working for them.

The study consulted managers in 80 organisations with high levels of staff retention, across the main service areas (residential care, residential care with nursing, domiciliary care, day care and community care) and different sectors (private, voluntary and statutory).

The findings show that there is no single practice that supports retention, but rather it is the combination of human resource practices, the management of the organisation and its culture and values that encourage staff to stay.

Staff turnover is higher in domiciliary care compared with other parts of the sector. This case study highlights good practice from domiciliary care providers in relation to staff retention which emerged during the research.

**RECRUITMENT**

Good retention levels begin with successful recruitment. It is important that potential care workers have a good understanding of what their role would entail and the hours they would be expected to work. This helps to reduce the number of staff who leave because care work does not suit them. The examples below demonstrate different approaches which have been successful in helping staff to gain a sound appreciation of the job prior to starting.

Blossoms Care, a medium-sized company specialising in domiciliary care and supported living in the south of England, has found that working with a local training provider is the best way to meet its recruitment needs. Despite operating in an area with many other competing care providers, the company feels its recruitment is unaffected due to the reputation it has built up and its link with the training provider.

The care company has worked with the training provider to develop the course which provides an insight into the sector and offers learners the opportunity to undertake work experience. Everyone who completes the course is guaranteed a job interview with the care company.

The approach has been successful and is considered to be the most effective means of recruitment. From the latest cohort of learners, nine out of fifteen were offered a job. It ensures that those joining the organisation have a sound understanding of the role prior to starting and have a genuine interest in working in social care.
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Crossroads Care Birmingham and Solihull is a branch of a large organisation which provides care to people in their own homes. The manager found that openly advertising care worker roles attracted a lot of applicants who were not really suitable due to a high number of people looking for employment. This caused considerable amounts of time to be wasted in reviewing and rejecting their applications.

The organisation, which employs over 80 care workers, now uses a different approach to recruitment which ensures that potential recruits have a better understanding of the organisation, its ways of working and its values before deciding whether or not to apply.

The details of anyone who applies speculatively are kept on file, and when posts become available, these people are invited to an open morning. These are also publicised through charities which support people returning to work or those that have been out of the labour market for some time.

The open mornings, run by the HR co-ordinator, give potential care workers an opportunity to learn about the organisation, the job role and the personal attributes that the organisation seeks in its recruits. Application packs are provided to take away, and a formal application and interview process follows.

The HR co-ordinator comments: “General advertising led to a lot of time wasters, but we get a very high success rate like this. We get good quality application forms once people know a bit about the organisation.”

Organisation of Work

Organising working hours can be a particular challenge for domiciliary care providers. The need to provide care in the individual's home, and at very specific times of the day, makes complex demands on managers and can mean a fragmented working day for care workers. However, some organisations do manage to arrange the hours of work successfully.

Crossroads Care Birmingham and Solihull employs over 125 staff and is able to offer care workers considerable flexibility in the hours they work. Care workers are given a choice over their hours of work, with some choosing only to work nights and others just to work weekends.

Once a rota is in place it is fixed, which means that care workers work with a regular caseload “and stick with it”. This means they can build up relationships with service users over many years, enabling the organisation to offer consistency of service, and meaning that the quality of care provided is high and is closely tailored to the needs of the service user.

Training

The majority of domiciliary care providers regard training to be a key factor in recruiting and retaining staff. The skills and knowledge gained through training are important in allowing employees to feel confident and competent in their role, which is particularly important for domiciliary care workers who often work alone.
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Community Home Care Provider operates in London providing domiciliary care services. The manager explained their active approach to training. As well as mandatory training, the provider has a training room with computer access where staff can watch training DVDs. The staff are encouraged to undertake training by relating it to the needs of the service users, which helps them to see the importance and relevance to their role.

The manager feels that it is important to encourage staff to share their skills and knowledge. Following a training course, she invites the staff to do a presentation to other team members about what they have learnt. This helps to pass on new or innovative practice, encourages staff to undertake training and builds their confidence.

At Blossoms Care (a medium sized, private sector provider in the South East), the manager highlighted the emphasis on and support for career progression in the organisation. Vacancies occur within the organisation reasonably frequently and managers always try to fill them internally before they are publically advertised.

If a member of staff applies for a more senior role and isn’t selected, then the manager supports the member of staff to put together a development plan. The plan focuses on the areas that they need to improve on so they are better placed to get the job next time. This includes training on subjects such as confidence building, management techniques and team leading. If the training isn’t available in house, the manager will source external provision.

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Managers reported that creating a happy atmosphere in the workplace, building a good rapport with staff and supporting them with issues outside work were all important parts of their approach to staff retention.

This can be more difficult in domiciliary care when carers are working individually out in the community. The two examples below illustrate how management style has created an organisational culture that fosters staff retention.

A manager at Anchor Support Services (a medium sized, private sector domiciliary care provider) noted the importance of the organisation’s culture in retaining their staff. The manager commented: “We are a family business. We don't ask above and beyond of staff, we like them to show initiative and we try to be approachable. We keep communication open and honest.”

This approach to communication is exemplified in how staff were recently kept informed about business developments. In the current climate, the directors did not feel able to offer staff a pay rise. To tell staff about the decision, a meeting was held at a local library. The director said that they could have a pay rise but there would have to be redundancies, or that they could keep pay at the same level and maintain staff numbers. Staff felt involved and bought into the decision making process, and accepted the need for a pay freeze.

Allcare Community Care is a domiciliary care provider based in the North West with approximately 75 staff. The manager noted the importance of sharing service user feedback. “It makes staff feel valued and helps both care staff and managers to understand how the service is performing.”
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The manager described how she had shared the findings of their most recent service user questionnaire at a staff meeting. The findings were positive and a boost for staff morale. In some cases, clients will name a carer in their feedback who they feel has done a particularly good job. When this happens the manager will write to the carer personally to let them know and thank them for their hard work.

Further Skills for Care resources relating to Retention and Recruitment can be found at:

http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/workforce_strategy/recruitmentandretentionstrategy/recruitment_and_retention_strategy.aspx