

Recruiting through the pandemic

A case study from The Disability Resource Centre

Helping disabled people, carers, families, friends and professionals in Bedfordshire, Luton and Northamptonshire.

Attracting new people to work as PAs

The UK Government launched a recruitment campaign for social care called 'Care for others. Make a Difference' on the 23rd of April.

The Disability Resource Centre website was updated with this information directing people to the campaign and shared in many other ways

With a number of people being made redundant this has prompted some to consider a change in career and a move to social care.

- A module of training called 'Being a PA' (explaining the role of a PA for those who are interested) has been developed and made available
- The Disability Resource Centre has developed online versions of training to be used in the absence of a suitable physical space
- The Disability Resource Centre has run a Friday morning PA drop-in for several years for people interested in being a PA or existing PAs to come in and chat to someone. In view of the lockdown this was offered virtually via a web based video conference

The Disability Resource Centre partnered with Care Pair to develop a PA matching system. This has enabled PAs and Individual Employers to find each other based on needs and additional personality traits. The idea is that matching based on availability and tasks is enhanced by the personality aspects and produces longer term working relationships. The system has continued throughout the Covid-19 situation with new employers and new PAs continuing to sign up to the system.

A PA tells us how they successfully used Care Pair:

“I signed up to Care Pair earlier in the year. I like the system because I was able to write a statement and leave my contact details.

The system asks some personality-based questions which I think is good, as it is a people business and this gives another avenue of connection.

A person who was looking to employ a PA saw my information and contacted me to discuss the role. We agreed on the phone to proceed and I contacted The Disability Resource Centre to arrange the necessary paperwork.

The initial phone call took place on Thursday and by Monday all the necessary paperwork had been completed and returned to The Disability Resource Centre.

I was impressed with how easy this was and how helpful staff at The Disability Resource Centre have been.”

Quote from a PA, August 2020.

We are using the Indeed website to recruit too

The Disability Resource Centre also supports recruitment through the Indeed website.

Initial concerns around the effect lockdown may have on recruiting in this way were ultimately unfounded.

One Personal Assistant position advertised on Indeed received 447 views and 14 candidates in 3 weeks; the majority of these being in the first week of posting.

Directly employing PAs to fill a gap in service provision – a case study

J is an 18 year old young man with additional needs whose school closed due to lockdown in April 2020.

His planned respite over the summer holidays had been cancelled due to COVID.

Mum was asking for support for the unmet need, the funding authority recognised this and were happy to fund the support. The school said they could provide the building. They had people who were prepared to provide support but they did not know how they could do this and working out how the support workers would be paid.

The Disability Resource Centre suggested setting mum up as an employer and her recruiting some employees from the school to provide support during the school holidays.

The school and mum identified the people that would be set up as employees and The Disability Resource Centre added them to the payroll. The team explained how this would work, answered any questions raised and provided support with completing the necessary paperwork.

“Organising respite for a disabled young person and his family in crisis was looking impossible.

They have been stuck at home since lockdown, unable to access the planned respite because of Covid.

Jon and his amazing colleagues at The Disability Resource Centre made it doable, with his help and support, knowledge and excellent communication I’m happy to say the young person and his family have had an enjoyable summer. We could not have done it without you”

Quote from the Transition Worker at the school.

“Without any respite at all, things could have been unmanageable. It sounded daunting at the start but with the support of everyone involved it’s been very positive and run smoothly with no hiccups.

It’s been brilliant, J has loved it and looked forward to going every time.

He’s enjoyed it more than a usual holiday club because he’s had support from people he knows well. J goes off happily each time and comes back happily too. It’s given him time away from us and also given us a chance to recharge our batteries.

It’s definitely something we would do again in the future.”

Quote from mum.

Contingency planning

At the beginning of lockdown, The Disability Resource Centre created a method of tracking Individual Employers needing additional support and PAs able to offer additional hours.

Whenever anyone called with these details they were recorded so that we could link them up.

The idea was that PAs unable to work for their usual employer, because they were shielding, may be able to work for someone else in the short term. Equally, employers who found that their PAs were unable to work due to shielding or isolation may have needed to recruit cover.

The Disability Resource Centre took a few calls of this nature but far less than expected. Throughout the lockdown period most PAs continued to work for their Individual Employers although contingency plans were in place.

Communication with funders

The Disability Resource Centre supports people funded by various different local authorities and Clinical Commissioning Groups.

Due to the frequent changes in guidance and advice we offered the opportunity to each of the funding authorities to have a weekly telephone call.

These calls have been welcomed and found to be beneficial, so much so that a number of funders have requested that the weekly calls continue as a matter of course in the future.

The regular calls have meant that a really good level of communication has been achieved. Improved working relationships and understanding between organisations has developed further than ever before.

The regular communication with funding authorities highlighted some discrepancies in approach. In the early stages Personal Assistants were identified as key workers and there was no mechanism for funding via the Furlough arrangements. The majority of funders took the decision to continue paying in full those PAs who were asked not to work by the Individual Employers. The basis for this was to retain the PAs that were employed so that when the situation changed, they were able to return to work immediately. This also meant that further recruitment would not be needed when the situation changed. In one local authority there was a difference in approach between their Adult Social Care and Children's services. This issue was raised at the weekly telephone call and prompted the funding authority to have an internal discussion in order to provide a consistent message.