

Hallmark Care Homes' 'stronger together' approach

Hallmark's people and performance team put safe care and team member wellbeing at the forefront of their response to COVID-19. Taking the approach of 'stronger together,' team members from across the organisation worked to provide much-needed support to the front line when the pandemic hit.



“The kindness economy is here to stay. At our core we are a people business, so it is vital that we take every possible step to prioritise those in our care, as well as those doing the caring.”

Elizabeth Fairchild
People and Performance Director

Hallmark's response to the pandemic was multi-pronged and included initiatives focusing on three main areas: recruitment, support for colleagues, and communications, both internal and external.

Recruitment

When the pandemic struck, Hallmark knew the impact of team absence due to illness and isolation would be significant and that they needed to maintain a highly skilled, trained and empathetic workforce. To prepare, they focused on driving recruitment to ensure a safe and caring environment.

While Hallmark were steadfast on the high standards of care professionals they recruited, it was necessary to consider what training and onboarding processes could be streamlined, to enable new team members to support the front lines faster. Hallmark has a strong emphasis on a compassionate, committed and cohesive team and they considered this to be paramount when recruiting. They then identified exactly what was needed in terms of training and support to allow someone to be effective in a community and subsequently trained specifically for those skills.

Hallmark found that a direct approach to assessing candidates, through phone and video calls, helped them to identify key candidates with the necessary values. Hallmark's own team members were seconded into the recruitment team to help with these efforts, also providing frontline support where needed.

Support for colleagues

Hallmark's 'stronger together' ethos also underpinned the assistance they provided to their front line teams. A support fund was quickly established and advertised across the organisation, through which all team members could apply for any COVID-19 related financial aid, including the cost of lost wages



to support colleagues to self-isolate and ensure they could prioritise resident wellbeing. As the pandemic continued, this fund evolved, embracing Hallmark's family values, to include things like white goods for the home, or financial support if there was a loss in total household income from isolation, not just the team member themselves.

Hallmark's teams were aware of the impact the pandemic would have on mental wellbeing, and took action to upskill leaders and line managers across the business on mental health awareness and how to provide support to their teams. This included providing a 24/7 counselling helpline as well as easy to understand resources on mental wellbeing. Hallmark is continuing to consider the changing mental health needs of their teams, in response to many team members' traumatic experiences. This includes providing trauma counselling, support for post-traumatic stress disorder and by continuously monitoring the mental wellbeing of teams.

Communication

Leadership in each home is critical in normal times and even more so during a pandemic. Home managers were at the forefront of the response, and their input and feedback was vital. Directors would hold daily video calls with home managers so they could gather data, support on key decisions and provide senior leadership support as and when it was needed. The Executive Leadership Team also held video calls with the homes and their teams, replacing what would normally have been routine visits. All employees were sent a regular newsletter called 'Keeping in Touch' which highlighted accomplishments and included company updates and offered regular recognition and thanks from the Managing Director and operations team.

Regular communications with relatives helped to provide clarity in an uncertain situation. Hallmark issued weekly communications to all relatives with information on the situation at each home, with separate, more frequent direct communications relating specifically to their loved one. This helped to reassure relatives that the homes were doing everything they could to keep their loved ones safe.



Top tips for staying 'stronger together'



Recruitment

People are the core of care. This is important not just in the recruitment process but throughout. Hallmark focused on making care attractive by putting people first, ensuring the recruitment process was as simple as possible, and placed a strong focus on values. All recruitment efforts must be localised to the area, and personal conversations count. The recruitment team found they could gain much more from a phone call with a candidate than by simply looking at a CV.



Team support

When faced with a significant, unprecedented challenge it can be hard to know where to focus resources. Hallmark ensured that front-line teams had feedback loops which were listened to and acted upon.



Communication

In a crisis, when there is an information vacuum, it will be filled, and not always by true or helpful information. That's why Hallmark worked hard to keep their teams and relatives informed through accurate and reassuring communications.