

# Oakland Care's holistic approach to colleague retention and support

Oakland Care employ nearly 400 staff and operate a network of five nursing and residential care homes across England. When the pandemic struck, the roll out of a total refresh of their mission, values and recruitment platform had to quickly be adapted for an online-led recruitment campaign.

Alongside moving to an online campaign, Oakland Care had to quickly find ways to support their workforce through the most challenging time for care homes in recent history and move their training and recruitment solutions online to make sure they had the necessary team members in place to respond to the pandemic. They took several steps to do this, streamlining recruitment and training and thinking outside the box to support colleague wellbeing.



**“Continually improving the candidate and colleague experience was important before the pandemic struck. Now, the way you attract, support and retain your colleagues is vital. Our mission to provide excellent homes for people to live, love and be loved and where everyone is a part of our family must also apply to our colleagues who care for them”**

**Mo Quadri**  
Director for People and Organisational Development

## Colleague wellbeing

It's vital that colleagues who are sharing such an unprecedented experience can connect with one another. Oakland Care used Facebook to create a platform where their team members could communicate with each other, receive the latest organisational news, share positive stories and provide and receive peer support.

Oakland Care embraced technology again when they implemented 'The Happiness Index' which came in the form of an app on colleagues' phones allowing them to provide daily feedback on how they were feeling, as well as include any relevant comments. This gave senior leadership teams the vital information they needed to see how their staff were feeling in real time so they could react and provide support quickly. While the data was anonymised, it was pinpointed to locations, so the relevant support could be targeted to the home where team members needed it.

Oakland Care's Wellbeing Champions had received some training in how to support team members but with the onset of the pandemic they were provided with mental health training, so there was an additional source of support located within each home. When staple food supplies became more difficult to get in grocery stores, Oakland Care worked with their own food suppliers to secure items in bulk to provide to their staff. Colleagues were working hard and would often miss the key times to get groceries while the shelves were stocked, so this small step took a significant amount of pressure off staff who were at the forefront of the pandemic.



## Recruitment

Alongside the pandemic came the need to reduce travel between homes and prioritise social distancing. As such, a new online portal to support the whole process of recruitment, training and deployment was implemented which moved the whole process online.

The recruitment platform also improved the candidate experience by streamlining the application process, guiding candidates through the process, providing exemplar applications and guidance on how to write one. Throughout the pandemic, Oakland Care found that the values of compassion and caring were the most important element in hiring a care employee, and that training could be given for any necessary skills after recruitment. The online platform created efficiencies for managers whilst also focusing more on the values that candidates had. Oakland Care considered how they could improve the package they offered to attract more candidates, providing extra annual leave days, improved employee benefits, full sick pay for those who became ill, and long service awards to attract and retain candidates with the right value set.

## Training

From the outset of the national lockdown, to ensure Oakland Care had the appropriate training available, the operations, clinical, and HR teams collaborated to adapt existing training to make it accessible online. Incredibly, and through a concerted team effort, this process was achieved within a week. They also overhauled their training process to streamline it to include everything that new team members needed to provide the best, safest care, in the most efficient way.

This effort took the programme from 21 e-learning courses to just three core courses which were all repackaged in a user-friendly way under the 'Exceptional Beginnings' programme. The goal was to make sure new recruits had the core competencies to respond to the situation in the home and provide immediate support to reduce pressure on existing colleagues. Local level leaders would then follow up with their new recruits to ensure they had the necessary full range of competencies and could access any further upskilling they needed.

### Top tips:



#### Support from the senior team

Oakland Care found that the support they had from their senior team was imperative to their ability to focus on what mattered. The senior team worked with local colleagues to ensure they knew the reasons behind every decision which helped to generate support for action at every level of the organisation. This meant colleagues understood what was happening, why it was happening and what their part in it was, leading to a cohesive team effort.



#### Encourage teams to look after each other and themselves

In ensuring their teams had what they needed to continue throughout the pandemic, Oakland Care fostered a culture of speaking up to request support and encouraging colleagues to look after themselves first, so they could provide the best care to their residents. Colleagues were supported to eat well, exercise and take care of their own mental health to ensure they were in the best mindset possible, and that this positivity would flow through to residents who were also living through a challenging time.