

Sunrise and Gracewell's rapid recruitment and clinical quality leadership

Sunrise Senior Living UK and Gracewell Healthcare have 46 care homes across England and Wales, supporting around 3,000 residents. Before the pandemic hit, “never in a million years” did the Sunrise team think they would be closing the doors to their care homes and communities.

At the onset of the pandemic, Sunrise recognised the immediate risk posed by the need for colleagues to self-isolate, which had a huge effect on workforce planning and resident care. To respond to the challenging workforce landscape, a rapid recruitment team was created to ensure effective care delivery could continue from high quality team members.



“I’m proud of the decisions we have made together as an executive leadership team throughout the pandemic which have helped to keep people alive, as well as the culture we created for our colleagues and residents. I’m eternally grateful to be weathering this storm, in a sector where our colleagues are entrusted with caring for people when they need it most.”

Kris Peach
Executive Director of Extra Care

Recruitment and retention

The team got to work immediately, re-designing a new values-based interview process, launching a virtual interview process planned and managed by a centralised team and recreating their induction in a virtual format. For roles which were a high priority, Sunrise and Gracewell also applied a ‘one-click’ apply option helping to increase the number of applications by removing barriers for those applicants who may have been unable to complete a longer application form but who more than met the requirements to join their hardworking teams.

The rapid recruitment team themselves took on additional responsibilities and increased workloads to ensure that residents continued to receive great care through volume-recruitment drives. Several head office colleagues were also re-deployed from their day jobs to support the effort and enable care homes to continue meeting the needs of residents.

To attract more candidates, the team proactively reached out to those businesses most effected by job losses from the pandemic, broadening their horizons when searching for new talent. In the initial 12-week period from April to early June, Sunrise recruited and on-boarded 677 new colleagues, with similar levels of new recruits hired over the following months.

To ensure these new team members and their current colleagues could weather the storm of the pandemic, Sunrise and Gracewell took steps to provide as much support as possible. Minibus services helped team members to avoid using public transport, enhanced shift and overtime allowances were implemented, and everyone received a free hot meal on shift.

Colleagues were kept up-to-date and connected with weekly newsletters, regular protocol updates and all-colleague conferences using Sli.do, an interactive presentation app with live polling, quizzes and Q&A sessions, ensuring regular, consistent and engaging information was provided to teams at all levels, enabling them to continue working towards a common goal.

Clinical quality and leadership

Over the course of the pandemic, the team created an initiative to place colleagues who could provide clinical leadership into those care homes with emerging outbreaks. This service was particularly useful for Sunrise and Gracewell's residential care homes which do not typically employ multiple nurses. The initiative, which connected the homes with experienced nurses when they needed them most, played a central role in supporting them to deal with a COVID-19 outbreak. This meant the pressures associated with managing multiple cases of COVID-19 and reducing the spread of the virus were eased, resulting in fewer infections across residents and team members. Not only was this vital for the health of residents and colleagues, but it also supported care homes to come out of outbreaks sooner without the need for significant agency use.

In a global crisis, it is vital that sector leaders could come together for the good of all residents, and share learnings, ideas and best practice, leverage relationships, give alternative views and most importantly maintain perspective. For this reason, the Head of Human Resources set up a human resource development WhatsApp group with other private care providers. This digital platform was an invaluable source of education and insight, and provided access to significant experience and knowledge from those who were all coping with the same challenges.

Top tips



Work together

Sunrise and Gracewell found that creating teams which had the knowledge and skill to take the decisions necessary for a tactical and strategic response to the pandemic from the outset was vital. They also found that speaking to those in the sector who were experiencing the same phenomenon created valuable connections and enabled the sharing of important information and outside perspectives.



Turn challenging situations into opportunities

An overhaul of the recruitment system allowed Sunrise and Gracewell to speed up the hiring process whilst ensuring that, from the outset, they were recruiting people with the right values and who would fit well into their teams. They also took hold of the media narrative, by showcasing the great care being delivered to their residents, and provided much needed balance by proving how residents were being kept safe.



Protect your people

In working so hard to ensure all homes had the necessary PPE, that colleagues were supported, and that there was a free flow of information, Sunrise and Gracewell's team members felt comforted by the significant steps that were being taken to support and protect them when they were on the front line.

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