

Redeploying trained staff to support demands in care

Surrey Choices

Surrey Choices (SC) is a local authority trading company owned by Surrey County Council who offer several disability services. During the COVID-19 pandemic, SC were able to continue to provide their respite, shared lives and supported employment services. However, due to the circumstances, their day services across the county could not operate as usual.

As it became increasingly apparent that, in a worst-case scenario, care services across the county would struggle due to illness or self-isolation, SC worked quickly to establish their redeployment initiative to ensure that no vulnerable person was left behind to the point that they could not access the care and support they needed.

With support and funding from Surrey County Council, SC rallied passionate volunteers from the day service team and for the first 20 weeks of lockdown, the scheme supported all types of care services across the county, from council-run learning disability centres to elderly and residential care homes who were experiencing staff shortages due to COVID-19.

To do this, SC made the process as simple as possible and prepared a short-term contractual agreement to support the best overall outcomes for vulnerable people in Surrey. They also approached the Surrey Care Association for advertising their redeployment offer to providers.

In practice, all a provider had to do was register with SC and indicate what shifts needed covering, when and what they were looking for. SC then contacted their pool of volunteers to identify people who could cover the shift. With SC staff well-trained and DBS checked, it was a case of transferring their existing skills to a new environment, which in turn also supported their personal and professional development.



“I was so proud to be needed in elderly care services. Our skills are transferable - I jumped at the chance to be redeployed. It was so heart-warming to be able to support people with dementia who really needed help. My own self-esteem has been boosted considerably by being able to help.”

Surrey Choices Activity Facilitator

Overall, 65 volunteers put their names down, 25 of whom took on the majority of the workload. By the end of the 20 weeks, the SC team completed almost 2,000 shifts. The split was more or less even across other SC services and for other providers and organisations.

The collaborative approach between SC, Surrey County Council and the Surrey Care Association ensured that no vulnerable person was put at risk due to a lack of personnel. SC recognised their position as an organisation that had the resources, expertise and skills that could support people with even the most complex of needs. With the administration and management of the initiative sitting centrally with SC, all staff had to do was deliver high quality care. SC ensured that all volunteers were comfortable and equipped with the information and tools they needed to do their job.

The redeployment scheme was targeted to individuals in a way that emphasised how people can help their community by utilising existing skills. It highlighted how committed people were to contribute in a meaningful way and truly showed the best side of Surrey's care staff community.



“The staff deployed were entering a great uncertainty – so little was known at the time and we were all used to working a certain way. They went from doing a 9-4 shift and art sessions to working double shifts, evenings and weekends in new services and with new teams, all while wearing head to toe PPE. It wasn't easy but we had some real heroes out there. They were fighting the good fight and they stepped up when Surrey's most vulnerable people needed them most.”

Christina Earl
Head of Innovation and Business Development, Surrey Choices

Top tips for redeploying staff to other services



Build relationships

It can be easy to get caught up in contracts and logistics so ensure you build open and trusting relationships with other organisations so that you can concentrate on what is most important: supporting the most vulnerable.



Establish a solid admin system

Redeploying a high volume of people can get overwhelming so develop a tracking system in order to understand where people are, what hours they are doing and what additional support they may need to do their job.



Focus on passionate staff first

Ideally, everyone would want to get involved but it can be difficult to convince some people. Focus your efforts on those who are passionate first as they can help you spread and celebrate positive stories and promote the initiative based on their real-life experience and encourage others to join.