

Thorndene

# Learning standards aligned thanks to funding

This case study looks at how the WDF has been used to maintain the standards and quality of service offered at private residential care home, Thorndene. Its aim is to use the fund to align learning standards across the care home and to ensure new and existing staff are fully trained and competent to support residents.

## Background to the WDF

Skills for Care believes that all staff working in adult social care should be able to access and participate in learning and development, in order to carry out their roles effectively and deliver high quality care.

The WDF supports this ethos. It is a funding stream from the Department of Health and is distributed by Skills for Care. It is available to support employers to make an investment in learning and development

that will benefit the organisation, its employees and those that are cared for and supported. The fund focuses on the achievement of qualification units and supports the ongoing professional development of staff across the adult social care sector within England.

## Thorndene

Thorndene offers a round-the-clock service for 22 elderly adults with varying needs, including residents with social needs, onset dementia and those requiring end-of-life care. Manager, Nicola Hall, oversees a team of 25 part-time staff consisting of senior care workers, care workers, domestic and kitchen staff at various

“Everyone needs training to do their job effectively. It helps care staff to understand why they are asked to do things in a certain way. That all comes through the learning that equips them with the skills and expertise required.”

stages of their careers. Agency staff are not recruited at Thorndene, as continuity of care is seen as absolutely essential to maintaining quality.

## What they wanted to achieve

Nicola and the care home's owner are both ambassadors for learning across Thorndene. The expectations of staff to participate and take ownership of learning and personal development are outlined from the outset, at interview stage. The cost of training 25 staff requires an extensive budget, so recouping some of the costs has been one of the key reasons behind Thorndene applying for the WDF.

Nicola works in partnership with her team to discuss what learning they have completed retrospectively and to make plans for their personal development over the next 12 months. Learning support is then put into place to enable each individual to achieve their professional development targets, through the right resources and workforce development funding.

“The support from the council partnership has been fantastic and nothing is too much trouble. The process has been very easy.”

## What was done

Nicola regularly attends her local workforce forums, where she originally discovered the

Workforce Development Fund. To access the WDF, Thorndene worked closely with the local employer-led partnership within Barnsley Council. Its workforce development manager assisted Nicola to complete the funding application and partnership agreement.

Maintaining the National Minimum Data Set for Social Care (NMDS-SC) is a prerequisite for accessing the WDF, but because Thorndene has kept up-to-date with this, it has been a straightforward process. NMDS-SC is the leading source of robust workforce intelligence for adult social care.

At Thorndene, the main aim of using the WDF has been to ensure that all staff are at least qualified to the Level 2 Diploma in Health and Social Care. For those that have already completed that level, the aim is to progress onto and complete Level 3. Nicola also encourages her senior care workers to progress towards Level 5 where they have the opportunity to acquire leadership and supervision skills. Even if this means that they subsequently move into nursing and management and leave the organisation to progress their careers elsewhere in the sector.

## What was achieved

Nicola has herself worked within social care since the age of 17 and at Thorndene for ten years. She has progressed from care worker to manager during that time, a position she has held for two and a half years. She understands the holistic benefits of learning, having herself been supported through a great deal of training during her career. She recently completed the Level 5 Diploma in Residential Management. No

funding was previously available for this, so being able to access the Workforce Development Fund to support part of the course was a bonus.

The WDF has also been used to support eight staff towards completing units at Levels 2 and 3. Five members of the Thorndene team are currently undergoing Level 3 training.

“As a company we try to ensure that all staff have at least completed a Level 2 of the qualification. If they then want to progress further onto Level 3 for their own personal development, this funding enables them to do that. It’s surprising how far the fund has stretched to benefit staff right across the business.”

Senior care workers are expected to have at least a Level 3 qualification and the WDF has helped Thorndene to achieve this. A member of staff working in the kitchen has also been supported to complete the Level 2 award in Food Safety, something that wouldn’t have been possible without the fund.

Nicola believes that the nature of the industry incites staff movement between care organisations, leading to inevitable turnover, so it’s essential to train new and existing employees to maintain high standards. There has been a marked improvement in staff retention and also confidence, following the continuous learning programme that is supported by the WDF.

“We are very proactive at Thorndene, so we don’t just cover the mandatory training. The more you do, the higher the standards of

care across the business. As a result of our learning ethos and this additional funding through the WDF, this is the most stable team I’ve had for a while. Reduced staff attrition, coupled with the team acquiring new skills has helped to stabilise and improve the team’s morale.”

One of the biggest successes from accessing the WDF has been for Thorndene to continually improve the standards and quality of care and services across the organisation.

### What was learnt

At Thorndene, the process of applying for and accessing the WDF has run smoothly. There has been a slight delay in accessing the finances, due to waiting for the independent assessors to verify the units. Chasing completed assessment forms from tutors has also contributed towards the wait. Maintaining the NMDS-SC has also been one of the stipulations for accessing the fund, but Nicola has found this to be beneficial in terms of keeping on top of data inputting.

“I will definitely be applying for further WDF funding this year, as the positive impact on the care home has been invaluable. I would definitely recommend other care organisations apply for the WDF as it has really helped our business to move forward with our programme of learning.”

# Skills for Care Recommends

Our website hosts a range of information about the Workforce Development fund and how to access it.

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## Workforce Development Fund

This page gives a general overview of the WDF including what it is, what it can be used for and who is eligible.

[www.skillsforcare.org.uk/wdf](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/wdf)

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## Workforce Development Fund for grant holders

The information on this page is for grant holders who are responsible for the disbursement of the Workforce Development Fund (WDF).

[www.skillsforcare.org.uk/wdfgrantholders](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/wdfgrantholders)

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## Accessing the Workforce Development Fund

The information on this page provides an overview of how you can become eligible for WDF, how to make a claim for it and the terms employers will be bound by when accessing the fund.

[www.skillsforcare.org.uk/accessingWDF](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/accessingWDF)

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