

Being a great individual employer: Jak Savage

Date: November 2019

Introduction

Jak Savage is an individual employer and employs two personal assistants to support her with her everyday care needs. Since becoming an employer just over a year ago, Jak has become more independent and is more involved in her community. She says that being an employer has enabled her to be more positive and focus on what she can achieve, rather than focusing on her condition and needs.

Jak was nominated for the 'Best individual who employs their own care and support' Accolade award in 2019/20. This case study shares some of the things that make her a great individual employer and gives practical tips and ideas to help you to recruit, develop and manage your PAs.

Key learnings

- Recruiting people with the right values is key to finding a great PA – you can teach them skills and knowledge, but you can't teach values.
- Open communication is vital to creating a good working environment where PAs are motivated and enabled to do a great job.
- Developing PAs ensures that they have the skills and knowledge to provide high-quality care and support.

Recruiting personal assistants

Jak has developed a person specification and job description that's based on the values and skills that PAs need to support her in the way that she chooses. It focuses on the ways that PAs can support her to maintain her independence as much as possible, rather than 'doing' things for her.

Jak works closely with Stockton Personalisation Support Service to find suitable PAs. She advertises vacancies on the council's PA Network website, Facebook and Indeed.com.

Jak is keen to explore people's values in the recruitment process. She encourages people to apply even if they don't meet the full criteria, as long as they're willing to learn new skills. She says:

"I may not find Mary Poppins at the outset, but if a candidate is mouldable and willing to broaden their skills and knowledge as they go along, that's more important to me. Potential for nurturing growth is very important to me."

When people apply for the role, Jak likes to have an informal chat before inviting them to interview. This enables them to learn more about the role and think about whether it's right for them.

Jak carries out the interview with her husband and daughter and asks candidates to answer questions based on an everyday scenarios that they might come across.

If a candidate is successful, Jak is supported by the personalisation service to complete the required checks, such as DBS and Right to Work checks.

Inducting new PAs

Jak uses the induction period to ensure that new PAs know about her preferred ways of working and what she expects from them. She gives them a staff handbook that's provided by the council, and personalises it with details about what she likes, needs and wants, how she likes things to be done, what she wants to achieve and about her personality.

During the first few weeks, new PAs complete a training needs analysis to identify their existing skills and knowledge, and any gaps. From this, they write an action plan which outlines what training they need and want to do, and when. It includes mandatory training for the role, such as health and safety and food hygiene, and other training that's specific to Jak's needs.

Jak uses the Care Certificate standards to support new PAs through induction. She uses the free workbook from the Skills for Care website, and allocates one hour of contact time per week to work through it with her PAs. She adapts the standards to the PA role and spends extra time on reflective practice/accounts.

During the induction period, Jak has 'settling in chats' with new PAs to see how they're getting on in the role. If there are any issues, Jak uses 'communication sandwich' techniques to address them i.e. you sandwich the issue as a problem that you can solve together, in between two positive pieces of feedback.

Training for PAs

Jak is committed to developing the skills and knowledge of her PAs. She has a background of working in social care and delivering training, and uses these skills to teach her PAs about reablement, confidence building and solution-focused problem solving.

Jak accesses training that's delivered by the personalisation service around health and safety, fire safety, food hygiene, first aid, safeguarding, information sharing and dignity in care – she ensures that PAs refresh this training every year.

After training, Jak asks her PAs to write a self-reflection about how the training relates to their role and what they're going to do/change to put the learning into practice.

She also offers her PAs the opportunity to do training and qualifications to support their continuing professional development. For example, one of her PAs completed the Level 2 Diploma in Health and Social Care, and is working towards a Level 3 Diploma, and did training on infection control and administering medication. Since completing the qualifications, Jak has seen a big difference in the confidence of her PA, which has improved the quality of care they provide.

Managing PAs

Jak is clear from the outset about what she expects from her PAs – this is documented in her care plan, in the contract of employment and on daily record sheets. This structured way of working supports a positive working environment so that her PAs know what to do, how and when to do it. Jak believes that this is essential to making personalisation work in the home setting.

She supports good communication in her working relationship with her PAs, and encourages them to tell her about any concerns early on, so that they can resolve them together before they become bigger issues. Jak's husband is involved in managing her team of PAs, which gives the team someone else to talk to about any concerns.

Jak does monthly supervisions with her PAs to talk about their performance and set objectives. Before each supervision, she asks her PAs to complete an online survey which asks them to reflect on their role, any concerns and if there's any training that they want to do – they use this to structure the conversation and set aims and SMART objectives for personal development.

About the Accolades awards

The Accolades awards recognises the achievements of individual employers who can show an effective approach to developing their PAs. There's a dedicated category called the 'Best individual who employs their own care and support.'

Entering these awards is a great way to recognise and celebrate the hard work you and your PAs do every day. And if you get through to the final stage, you'll be invited to our celebration event with your PAs – which can really boost their morale and confidence.

Individual employers can nominate themselves or be nominated by someone else such as PAs or someone from a user led organisation.

The nominations usually open in the summer. Sign up to our quarterly newsletter to keep up-to-date at www.skillsforcare.org.uk/IEnewsletter.

More information

Skills for Care has practical resources to help you to employ personal assistants.

Employing personal assistants toolkit

This toolkit guides you through the process of employing PAs, including sections about recruiting, inducting and managing them.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/PAtoolkit

Individual employer funding

Individual employers can apply for funding to pay for training for themselves and their PAs.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/IEfunding