Aligning principles with current practice at New Directions Rugby

New Directions Rugby is a social care provider in Rugby, Warwickshire. It has been offering adult social care, accommodation, and support for over 75 years. The organisation employs over 200 people and supports over 100 vulnerable individuals through residential care homes, supported living services, a respite service, and day opportunities. Chief Executive Officer Paul Tolley attributes the organisation's success to a commitment to sustainable growth and continuous improvement.

This ethos applies across all areas of the business, including recruitment, retention, staff development, progression, and employee satisfaction, which have been strengthened through clear, evidence-based processes and a strong values-based approach.

New Directions Rugby is using the Care Workforce Pathway to support and strengthen some of its established ways of working. Paul and his team use the Pathway as a tool to review and refresh their workforce development activity, making sure everything connects and aligns.

Paul and his team started with a basic initial mapping of each of the role categories in the Pathway against the roles within New Directions Rugby. Where there were differences, they found the best fit for the job titles they use and the expectations of the people employed in those roles. Having completed the role mapping, they will then compare the values, skills, knowledge, and behaviours expected of care workers listed for each role category with New Direction Rugby's existing competency framework, including qualifications and training.

Paul says: "The Care Workforce Pathway provides a clear career structure to review, revise and re-define these competencies, ensuring that they are completely up to date."

With roles and responsibilities clearly set out across the organisation, it makes it simpler to see the training and development needed to encourage and support employees to progress in their career in the way they choose.

By combining some of the Care Workforce Pathway principles within existing initiatives, the organisation has seen improved recruitment, retention, and progression. Some long-term employees have moved from new to care / support worker roles to senior positions, including Operations Manager.

Many staff who received their initial induction and development at New Directions Rugby and left for other opportunities have since returned to continue their careers with the organisation. Staff have also used funding from the Apprenticeship Levy and Learning and Development Support Scheme to complete Level 2, 3 and 5 qualifications.

To help fully embed a learning and development culture, New Directions Rugby faced some key challenges. One was finding a way to measure and better understand how staff feel about their roles and development. To address this, the organisation created an anonymous staff survey. The survey uses the same questions each time to track changes and improvements. Another challenge was around training via e-learning, which made staff feel undervalued and disengaged. New Directions Rugby recruited an in-house Learning and Development Manager who redesigned the induction and training programme, now nearly all training is delivered face-to-face. The survey results show that staff now feel more supported in their learning and are applying their skills and knowledge in practice more confidently.

Paul says, “One of the most rewarding and clear impacts of investing in the training and development of our workforce has been seeing the increased confidence, especially where our support workers have progressed to Team Leader and management roles.”

The organisation is in its healthiest place yet in terms of recruitment and retention. In the four years leading up to April 2024, levels of staff turnover were high and despite recruiting over 180 staff, there was a net gain of just two employees during this period. This ongoing, continuous recruitment is time consuming, costly and impacts continuity of provision. In the 18 months since then, there has been a real cultural shift, resulting in fewer staff leaving and a net gain of 31 staff. Paul believes this is due to better recruitment and retention practices, as well as offering competitive rates of pay.

For other care providers thinking about using the Pathway, Paul recommends starting with the basics. For example, mapping job roles within your own organisation to those on the Care Workforce Pathway, then starting to look at the other resources available to guide you. He’s clear that for him and New Directions Rugby developing the workforce using the Care Workforce Pathway framework is a continuous journey, with a focus on recruitment and retention and making the care professional role as rewarding as it can be.

“We’re really only at the beginning of our journey in terms of using the Pathway to review and refresh what’s working for us. But it’s already helping us strengthen what we do and align with sector-wide standards.”