

Embedding career development at Walnut Care

Walnut Care is a leading domiciliary care provider based in Lincolnshire, established in 2002. With a growing team of more than 140 care professionals, the organisation has seen rapid expansion in recent years and now have over 300 people who draw on their care and support. Alice Weatherley, Learning and Development Lead, returned to the organisation full-time in 2024 and has been using her teaching background alongside her passion and enthusiasm for education and training to help formalise and enhance learning and development.

As an Early Adopter of the Care Workforce Pathway, Alice saw the opportunity to use the Pathway to support and develop the existing training and development offer and to bring greater clarity and structure to career progression.

Walnut Care began by mapping the Pathway role categories against their own job descriptions. Although the organisation had always had clear roles, they hadn't been formally documented. The Pathway provided a framework to define expectations for each role — from new to care through to senior and team leader positions.

To support implementation of the Pathway, Alice and the Walnut Care team undertook a series of initiatives to ensure the resources and approach worked for them. This included adapting the format of the skills assessment and creating a bespoke career passport that showed a visual representation of career routes. As the Learning and Development lead, Alice held one-to-one career conversations with employees, using the Pathway as a reference point. They also developed a workbook aligned with the Level 2 Care Certificate, tailored to domiciliary care, and delivered training both online and face to face, allowing employees to choose their preferred option.

Adopting the Care Workforce Pathway has helped Walnut Care formalise its approach to career development, making progression routes clearer and more accessible. Employees are now recognising care as a long-term career, rather than a temporary job, and many are now working towards, or have expressed an interest in gaining, a qualification.

The benefits of the revised approach to learning and development, and embedding the use of the Pathway, are now being seen. Walnut Care has reported an improvement in staff retention, with fewer care workers leaving the organisation over the summer period than in previous years. Employees have been supported to set out their career aspirations and choose their own pace of learning. Many employees have shared that they now feel more valued, with some saying they could see how their work was also improving as a result. There has also been a positive impact on recruitment, with recent campaigns attracting and recruiting well.

Alice explained that interpreting the resources so they worked for Walnut Care took time, especially as many were geared toward care homes rather than domiciliary care. However, the process of taking Walnut Care's specific circumstances and context and aligning it to the Pathway was invaluable.

"It made us sit down and ask: What makes someone a senior care worker? What should they know and be able to do? It's really shaped how we recruit new people and train our existing care workers."

She advises other organisations to start by reviewing what they already have in place and then mapping that against the Pathway:

"You're probably already doing a lot of it — maybe you just haven't written it down. Think about what you need the workforce to look like and then use the Pathway to help get there."

Walnut Care now plans to use aspects of the Pathway to support its cadet programme for 16–18-year-olds and to enhance the care work experience opportunities that it offers to students in local schools. The organisation sees the Pathway as a tool to promote professionalism and standardisation across the sector, helping care workers see a clear and rewarding career path.

"It's a career framework that is tailored to care. It really helps us when we talk to other organisations as we now know we're speaking the same language."