

Seeing potential

Leeds City Council Step into Care



This series of case studies profiles how locally-based programmes can support people from non-traditional backgrounds into the care profession, from the perspectives of the programme operators, local care employers, and the candidates themselves.

These four case studies profile Leeds City Council's Step into Care Programme, which helped Devon Watson and the Leeds Jewish Welfare Board become an ideal match. In this case study, we hear from HR Manager Szczepan Swiatkowski about how the Step into Care programme revolutionised their recruitment.

Szczepan Swiatkowski

The Leeds Jewish Welfare Board (LJWB) is a charity operating three registered care homes, providing domiciliary care in the community, as well as having a community centre. The LJWB provides support to people living within the local Jewish community, but it is not limited to that – it covers everybody within the local area where they are based, supporting approximately 140 people who need care and support.

Szczepan Swiatkowski, the HR Manager at LJWB finds that, in general, social care roles for their homes are often very difficult to recruit for, given not only the shortage of workers but also the skills needed for the role, and a misconception about what care roles entail. He has found that recruitment can take a lot of time, which includes searching, recruiting, reference checking and onboarding. Szczepan says: “This lengthy process often involves or completely falls to the home managers, who are always very busy leading their teams to deliver care”.



Szczepan outlined that, even once a provider hires a great care worker, they sometimes move on somewhere else quickly, due to the large number of vacancies in the sector at any one time meaning they are in high demand and may not have loyalty to one provider. These issues posed challenges for LJWB as it was difficult to handle such a turnover within the organisation.

Luckily for LJWB and Szczepan, they were approached by Leeds City Council (LCC) who introduced the Step into Care programme, which revolutionised their hiring and alleviated stress and pressure. Not only did Step into Care make things easier for Szczepan, he said it also helped them secure some incredible and loyal colleagues, and “all of them have remained with the organisation long term.”

While the candidate is working through the course, the Step into Care team complete the DBS, employment and right to work checks, and seek out and secure references. Szczepan says that by handling this process, Step into Care takes a huge amount of the work away from the home level staff, whilst still ensuring a thorough process for recruitment and vetting.

Devon's journey to LJWB

Devon was the first person placed at LJWB by the team on the Step into Care programme. He completed the two-week Step into Care placement with LJWB and it has made a huge difference both to the LJWB and to Devon. Szczepan said that by supporting Devon through the programme in every possible way, LCC removed the barriers that might normally prevent him from finding and succeeding in a care role. They also supported Szczepan and LJWB by carrying out much of the administrative work and checking in with both parties to ensure that the placement went well. After Devon became the first successful applicant to the programme, it has since placed four talented people into LJWB's services.



“The Step into Care programme has proven to be an excellent way of recruiting people, especially if the provider has a good relationship with the local authority.”

Another key part of the programme is that candidates' Maths and English capabilities are assessed, and checks are performed to verify any current professional qualifications they hold. Candidates also complete specific care-related modules. Once candidates score over a certain mark, the provider will accept the placement. This gives hiring managers like Szczepan the confidence that the candidates who join from Step into Care will be able to fulfil all requirements. Because of the nature of social care services, and the regular recruitment turnover, LJWB is often in contact with the Step into Care team about candidates who could suit their organisation.

Once candidates have worked in the home for two weeks, they take part in the guaranteed interview. During the final interview process, candidates are aided by another support worker, team leader or the home manager, who can talk them through the process. Szczepan said this is extremely beneficial to candidates such as Devon, because it allows them to build the confidence they need for the interview and gain support with the type of questions that might be asked, giving them the platform to do their best.

For Devon, in particular, LJWB and Szczepan ensured that the home manager, with whom he had a relationship, was involved in the interview, as opposed to an external interviewer, which might have been more difficult for him.

Benefits

Szczepan says: “The Step into Care programme has proven to be an excellent way of recruiting people, especially if you have a good relationship with the local authority”. He spoke about how the onboarding process can be fast and efficient, as once the provider receives a successful candidate they bring them into the organisation quickly, whilst receiving the necessary information along with the checks carried out by LCC.

“Home managers in particular really enjoy the process,” says Szczepan. Initially, there were concerns that the placement may have taken a long time to secure and that it may have used up significant capacity from support workers and colleagues. However, he says: “The team has embraced it - having the candidate trained beforehand and shadowing current staff makes both the candidates and our job much easier”. Where people are willing, providers can place them into a job quickly, and the shadowing experience means they have time to adjust and get used to the amounts of work involved to ensure they are able to meet the challenge.



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The Step into Care programme is still benefitting LJWB and Szczepan says it is now the main way that they hire. It has been utilised throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and has helped them to meet the staffing challenges they face – sourcing talented people who may not otherwise have applied.

Step into Care aims to find people that have the right values to work in care. The values candidates have shown are exactly what LJWB are looking for – ready to learn, and keen to stay and develop.

Top tips for organisations looking to work with a similar programme



Don't hesitate to get involved in a process like this, which provides support for recruitment. Some may think it takes time to provide the details of their requirements, and agree the right candidate, but it's been an uncomplicated process that hugely reduces the burden on managers.



Develop a good relationship with your contact in the programme because not only are they always on hand to provide support, but they can also highlight other opportunities which you can participate in, to further support your recruitment and retention. The more information you provide to your contact about the vacancies you have and about how your home works, the better they can meet your needs.