



## Overview of actions

Speed, structure and support were key to Sheffcare's recruitment success.

### Fast-tracking applications and interviews

**“We don't pay above competitors, so we focus on speed and responsiveness to stand out. That's helped reduce interview no-shows.”**

**Merewyn Scafe**, Director of HR, Sheffcare

- **Rapid candidate engagement** – Applications are reviewed daily and successful candidates are contacted within one working day to reduce dropouts and keep applicants engaged before they accept roles elsewhere.
- **Structured, values-based interviews** – Candidates receive interview questions in advance for transparency. Managers use structured templates and receive training to ensure fair, consistent and values-led decision-making.
- **Efficiency through pre-screening and compliance** – Pre-application questionnaires improve applicant quality, while right-to-work checks, ID verification, and immediate processing of DBS and offer letters minimise delays.
- **Safeguarding and rigorous checks** – Reference verification includes full employment history and safeguarding reviews. Additional evidence (HMRC records, benefit statements) is requested when gaps exist, prioritising compliance and resident safety over speed.



# Providing local opportunities

- **Local placement for stronger connections** – Sheffcare prioritises recruiting staff for homes near to where they live, reducing travel time and costs (key drivers of attrition) while supporting work-life balance, reliability and deeper community ties.
- **Building a sustainable local workforce** – Instead of international visa sponsorship, Sheffcare focuses on recruiting locally to reflect community demographics, strengthen retention and ensure culturally aligned care.
- **Strategic matching by central HR** – The HR team matches applicants to nearby homes based on location and availability, improving new starter satisfaction and reducing reliance on agency staff during onboarding.
- **Community engagement for visibility** – Recruitment is supported through banners outside homes, partnerships with job centres, and attendance at local fairs, promoting vacancies to candidates with care training and fostering community trust.

# Meeting cultural needs

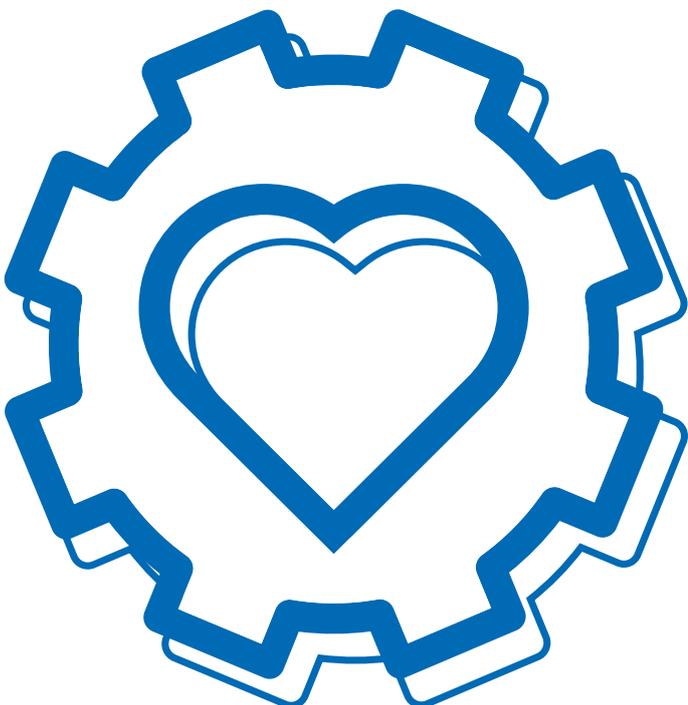
- **Personalised onboarding through the ‘About Me’ form** – This tool invites new starters to share meaningful details about their identity, preferences and needs in a safe, voluntary way. This helps them to feel respected and supported from day one.
- **Capturing practical and cultural insights** – Information such as faith-based practices, dietary restrictions, accessibility requirements and neurodiversity accommodations is shared with managers and teams, enabling tailored support and fostering inclusion.
- **Recognising individual neurodiversity needs** – Some neurodivergent colleagues may not identify as disabled, meaning standard health-declaration forms do not always reflect the tailored support or adjustments they find most effective. The ‘About Me’ form provides a safe, optional space for new starters to share their communication preferences, sensory considerations, working styles or any adjustments that help them to perform at their best.
- **Enabling managers to provide proactive, personalised support** – By sharing the ‘About Me’ forms with line managers, we ensure they have the insight needed to train, support and manage each colleague effectively from day one. This promotes a more inclusive, confident and equitable onboarding experience where individuals feel valued and set up to thrive.
- **Embedding inclusion into everyday practice** – By promoting open dialogue and cultural awareness, the ‘About Me’ form strengthens team cohesion, enhances wellbeing and reflects Sheffcare’s ethos of dignity and person-centred care for both staff and residents.

# Induction

**“We used to lose about 50% of new starters during their probationary period. That’s gone down significantly since introducing centralised induction.”**

**Merewyn Scafe**, Director of HR, Sheffcare

- **Centralised induction for consistency** – A three-day programme delivered before staff start in homes ensures clarity, alignment with organisational values and a structured entry across all nine care homes.
- **Early identity and belonging** – Cross-home cohorts create peer networks that outlast induction, making it easier to share best practice and sustain morale during challenging shifts.
- **Comprehensive and values-led induction content** – Induction covers safeguarding, infection control, dementia care, manual handling and digital systems, and introduces Sheffcare’s core principles of kindness, dignity, respect, independence and choice.
- **Practical guidance and clear protocols** – Staff receive tailored welcome packs and learn about policies, communication standards, and digital systems such as payroll and internal communications.
- **Flexible eLearning and accessibility** – Core compliance modules are funded and can be completed during work, or out-of-hours with additional pay. Session times were shortened and travel reimbursed to improve engagement and accommodate personal needs.
- **Commitment to quality over speed** – Induction scheduling can extend recruitment time lines, but candidates value the thorough preparation, which improves retention, onboarding quality and workforce stability.



# Buddy support

**“The buddy will initially assess your experience before doing any care tasks. I came with no experience, so I just watched everything. It was about learning best practice from someone experienced and developing your own methods.”**

Chloe Wisemam, HR Advisor, Sheffcare

- **Structured buddy system grounded in best practice** – Every new starter is formally allocated a Buddy for at least their first two weeks (longer where needed based on experience). Buddies work the same rota wherever possible, giving new colleagues a consistent point of contact and practical support from their first day.
- **Purposeful, experience-based induction** – The Buddy system complements the formal induction programme by enabling new starters to work alongside a knowledgeable peer. This provides real-time modelling of Sheffcare’s values, policies and high-quality care standards, helping colleagues feel confident and supported in what can be a daunting environment.
- **Carefully selected and trained Buddies** – Buddies are chosen for their experience, interpersonal skills and commitment to resident wellbeing. They act as ambassadors for Sheffcare: welcoming new colleagues, making introductions, guiding them around the home and answering questions about day-to-day practice. For standalone roles (e.g., reception, administration, activities), Buddy periods are arranged in another Sheffcare home.
- **Hands-on, supernumerary guidance** – Working in a supernumerary capacity, Buddies tailor support to the new recruit’s confidence and competence, modelling best practice and ensuring a smooth transition into the role.
- **Voluntary, incentivised participation** – Staff who wish to become Buddies can express interest to their manager. Recognising the value of the role, named Buddies receive an additional 20p per hour for shifts in which they are actively supporting a new starter.
- **Consistent support and cultural integration** – Beyond task-based learning, Buddies help new colleagues understand team dynamics, navigate the home, and feel included and valued. This replaces previous informal arrangements with a standardised, structured approach aligned to CQC Regulation 18: Staffing.

**“The buddy from activities team was spot on. We hit it off immediately, had a laugh, but took it seriously. I got consistent guidance.”**

Ian Wood, Bank Minibus Driver, Sheffcare

## Promoting development opportunities to attract and retain staff

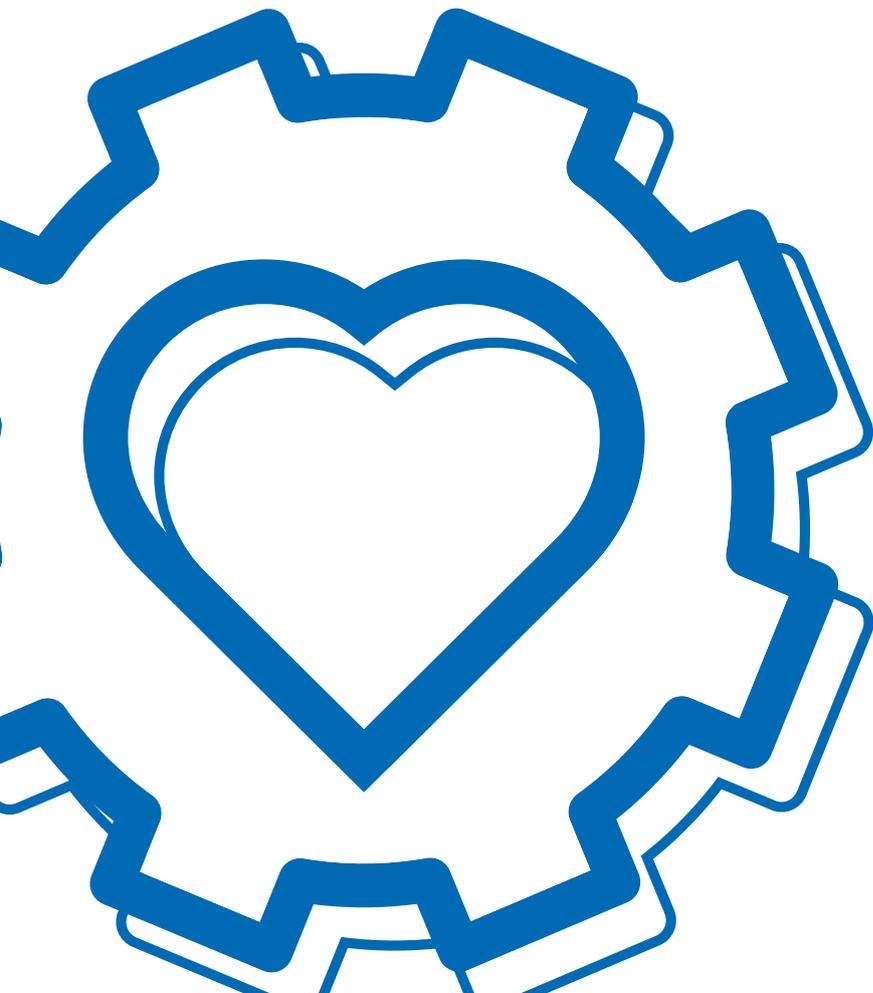
**“We emphasise progression from day one. All our managers started in frontline roles. Sharing those stories and offering diplomas early shows care is a career, not just a job.”**

Amelia Charlesworth-Dakin, HR Marketing Co-ordinator, Sheffcare

- **Embedding career development from day one** – Induction sessions introduce progression routes and share success stories, reinforcing that growth is achievable and valued.
- **Clear and structured career pathways** – Sheffcare promotes internal progression through tailored training, cohort-based programmes, and a strong culture of nurturing talent – evident in eight of nine registered managers progressing from frontline roles.
- **Accessible training and qualifications** – Staff can access mandatory and specialist courses via the training portal, alongside diplomas and external programmes such as Skills for Care’s Aspiring Managers initiative.
- **Acting up development programme for leadership readiness** – Aspiring leaders gain hands-on experience in tasks like fire drills, medication protocols, and rota planning, supported by competency check-lists and formal assessments.
- **Ongoing supervision and recognition** – Regular appraisals, drop-in sessions with senior leaders, and rewards for additional responsibilities (e.g., buddying) reinforce career planning and talent development.
- **Positioning care as a career, not just a job** – Consistent messaging and visible opportunities cultivate ambition, loyalty and purpose, strengthening retention and building a skilled workforce for future challenges.

**“Changing to cohort-based training created momentum. We’ve seen a big increase in people signing up for diplomas and specialist courses. Fourteen people who’ve started diplomas in the last month, and about 30 more interested in dementia, falls prevention or end-of-life care.”**

**Amelia Charlesworth-Dakin, HR Marketing Co-ordinator, Sheffcare**





## Key decisions

- Delivered a centralised three-day induction before staff entered homes, ensuring every new starter received consistent training, clear expectations and essential care knowledge before beginning work.
- Formalised buddy support and promoted internal progression through acting up programmes, giving new staff structured peer guidance while enabling aspiring leaders to develop confidence and supervised management experience.

## Key learning

Structured onboarding and peer support significantly improved retention, confidence and cultural alignment across the organisation.

- **Retention and morale** – A consistent induction and buddy system reduced early attrition and boosted confidence among new starters.
- **Inclusive onboarding** – Personalised support, including cultural and practical needs, strengthened team cohesion and engagement.
- **Career focus** – Visible progression opportunities from induction onward positioned care as a long-term career, improving loyalty and reducing turnover.

