

# Pilot, refinement and embedding



This section outlines how St Monica Trust refined its apprenticeship programme through practical learning, tailored support and cultural integration.

As the programme matured, the Trust shifted from trial to strategy – adapting recruitment, contracts and training to meet operational needs. Support for young apprentices was prioritised through wellbeing resources, clear communication and peer mentoring to build apprentices' confidence.

The Trust also secured buy-in from residents, families and staff. Consistent expectations and collaborative onboarding made it easier for apprentices to transition into work while staff involvement in recruitment fostered ownership and improved outcomes.

By embedding apprenticeships into daily practice, St Monica Trust has created a model that supports young people, strengthens care teams and prepares for future workforce challenges. However, the Trust acknowledges there is still much to learn to help embed this further.

This section is split into the following topics:

- piloting what works
- essential adjustments
- securing the support of people and families
- securing the support of existing staff
- making apprenticeships part of everyday practice
- key decisions and key learning.

# Piloting what works

**“We brought them [apprentices] all on board in one go and started them at the same time... but we came across real challenges... So now we bring people in in pairs, over a four-month period.”**

**Sara Naylor-Wild**, Director of Care, St Monica Trust

- **Iterative design through trial and reflection** – The programme evolved through piloting, feedback and adaptation rather than following a rigid framework, ensuring it is responsive to apprentices’ needs.
- **Lessons from cohort-based recruitment** – Large group onboarding initially aimed to build peer support but sometimes reinforced poor habits and group dynamics, prompting a shift to smaller, more tailored intakes.
- **Refining communication strategies** – Workplace language was simplified using plain text, visual aids and bullet-pointed guides to support apprentices with limited education or neurodiverse needs. These resources were tested and improved through feedback.
- **Evolving mentoring and learning models** – Management-led mentoring gave way to buddy systems and apprentice champions, fostering informal peer support and reducing anxiety. ‘Off-the-job’ learning moved from home-based to onsite delivery for more creative, collaborative skills development.
- **Piloting wellbeing support** – Sensory tools, wellness plans and flexible adjustments for mental health and neurodiversity were introduced and refined helping to make the programme practical and avoiding any stigma.
- **Building a sustainable model** – By scaling successful practices and discarding ineffective ones, the Trust created an inclusive, adaptable apprenticeship programme grounded in continuous learning.



# Essential adjustments

**“The original apprenticeship provider we used wasn’t experienced in engaging a room or delivering training. It was workbook-based and didn’t motivate them [apprentices]. You need blended learning and activities to keep young people engaged.”**

Clare Reeve, Training and Development Manager, St Monica Trust

- **Switching apprenticeship providers** – Moved from a local college requiring off-site sessions to Connect2AdultCare, a national provider offering flexible remote and on-site delivery, improving integration with care home operations.
- **Establishing an informal service-level agreement** – Defined expectations for delivery, communication and learner support, introducing consistent assessor input, streamlined reporting, and a single point of contact for better coordination.
- **Revising classroom learning** – Replaced traditional school-style sessions with practical, interactive approaches focused on real-world scenarios and hands-on activities to boost engagement and motivation.
- **Transforming off-the-job training** – Shifted from remote delivery to workplace-based learning, embedding activities like shadowing, research and cross-unit work to strengthen relevance, accountability and peer support.
- **Embedding continuous improvement** – Adjustments were guided by feedback and operational realities, creating a flexible, inclusive model that is aligned with organisational needs and supports apprentice success.

**“Recruiting and retaining young people isn’t easy. Our approach has evolved through trial and error – early ideas, like letting apprentices complete training from home, simply didn’t work. We had to rethink and bring learning into the workplace to keep engagement high.”**

Stacey Payne, Apprentice and Work Placement Lead, St Monica Trust

# Securing the support of people and families

**“It’s essential you talk to them [apprentices] and they talk to you to build up a relationship. The young people here are part of a team and have a good sense of humour. That’s very important.”**

Patricia, Resident, St Monica Trust

- **Supporting transition to independence** – Many apprentices arrived with strong parental involvement in their education. The Trust helped shift this dynamic by reinforcing personal responsibility for attendance, conduct and communication.
- **Proactive family engagement during onboarding** – Clear communication outlined expectations for professional behaviour and independence, managing parental expectations while empowering apprentices.
- **Providing reassurance and guidance** – Pastoral and operational teams worked with families to explain workplace support systems, building trust and helping parents understand appropriate boundaries.
- **Supporting apprentices to become autonomous** – While some apprentices relied on families for transport or emotional wellbeing, staff consistently reinforced workplace norms and apprentices’ using clear language.
- **Creating a collaborative partnership** – By engaging families respectfully, the Trust turned them into allies, encouraging apprentices to grow in confidence and take responsibility – contributing to improved retention and success.



# Securing the support of existing staff

**“When I first started, I was shadowing and buddied up with co-workers. Now, if I need help or advice on the floor, I know I can go to them for support.”**

**Ruby Hann**, Apprentice Care Assistant, St Monica Trust

- **Early challenges with staff involvement** – Initial placements lacked operational manager input, causing confusion and resistance. Managers felt disconnected and overwhelmed, particularly when apprentices had complex needs.
- **Embedding managers in recruitment** – Involving managers in interview panels gave them insight into candidates’ backgrounds, fostering ownership and confidence in supporting apprentices.
- **Training to effectively support apprentices** – Managers and team leads received safeguarding and youth development training, helping them understand generational differences, communication styles and challenges faced by apprentices.
- **Creating a feedback culture** – Staff were encouraged to share honest feedback, enabling rapid learning and adaptation. Ineffective strategies were replaced and successful ones scaled.
- **Building alignment and resilience** – By valuing staff input and equipping them with tools, the Trust strengthened relationships, improved mentorship and embedded apprenticeships into everyday care delivery. Apprentices arrived with strong parental involvement in their education. The Trust helped shift this dynamic by reinforcing personal responsibility for attendance, conduct and communication.

# Making apprenticeships part of everyday practice

**“We can still bring the same number of apprentices on board, but we just stagger the recruitment across the year – and that’s definitely a better onboarding experience.”**

**Clare Reeve**, Training and Development Manager, St Monica Trust

- **Full integration from day one** – Apprentices were treated as core team members, not temporary additions, ensuring they were embedded into routines and care practices.
- **Staggered intake for smoother onboarding** – Apprentices joined in pairs over several months, with quotas per care home. This allowed staff to provide focused support and helped apprentices build relationships gradually.
- **Reinforcing workplace norms consistently** – Expectations were explained using clear language, and issues were addressed privately and promptly to maintain professionalism without public criticism.
- **Embedding peer support networks** – Buddy systems and apprentice champions offered informal guidance and reassurance, reducing anxiety and fostering belonging.
- **Integrating pastoral and wellbeing care** – Chaplaincy and wellbeing teams worked alongside operational staff, providing emotional support and practical tools like sensory aids and wellness plans as part of everyday life.
- **Creating a culture of value and growth** – By making apprenticeships a natural part of the workplace, the Trust empowered apprentices and engaged staff in shaping the future workforce.



## Key decisions

Here is a summary of the key decisions that made a difference in the rollout of the approach:

- Staggered recruitment replaced large cohort intakes, allowing apprentices to be onboarded in manageable pairs, improving integration, reducing behavioural issues and enabling personalised support from care home teams.
- Managers were included in recruitment panels, giving them insight into apprentice backgrounds and fostering ownership, preparedness and confidence in supporting new starters effectively.
- The Trust switched to a flexible national training provider, enabling remote and on-site learning, aligning better with operational needs, and improving continuity and learner support.
- Workplace expectations were simplified and clarified, using plain language and immediate feedback to help apprentices understand professional norms and build accountability without replicating school-like environments.

## Key learning

St Monica Trust's apprenticeship programme evolved through deliberate piloting and responsive refinement – turning early challenges into opportunities for improvement.

- **Experimentation was essential** – Early planning embraced testing cohort sizes, mentoring formats, and communication styles to find what worked best for younger apprentices.
- **Shift to staggered onboarding** – Large group intakes created disruption, prompting a move to phased recruitment for smoother integration and support.
- **Adapt training delivery** – Off-site, workbook-based models gave way to flexible, workplace-based learning aligned with operational realities.
- **Engage staff early** – Recruitment panels and tailored training fostered staff ownership, empathy and readiness to support apprentices.
- **Simplify communication** – Communications were adapted and tested to suit neurodiverse and care-experienced learners, improving clarity and engagement.
- **Treat pilots as learning opportunities** – Iterative review cycles built a scalable, inclusive model that prioritised culture change alongside process design.

## Recommendations

Access a checklist of practical recommendations inspired by St Monica Trust's approach via Skills for Care's website.