



This section outlines St Monica Trust's approach to retaining young care workers through apprenticeships and tailored support, highlighting strategic intent, risk management and infrastructure changes.

The Trust expanded its apprenticeship programme to build a sustainable workforce, including a greater number of younger workers. Leadership prioritised inclusive recruitment and career pathways for school leavers and care-experienced individuals.

Strategic actions included partnerships with schools and HOPE Virtual School. Risks such as low confidence and neurodiversity were addressed through trauma-informed training, mentoring and flexible onboarding.

Infrastructure was adapted with subsidised transport, staged uniforms and digital tools. Apprentices received consistent trainer support and access to wellbeing resources. Recognition, career progression and inclusive practices helped boost retention and morale.

St Monica Trust's holistic, person-centred approach has positioned it as a leading employer for young people entering adult social care.

This section is split into the following topics:

- attracting young people
- recruiting school leavers
- recruiting children in care
- tailoring recruitment and induction for young people
- tailoring the apprenticeship to young people
- supporting young people, including children in care
- mentor and buddy support
- career pathways and progression
- building a supportive foundation to retain apprentices
- key decisions and key learning.

NB: For providers wanting to establish their own programme, Skills for Care provides information about [how to get started with apprenticeships](#).

# Attracting young people

**“We focused on individuals, not labels. Mixing people with different backgrounds created strong peer relationships and avoided stigmatising those with lived experience of care.”**

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

St Monica Trust has reshaped its recruitment strategy to attract younger candidates, placing a strong emphasis on apprenticeships. Key elements include:

- **Early outreach** – Collaboration with local schools, sixth forms and colleges; attendance at career fairs; and promotion through platforms like the [Find an Apprenticeship](#) website. Staff deliver interactive sessions such as life support training and dementia awareness workshops to raise awareness of careers in care.
- **Improved application process** – This ensures it is accessible, relevant and includes early eligibility checks, improving candidate experience and reducing the administrative burden on providers.
- **Targeted marketing** – Bespoke branding for apprenticeship roles, QR-coded leaflets, and social media campaigns (including plans for TikTok). Facebook has also driven increased referrals from parents.
- **Partnership with Connect2AdultCare** – Joint development of a brochure outlining available qualifications and explaining the apprenticeship journey, helping young people and families understand each stage of the process and ensuring the programme feels consistent, connected and easy to navigate.

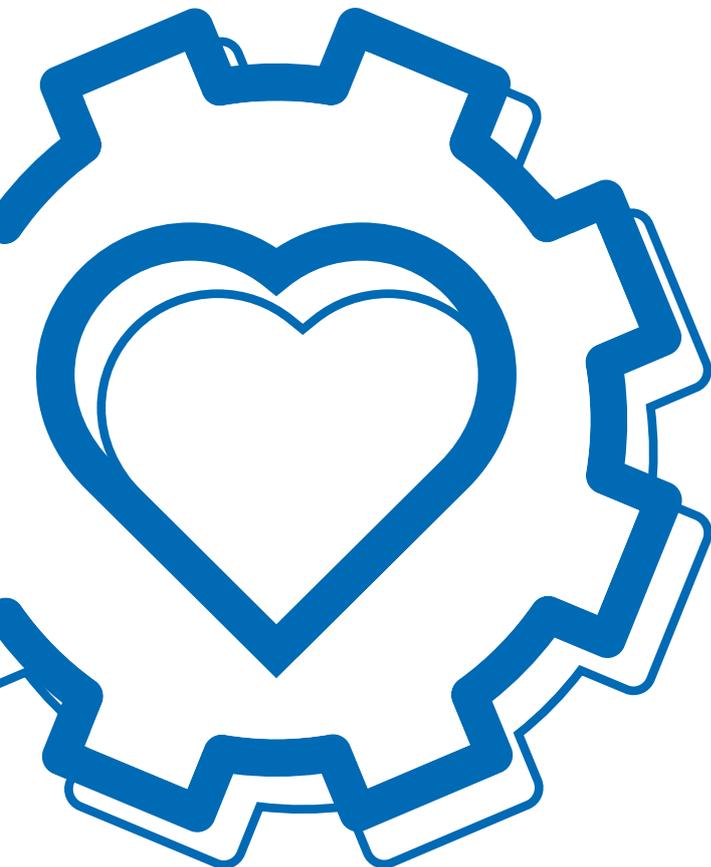
**“I think the young apprentices are very good so long as they’ve got a mature outlook and they question before they join why they want to do caring. If they want to be in the role, then that’s why they’re good.”**

Patricia, Resident, St Monica Trust

- **On-site engagement** – Monthly roadshow events offering apprentices and staff informal opportunities to speak with training leads, explore progression routes and ask questions.
- **Work experience opportunities** – Hands-on placements for students, often leading to longer-term engagement.
- **Community and culture** – Strong local reputation and family-oriented culture, with many apprentices referred by relatives already employed within the organisation.

**“I was looking online at apprenticeships and there weren’t many coming up, but the one at St Monica’s stood out. It seemed to offer the most opportunities for growth, and when I looked into it further – checking their website, reading reviews from family members, and even looking at CQC inspection reports – I felt reassured. It had a strong reputation and felt like a place where I could really develop my skills and build a career.”**

**Leah Brophy, Care Assistant, St Monica Trust**



# Recruiting school leavers

**“We recognised we needed to interact with school leavers and colleges to attract people who hadn’t considered care as a career, especially those with poor educational experiences and limited qualifications.”**

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

St Monica Trust’s apprenticeship programme has evolved from upskilling existing staff to attracting younger external candidates, supporting a sustainable talent pipeline and inclusive hiring. Key aspects include:

- **Strategic shift** – Focus on recruiting younger people entering the workforce for the first time, rather than upskilling existing staff. This reduces reliance on agency staff and aligns with the Trust’s charitable mission.
- **Myth-busting communications** – Open, upfront messaging challenges misconceptions about care careers and apprenticeships, addressing concerns about progression, pay and college requirements.
- **Supporting school-to-work transition** – Clear, accessible communication (including visual aids and bullet lists) explains workplace expectations such as punctuality and professionalism. Staff create safe, supportive environments, balancing nurture with accountability.
- **Life skills development** – Practical support for transport, schedule management, and reliability helps apprentices adapt to workplace demands, recognising gaps in confidence or role models.
- **Holistic approach** – Emphasis on personal growth alongside job training, building resilience and professionalism as key components of success in care roles.
- **Smaller, staggered cohorts** – Shift from large groups to four cohorts of six per year at each care home, creating calmer, more focused learning environments that improve outcomes and confidence.

# Recruiting children in care

**“We were really focused on a population of kids that appeared to have struggles with education, and then dealing with those as individuals.”**

**David Williams**, Chief Executive Officer, St Monica Trust

While many needs of care-experienced young people mirror those of all young people, the Trust has made specific adjustments to create a person-centred approach for recruiting them into adult social care roles. Key elements include:

- **Inclusive ethos** – Avoids labels such as ‘looked-after’ or ‘disadvantaged’, focusing instead on individuals who have faced barriers in education or employment. Each apprentice is treated with dignity and supported according to their unique needs.
- **Partnership with HOPE Virtual School** – Collaboration with Bristol’s local authority network to advocate for children in care and support educational achievement. This evolved from informal support for one apprentice into a structured referral process, with social workers sharing candidate backgrounds and support needs for tailored onboarding.
- **Early career conversations** – Engagement begins in Years 10 and 11, with health and social care often identified as a preferred pathway. HOPE Virtual School assesses readiness and works with the Trust to identify barriers and plan appropriate support.
- **Practical adjustments** – Measures to reduce anxiety and build confidence, including informal site visits before interviews, flexible start dates and personalised induction plans.
- **Continuity of support** – Close collaboration with social workers and educators to maintain consistent guidance throughout recruitment and workplace transition, ensuring apprentices feel safe, understood and empowered.
- **Cultural shift** – St Monica Trust is now recognised as a trusted employer for children in care, thanks to its willingness to engage early, listen and adapt processes, setting a model for inclusive recruitment.
- **Inclusive approach for children in care** – Children in care are integrated into wider cohorts of young apprentices rather than grouped separately. This approach is preferred as larger, standalone groups of children in care have proven challenging, and integration supports a more positive experience. Numbers vary depending on individual circumstances.

**“Any young person that makes reference to care – St Monica’s is at the forefront of our and social care’s minds to get in touch and see if there might be opportunities available.”**

Hattie Taylor, Senior Education Advocate, HOPE Virtual School

## Tailoring recruitment and induction for young people

The Trust has developed a tailored and inclusive recruitment and induction strategy for apprenticeships, designed to support young people with limited qualifications or formal experience. Key elements include:

- **Values-based interviews** – Unlike competency-based approaches used for other roles, apprentice interviews focus on personal qualities such as motivation, empathy and the desire to care for others, rather than technical skills or job history.
- **Simplified, supportive questions** – Interview questions use clear language and relatable scenarios to explore attributes like resilience, teamwork, willingness to learn and adaptability, helping candidates feel confident and understood.
- **Pre-interview support** – Candidates receive help with applications, interview preparation and sourcing appropriate clothing, sometimes in collaboration with the HOPE Virtual School. Tours of care homes are also offered to familiarise candidates with the environment.
- **Rapid, person-centred process** – The interview experience is informal and responsive. When a promising candidate is identified, the Trust acts quickly to build rapport and avoid delays, reinforcing its commitment to inclusive and supportive hiring.
- **Focus on ethos and potential** – By prioritising values and attitudes over past experience, the Trust identifies individuals who align with its caring ethos and show promise for growth, strengthening both candidate engagement and organisational culture.
- **Two-phase induction** – Initial sessions led by the training provider introduce learners to their trainer, digital tools, and conduct English and maths assessments via Basic Key Skills Builder, alongside screenings for dyslexia and dyscalculia. A separate work-based induction helps apprentices integrate into their team and understand day-to-day expectations.
- **Clear communication** – Learners and their parents or guardians receive a detailed handbook outlining programme structure and expectations. Parental engagement is encouraged to strengthen support networks.
- **Peer integration** – New starters are inducted alongside regular staff but often paired with peers to ease the transition and promote inclusion.
- **Dedicated point of contact** – Each apprentice is assigned a named contact from day one, ensuring consistent guidance and communication.
- **Tailored support** – The Trust works closely with training providers to adapt communication methods and respond to individual needs, reducing anxiety and fostering confidence.

“We give our new recruits the right IT resources... we pay for their ID checks, recruitment costs, travel time, and supernumerary time so they can learn off the job.”

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

## Tailoring the apprenticeship to young people

“Going into the working world is quite a big change for them. Our trainers are very aware of that. We’ve actually got a couple of trainers that will purely go to Saint Monica’s... they know their brand and expectations.”

Gena Hennessy, Area Manager, Connect2AdultCare

The Trust provides tailored support to help apprentices adapt to workplace expectations and succeed in their roles. Key elements include:

- **Clearly communicating expectations** – Operational managers break down workplace norms such as punctuality, professional language and boundaries into simple, relatable terms to reduce anxiety and improve understanding.
- **Structured apprenticeship agreement** – A formal framework sets out a 15-month practical training period, including 20% off-the-job learning, ensuring apprentices gain the skills, knowledge and behaviours needed for competence.
- **Professional conduct guidance** – Apprentices are informed about attendance requirements, punctuality and communication protocols for sickness or lateness, following the Trust’s Sickness Absence Policy and Procedures.
- **Dedicated training support** – The training and development team provides tailored guidance, regular check-ins and simplified learning materials. Training is delivered in bite-sized chunks, prioritising practical observations over written tasks. Each apprentice is supported by the same trainer throughout their journey to build trust and rapport.
- **Empathetic and accessible environment** – Staff use clear language and address behavioural issues privately to avoid stigma. Optional wellbeing resources such as sensory tools, wellness action plans and flexible adjustments support mental health and neurodiverse needs.

- **Peer support network** – Apprentice champions (experienced apprentices) guide new starters, reducing anxiety and fostering belonging. Staff training in safeguarding and youth development helps bridge generational gaps and promote inclusion.
- **Focus on confidence and resilience** – By tailoring support to the realities of young people’s lives, the Trust helps apprentices build independence and resilience, improving retention and preparing them for the demands of adult social care.
- **Clear expectations and honest insights** – From the start, learners understand the goal of achieving their End Point Assessment (EPA). Trainers share real-world experiences to normalise challenges and reassure apprentices that support is available.

**“If they prefer more Zoom, we’ll do more Zoom. If they prefer more face to face, that’s what we’ll do. We might do their learning in bite-size chunks... we may also do more observations than heavy knowledge work to start with.”**

**Gena Hennessy**, Area Manager, Connect2AdultCare

## Supporting young people, including children in care

The Trust provides ongoing support to ensure apprentices thrive in the workplace. Key elements include:

- **Manager training** – Delivered by a local college, sessions focus on safeguarding, resilience-building and managing difficult conversations to equip staff for supporting young people with mental health challenges or neurodiverse needs.
- **Wellbeing and pastoral support** – Apprentices access occupational health, an employee assistance programme, and pastoral check-ins from chaplaincy staff to build trust and resilience. ‘Social deputy’ roles in care homes provide everyday guidance and mentoring, strengthening links between frontline teams and the apprenticeship programme.
- **Structured progress reviews** – Every 12 weeks, learners, trainers and line managers meet to review development, address concerns and ensure apprentices feel heard and valued.
- **Informal mentoring** – Staff across departments provide reassurance, honest feedback and motivation, helping apprentices build confidence and resilience.
- **Tailored communication** – Language is clear and jargon-free avoided and expectations framed as clear ‘do’s and don’ts’. For neurodiverse learners, tasks may be broken into smaller steps over several days.
- **Practical tools and adjustments** – Sensory boxes, wellness action plans and reasonable adjustments (e.g., finding quiet spaces) support psychological safety and inclusion.
- **Respectful disclosure approach** – Apprentices are never required to disclose diagnoses but are encouraged to share if comfortable, with staff explaining how disclosure can lead to better support.

- **Ongoing staff awareness** – Training and informal discussions help colleagues recognise and respond to neurodiversity with empathy, reducing stigma and embedding inclusive practices.
- **Signposting to resources** – Apprentices are directed to information on employment rights, working conditions and mental health to support their independence.
- **Employee assistance programme** – Available 24/7 to all staff, this offers confidential support for emotional, legal and health-related concerns.

**“Lots of young people leave the care system at 18 – it’s a really tricky time for them. A lot of that support and important people in their life kind of drop off.”**

**Hattie Taylor**, Senior Education Advocate, HOPE Virtual School

Whilst all of the above were relevant to wider cohort, further targeted support was sometimes needed for children in care joining the organisation.

- **Flexible shift patterns** – Reasonable adjustments, such as later start times, were occasionally introduced to support individual wellbeing and prevent drop-out, though flexibility was not always possible for all apprentices.
- **Collaborative support network** – Open communication with carers, social workers, and HOPE Virtual School advocates helps anticipate challenges and respond proactively.
- **Participation in PEP meetings** – Staff attend PEP meetings three times a year to review progress and agree next steps, ensuring joined-up support.
- **Trauma and attachment training** – Delivered via the virtual school to help staff build empathy and respond effectively to complex behaviours.
- **Consistent points of contact** – Each apprentice is assigned a key contact within the care home (often a deputy manager) and is supported by a stable, familiar group of people both inside the organisation and among external partners, ensuring they interact with the same trusted individuals over time. This continuity helps them feel secure and supported during transitions.

**“We learned from our first cohort that mental health and life challenges outside work put pressure on individuals. We had to adapt our approach to support them better.”**

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

**“We let them know that life does get in the way... we are here to support them with that as well.”**

**Gena Hennessy**, Area Manager, Connect2AdultCare

## Mentor and buddy support

**“I shadowed a senior staff member for about two months. She gave me regular feedback and helped me feel confident. We also had supervision every few weeks to check in and give feedback both ways. I always felt I could ask questions, even after being signed off. They supported me and reassured me that no question was stupid, which helped me build confidence.”**

**Leah Brophy**, Care Assistant, St Monica Trust

St Monica Trust uses mentoring and buddy systems to help younger workers integrate successfully. Key elements include:

- **Department-wide mentoring** – Staff in operational, training and administrative roles foster a culture of guidance and support, ensuring apprentices feel included and valued.
- **Non-hierarchical approach** – Apprentices are paired with colleagues outside management roles to reduce fear of judgment and encourage open, honest communication.
- **Ongoing, informal support** – Regular check-ins tailored to individual needs focus on job performance and personal wellbeing, helping identify issues early and maintain engagement.
- **Buddy system for daily integration** – Buddies help apprentices navigate routines, model professional behaviours and reinforce workplace culture –especially important in care environments where observation is key.
- **Flexible support** – Guidance is adapted to individual learning styles, emotional needs and communication preferences.

# Career pathways and progression

**“The young people they recruit are very good because they’ve got the right mindset. They’ve decided that they’re going to make a career out of this.”**

Sylvia, Resident, St Monica Trust

One of the most impactful outcomes of the apprenticeship programme at St Monica Trust is the creation of clear, inspiring career pathways for younger workers. Key elements include:

- **Visible progression routes** – Apprentices are shown from the outset what their future could look like within the organisation and across the wider care sector, helping them see their initial role as a stepping stone.
- **Internal development opportunities** – The Trust offers apprenticeships at multiple levels and supports transitions into clinical and non-clinical roles, including pathways to senior carer, house lead and management positions.
- **Career information, advice and guidance** – Trainers provide mid-point career sessions with tailored advice on qualifications, progression routes and transferable skills.
- **Exposure to aspirational careers and higher education** – Apprentices with ambitions to become nurses, paramedics or other health professionals gain relevant experience, such as shadowing on-site social care nurses. For those aiming to progress further, staff actively support transitions into university-level nursing programmes and other advanced qualifications.
- **Building ambition and confidence** – Success stories are shared to make opportunities visible, especially for apprentices who may not have seen long-term career planning modelled before.

**“When you invest in people from the start, they repay you with commitment and longevity. You can’t replicate that by hiring from the market alone.”**

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

“I’m currently exploring two paths – either pursuing another apprenticeship in childcare, which really interests me, or continuing to grow in my current role as a carer. I genuinely enjoy the work I do and the environment I’m in, so staying on and progressing here feels like a strong option. I’m working towards my Level 2 qualification now, and I’m already thinking ahead to Level 3, maybe even Level 4. My goal is to keep building my skills and gaining as many qualifications as I can, ideally within this company, because I truly value being part of it.”

Caitlin-Mae Toogood, Apprentice, St Monica Trust

## Building a supportive foundation to retain apprentices

St Monica Trust has identified several key motivators for young people entering the care sector. Key elements include:

- **Competitive pay** – Apprentices earn £10.87 per hour, above the national apprenticeship minimum of £7.55, with plans to increase again in April 2026.
- **Flexible contracts** – Apprenticeships are structured as 30-hour contracts, supporting work-life balance and reducing stress.
- **Transport support** – A subsidised taxi scheme helps apprentices in rural areas or without vehicles travel reliably to early shifts, reducing absenteeism and reinforcing that their success matters.
- **Financial assistance for care leavers** – The Care Leavers’ Apprenticeship Bursary provides £3,000 in instalments during the first year, helping care-experienced apprentices stay engaged and motivated.
- **Uniform progression** – Apprentices start in green polo shirts and transition to formal tunics after completing their care certificate, celebrating achievement and reinforcing belonging.
- **Recognition initiatives** – ‘Learner of the Month’ awards offer public recognition and small rewards, boosting morale and pride in progress.
- **Peer support networks** – Social groups and shared experiences create a sense of community, reducing isolation and strengthening engagement.



## Key decisions

Here is a summary of the key decisions that made a difference around recruiting, developing and retaining the younger workforce:

- Redesigned recruitment to focus on values over experience, helping young applicants feel seen and supported regardless of qualifications or background.
- Introduced supernumerary roles for new apprentices, allowing them to learn without pressure and build confidence before being counted in staffing numbers.
- Adapted shift patterns and transport support, including subsidised taxis, to ensure apprentices could reliably attend work and feel valued.
- Delivered trauma-informed training to managers and staff, improving empathy and responses to emotional and behavioural challenges among young apprentices.
- Created staged onboarding and uniform systems, reinforcing progress and belonging while celebrating milestones with residents and staff.
- Embedded mentoring and buddy systems, offering informal, peer-led support that built trust and reduced anxiety for new starters.
- Provided flexible learning formats, including bite-sized training, personalised communication, and consistent trainer relationships to suit diverse learning needs.
- Celebrated achievements and career progression, using recognition schemes and visible pathways to motivate apprentices and encourage long-term commitment.





## Key learning

**“We don’t want to give the impression we’ve got everything right. This is a journey, and in some areas we still struggle to provide the support apprentices need.”**

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

St Monica Trust shaped its apprenticeship workforce planning around a deep understanding of young people’s needs and the realities of care work.

Key elements include:

- **Inclusive recruitment** – Values-based interviews and tailored outreach to schools and care networks ensure opportunities are accessible and appealing to young people.
- **Staggered cohort sizes** – Smaller, phased intakes prevent learners from feeling overwhelmed and allow for more personalised support.
- **Supernumerary roles** – Apprentices start in roles that ease the transition into care work, reducing pressure and building confidence.
- **Built-in infrastructure adaptations** – Subsidised transport and staged uniforms were integrated from the outset, not added later, to remove practical barriers and reinforce belonging.
- **Staff training in trauma-informed practice** – Teams were equipped early to support apprentices with complex needs, prioritising emotional resilience and youth development.
- **Embedded mentoring and buddy systems** – Introduced from the start to build confidence, trust and retention among apprentices.

## Recommendations

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