



The care exchange - Series 1 Episode 1: Bring your whole self to work: Oonagh Smyth

Hosts: Pia Rathje-Burton and Ali Rusbridge

Pia Rathje-Burton 00:07

Hello, welcome to the care exchange the Skills for Care podcast for managers in social care.

Ali Rusbridge 00:13

In the care exchange podcast series, we'll be talking to leaders and managers who work in adult social care. It's an opportunity to hear about their experiences and the tips and learning and knowledge that they want to share with other managers.

Pia Rathje-Burton 00:26

So the reason we decided to create a podcast was that we really wanted to celebrate the role of managers in social care. And we also wanted somewhere where managers could listen to other managers feel less isolated, and pick up some good ideas. The care exchange conversation will be a monthly podcast. So if you are a manager in social care, this is the podcast for you.

Ali Rusbridge 00:46

But before we start our first episode, we thought we should do a quick overview about Skills for Care. Skills for Care is mainly funded by the Department of Health and Social Care and we support the adult social care sector around workforce issues. So in other words, you and your staff, and the resources and support we provide a focus in three main areas, which are about recruiting staff, developing staff and leading your staff, which is obviously really, really important from the registered managers perspective.

Pia Rathje-Burton 01:13

So my name is Pia Rathje-Burton, I work as a locality manager for Skills for Care. The role as a locality manager is to be the face of Skills for Care in an area in my area is Kent and Medway. Before I joined Skills for Care, I was a registered manager for 15 years.

Ali Rusbridge 01:28

And I'm Ali Rusbridge I'm also locality manager and my area is north east London, somewhere I've lived and worked in a range of learning and development roles for far too long to mention. But we are your care exchange hosts.

Pia Rathje-Burton 01:38

Usually we'll be talking to a manager of a social care establishment, so a care home or home care service or supported living service. But a day or first episode is a bit different.

Ali Rusbridge 01:48

Because today we'll be joined by our boss, Oonagh Smyth, the CEO of Skills for Care.

Pia Rathje-Burton 01:54

So first podcast and our boss no pressure.

Ali Rusbridge 01:57

No pressure, Oonagh has been the CEO of Skills for Care since March 2020. Joining us just a couple of weeks before the first lockdown earlier this year.

Pia Rathje-Burton 02:06

So onto the show. So, thank you very much for joining the care exchange podcast Oonagh. Really, really nice to see you today. Are you ok?

Oonagh Smyth 02:23

Yes, I'm good. I'm good. I'm delighted to join you.

Pia Rathje-Burton 02:26

Excellent. So really, really nice to have you here on our first care exchange podcast. So can you tell me a little bit about your role at the moment?

Oonagh Smyth 02:35

Yeah, so I'm the CEO of Skills for Care. And I've been the CEO for about six months now, which feels quite shocking that it's been that long. And so the rule is everything you'd expect from a CEO a combination of internal and external. So trying to build relationships, get an understanding of the organization, as well as doing a lot of external work. Talking about the work that we're doing in the sector, sharing some of that intelligence and supporting employers.

Pia Rathje-Burton 03:15

Yeah. And how do you become a CEO? Have you been a CEO before? How do you become a CEO?

Oonagh Smyth 03:21

No. So my last role I was eight years in Mencap as a as an executive director in Mencap and so that my role was mostly strategy, governance, policy, employment deliveries, or whole a whole combination of things. And so it was probably the natural next step for me, because it was one step up to move into the to the CEO, but I also led the mencap executive when we didn't have a CEO when we were in between CEOs. And so that was a really good experience, I think, to get a sense of, of leadership. And prior to that my roles have always really been around equality, policy, and, and governance and strategy. And those combination, it's probably quite rare to have that combination of the internal and the external, before you're a CEO. And so that feels like it was a I was just quite lucky to start in that in that field and work quite a lot with boards already. And so moving into the CEO role, probably felt a bit more natural to me, maybe then if I had just been externally focused, or just internally focused. So having both of that combination, I found it really helpful, I think,

Pia Rathje-Burton 04:37

Yeah, how lucky and lucky to be able to kind of try it for a bit as well. Yeah. If you liked it.

Oonagh Smyth 04:46

Yeah. And I'd almost you know, the thing that I always find quite interesting is you how much the role the title means, and sometimes you have to, you have to remember, this isn't about me, this is about the titles so when when people sometimes get a little, they're aware of you being the CEO when they might, they might not be as comfortable. And so, you know, sometimes you have to remind yourself that's not about me this is about it's because of the role and, and that does come with it with experience. I remember meeting somebody in the in Mencap when I was making a cup of tea, and we were talking quite naturally, until she found out my role. And then, and then she said, Oh, no, I'm so I'm so embarrassed. I didn't know that you were a director. And you know that, I hope that the, you know, the style that I have is quite accessible, and that anybody can can talk to me. But sometimes you need to remind yourself that you sometimes have to try a little bit harder to make that clear to people, I think.

Pia Rathje-Burton 05:47

Yeah, it's about making you human. And I think, yeah, when I was a registered manager, I had a fairly large home. And you could sometimes feel that people did have those reservations, if you're kind of just having a kind of a water cooler moment where you're just chatting about, you know, something that was happening on TV the night before, you know, something's one on one children or something, you can see that people kind of going, oh, what we're having a conversation a little bit. And it's just about kind of remembering, actually, this is not about me as a person. It's about the role, that's a really, really good point. So in terms of Skills for Care, so obviously, you'll be with us for for just over six months, I'm sure you've noticed there's a real focus on supporting registered managers, why do you think that we have that?

Oonagh Smyth 06:33

I think that it's probably a combination of a few things. So for me, the registered manager posts, and this is this is something that I would have said in Mencap when I was working in a provider as well, the registered manager post is absolutely key in social care, and sometimes not recognized to be so as important as it actually is. And so I think this is about providing the support the registered managers need, but also filling a gap maybe. So when I look at the registered manager posts, that combination of the inside, the outside your team, the quality of service, having to understand and bring together all of those different skills, business skills, people skills, thinking about the individuals that you that you support, and when when you take a step back, and you look at even our stats and our data that comes from the adult social care workforce data set, one of the things that we know is the link between quality and registered managers and so if you've got a registered manager who's skilled who's happy in role, and you know, that has a massive impact, then on quality and on their teams, and so it feels like that combination of a being such a key role, but also a role that can feel quite lonely at times, it seems like the what we can provide is the combination of practical advice and support, but also, particularly during COVID, that peer to peer support. And so our ability to facilitate that to facilitate the networks feels like it's really key for registered managers, and all of the registered managers that I've spoken to, I think I'm attending a network this week, actually, and I've attended other ones. And they're the feedback is very much we sometimes need that peer support for practical reasons to say, you know, does anybody have a risk assessment on this particular on this particular issue? Because I'm going to draft one and you know, it reduces their time. But equally, sometimes, it's just I've had a bad day, and having other people coming in saying, you know, it's okay. And we all have bad days, and you're doing a great job. So that that combination of practical and emotional support feels just really, really important to me. And if we didn't do it, I think some it would happen in pockets, but I don't think it would happen to the degree that it does.

Ali Rusbridge 08:52

So you know, can I just say Oonagh you're saying that our role in Skills for Care really, is to facilitate that peer support to be able to bring managers together very much.

Oonagh Smyth 09:01

Yeah, I think it is, I think that's the that's the role of the registered manager networks in, in bringing together registered managers who can support each other, and also to signpost them to things that we're, we're doing. So I think it's two way for me. So some of the during COVID being one example, we heard registered managers talking about things that they would value from us. So some practical webinars around how do we support BM colleagues who are higher risk of of being adversely affected by COVID? And how do we how do we do that? What are the types of things that we need to think about? And so listening to those networks, we were then able to say, well, maybe we need something a little different here in terms of support, and

we ran some webinars. So I think it's two ways. I think we can facilitate the networks but also, it gives us really useful insight into the support that we need to be providing as well. Yeah,

Pia Rathje-Burton 09:58

Yeah. I agree, I agree is about having those conversations with managers about what's important to you, and what can we do to support you? In terms of kind of at the register manager role, and as you know, I was a registered manager for many years. How, why do you think it's important that registered managers develop themselves? I know from experience, it was something that often kind of came to the bottom of the list my staff or it were kind of the my key focus in terms of learning and development, why do you think is important that register managers develop themselves?

Oonagh Smyth 10:30

I mean, I think it's always important to develop ourselves in general. So even for any any role, I but I think, particularly for managers, and particularly when you've got all of that combination of rules that you have to do, and you have to have that insight into so many areas of soft skills and business skills. And it feels to me, I always think as I've moved up through organizations, if you don't understand yourself, in any of those situations, you can't understand what's happening, because you don't know what you're bringing. And so all of us will have areas that we need to be focusing on. So I think it's important to look across the role of the registered manager and say, there's no way I'm going to be naturally good at all of that, it's not possible, because none of us are and so what are the areas that I need to focus on in terms of continuous improvement, but I also think there's an element of setting like culture, if you want your teams to think about their own learning and development, if you want your teams to, to value that continuous improvement, and that reflection, where you're able to say, you know, I didn't do that very well but that's okay. Because this is what I'm going to do. So it's as much about developing yourself, but it's also about building the culture, of that development in the teams as well and in the organization. And the first step for that, for me, in that is, is about reflection, and some of it might be technical skills. So it might be finance skills, for example, that you think I probably need to build a bit more of those. But quite a lot of that I think is about you as a person and you as a manager, and you as a leader and trying to do that consciously. While it seems like another task and I think that sometimes can be right, when you're when you're overwhelmed, seems like another task, but it equally frees up time in the longer term, because you're able to better develop your team. And the more you can develop your team, then the less you have to go in to try to fix things last minute or? Or the last you have to, you know, there's none of that more reactive time, I suppose. So I think it does pay off in the long term, but it's about you being really focused and not trying to do everything at once. And, and also, you know, listening, or understanding if you have a big inner critic as well. So one of the things in my coaching that I've become very aware of is some people are just really hard on themselves and think, Well, you know, I can't do that very well. Oh, that's awful, I should be

able to do that. And actually, sometimes it's about having a bit of patience with yourself and saying it's okay, not to know. But to try to move on to that. Yeah.

Ali Rusbridge 13:08

It sounds to me like you're describing the registered managers role as involving so many different skills and knowledge, and there's quite a complex role. Do you feel it's a really difficult role for people to do?

Oonagh Smyth 13:21

Yeah, I think it is. And that's the, you know, that the point I was making around it develop, it does require a whole breadth of skills, some of which are quite technical and a lot of which are people skills and a lot of experience and you're, you're going from the real detail into the big picture into the very human, then you're trying to do that really quickly, within I don't know, a space of half an hour. So I think it is a really complex role. There's a lot of requirements from a regulatory perspective, we know the importance of, of well-led in terms of or in terms of CQC and what that actually means, but the, you know, the breadth of that is significant, I think. Yeah,

Pia Rathje-Burton 14:03

I agree. It, it is and it's really important that, that managers kind of use all the avenues they are to, to develop themselves. It doesn't just have to be formal qualifications. It could be you know, attending a conference, it could be listening to something and then afterwards reflecting saying, well, actually, how does that impact on the work I do on my role and my skills and abilities to do to do that role? and, and really using all the things you know that they are, there's so much available for the sector, but I think sometimes it's about picking the things that's going to really impact on your role will be would be kind of a thing to for managers to think about. You mentioned coaching, so you are a coach, tell us a little bit more about what what being a coach is all about.

Oonagh Smyth 14:52

So yes, I'm a I'm a qualified coach, and one of the reasons I got that qualification or went through the process because it was much more than a qualification. The qualification was almost at the end, it was such a learning process. But it was so that I could think about how to you sit alongside people in their development and in you know, in their own sense of who they are in the in the workplace. And I wanted to build some of those skills, and I didn't really realize I was going to love it so much the coaching the external coaching, so I keep two coaches at any one time. And I do that pro bono one I'll generally coach women in the charity sector who wanted to develop. So that's the sort of niches that I've developed. And I think it is about, it's about helping people within their own context, get insights into their own development. So it's never about giving people the answers or being very direct of some coaching is that's not my style. My style is much more relational. So how do you, you start from a position where people

know what they need, and this is providing a bit of a safe space and a conversation to help them move on and wherever they want to go in their career.

Pia Rathje-Burton 16:07

So do you think it's something that register managers should look at, you know, as a way of developing themselves or the other to receive coaching or to become a coach?

Oonagh Smyth 16:16

I mean, I think it's as it gets fantastic, I think it would be one of the things I would recommend to him, I don't think any anybody would not appreciate it or get some value from coaching, obviously, you need to pick up the coach and make sure that they're there, you can establish a relationship with them. But that ability to cut through almost the context to think, or what is it that I want? What are the barriers? What's that saying about me, it's not always an easy process coaching shouldn't really feel easy, because it should pursue slightly beyond the the area that you're comfortable. But I think it should definitely be something that people consider. Mostly, I would say, where they feel like they keep coming up against the same issues, or the same, relational issues, for example, and things that they just think I'm seeing this repeat and repeat and repeat. And there's something here that I need to understand. And and they could also consider a mentor, which is a slightly different offering, I suppose, or a slightly different relationship, which is much more learning from somebody else's career, I think.

Pia Rathje-Burton 17:26

Yeah. So do you think that it's something that so rather than kind of having a coach all the time, it's not the kind of as this kind of person on their shoulder to support them? It's more about, you know, looking at what are the things that I'm so you say, a barrier or something I'm struggling with, and then approaching a coach? And kind of then working on those issues? Is that how you?

Oonagh Smyth 17:49

Yeah, I think I think your point earlier around, really understanding the elements of your role, and thinking about where do I need development, and some of that might be knowledge based, but some of it might be actually this, there's something that I'm bringing to this, that I need to understand more about myself and who I am in work. So if it's things like I don't know, maybe I don't have confidence, I don't speak out at meetings, or I find it difficult to have difficult conversations with my team, that might be another one. Or I want to develop, but I keep getting passed up for promotions. So things that you think there must be something here, but I don't really know what it is, or, and I want to find out more, they're the types of things that I think are really useful to have a coach for, I don't think it's always helpful to have a coach forever. Because it feels like it should be something that's quite focused on, on something you particularly want to talk about. And then you need to do some improvement yourself, take some time out and work on that. And then you might pick up coaching, coaching again, but it is

more of those deeper things, I would say that, that you might need some support to think through.

Pia Rathje-Burton 19:06

Yeah, it's a really interesting one to think about in terms of, you know, the manager role and it's perhaps not something that register managers historically would have thought about something there was a way for them to, to develop themselves. So as you're kind of working with you within skills care for the last six months, we're really noticed that you clearly like to read a lot to keep yourself updated. Why do you think that? Why do you do that? And I think the second part of that question is do you think managers should really kind of do that as well keep them self up to date.

Oonagh Smyth 19:43

So anybody who knows me well will always say that I'm a big reader. It's something that I've always done. Even as a kid I would have inhaled books in Sweet Valley High, I loved Enid Blyton and so that even I do it my in my leisure time, and so it's a it's a really key way that I take in information. And so I like to read, I like to change my thinking, I like to read things that make me think I wouldn't have that makes me think completely differently I wouldn't have I wouldn't have known that. And so I read a lot of workbooks, workbooks about coaching about people about cultures. But I also like to keep up to date with external changes in the social care sector, because I do think we things move quite a lot. So particularly when we're looking at and thinking about policy, when we're thinking about changes to practice that we need to be aware of. And so I was with all of the sector press, so sign up to loads of newsletters, including our own, obviously, but also others from across the, from across the sector, from some of the care management matters, you know, some of the trade magazines that you get some depth of insight into where people are. I also watch Twitter, which I keep an eye to get a sense of what's going on in the sector. And that gives me a I suppose a more daily update, I think.

Ali Rusbridge 21:16

Can we ask what your Twitter handle is Oonagh? What's your Twitter handle?

Oonagh Smyth 21:19

I think it's just Oonagh Smyth, I think it's really easy. Yeah, just just @OonaghSmyth, I think. And I also try and put away some time for reading. So it with research colleagues, or people who I know keep up to date with, with the latest, the latest research, I have asked them to flag things to me and I put time away every week to read.

Pia Rathje-Burton 21:43

And you think from a registered manager's point of view or manager in social care is important to take that time. And obviously everybody has different ways of, of kind of gathering

information, but to kind of look outwards and think about well, what are you know, what, what's happening in the sector?

Oonagh Smyth 22:02

Yeah, I so I think it some of it depends on what, how you'd like to learn and how you like to think so. My husband likes to talk things through. So he allows me to do all the reading, and then he just asks me questions and gets all the the knowledge but doesn't have to read the books. So I think it's so if that's what you like to do, if you'd like to talk things through then you know, thinking about setting up a book club maybe or you know, something where you can get that broader input. But in terms of the more immediate changes in the the things that are going on in the sector, I think it's really important that registered managers stay aware because some of it will affect them personally and their service personally. So I think everybody needs to be building that in however, however that works for them.

Pia Rathje-Burton 22:48

So almost having a social care managers book club. Sounds like a good recommendation. Definitely something not something I've thought about before. And I know myself when I was a registered manager, you know, I did struggle with the time to kind of really set that time aside, I really had to work on that. And almost diary in my my kind of outlook diary to kind of make sure that I that I took that time, but realizing how important I know that when we've when we've talked to managers, well that if I was aware of something that was happening, I was almost prepared for it, you know, it wasn't just a bit of a shock to say, Oh, my God, this change is happening. If I knew that it was coming, then I could come almost prepare myself prepare my staff, think about start thinking about well, how are we going to implement this change, or, and sometimes always about gathering opinions. So you know, social care says a huge sector that not everybody is in agreement of, you know, changes and where we're going. And so it was good to kind of get different, different opinion about something that you might not have thought about. Oh, actually, I hadn't thought about that. You could view it that that way. So I found that really useful. Twitter. You know, I wouldn't wasn't using Twitter so much at that time. But I found it really useful to look at the trade magazines. For instance.

Ali Rusbridge 24:08

Can I ask about podcasts because we're on one now is there a particular, do you listen to podcasts Oonagh? Is there any that you recommend or are interested in?

Oonagh Smyth 24:15

So I listen to podcasts when I'm runnin. So I so I usually run marathons, but obviously there's no marathons on. And so four and a half hours of podcasts I get through quite a lot. Mostly politics, some or history actually. So I listened to quite a lot of the political comedy on radio four, which makes me laugh and and some history podcasts as well. I don't really listen to work

podcasts when I'm exercising because I tried to switch off I think, and yes, but I listened to a whole a whole wide, whole wide range and some audiobooks sometimes as well.

Pia Rathje-Burton 24:57

So how do you think we get greater appreciation For the social care workforce, and particularly registered managers, as we're talking about registered managers today, obviously, it's a lot in the press about social care, compared to where we were just a year ago. Um, how do you think we get that appreciation?

Oonagh Smyth 25:12

So I suppose some of it depends on who we mean appreciation from, because I, I'm not sure we're always clear on on that. So I think if we're talking about the public, the thing that always struck me working in social care was that I don't think the public understand what social care is. And so anytime we start to talk to the public about reform of social care reform funding, they get quite surprised, I think, at the current system, because they don't really understand it. And so I think there's a lot to do around the public understanding of social care. And if we think about then how that translates into policy, so if the public understand and value social care, then that rises up the public agenda, because, you know, that's what MPs will get in their, in their in their letterboxes and it will form the basis of elections much more. And so I think there's something about that wider narrative around the public understanding on social care. And I also predict that will translate into people saying to the children, why don't you go into social care and valuing the job as a career as well? I think.

Pia Rathje-Burton 26:21

Yeah, no, I think you're, I think you're right. I know, when I was a registered manager, you know, yes, they kind of got the care home bit, because they knew what a care home was, but you know, I, my, my role at the time covered a number, a number of different things, not just the care home, and anything else was just, you know, I didn't realize that was part of it, you know, so I think that education of the public is, is essential in in the appreciation of what we're what we're doing.

Oonagh Smyth 26:49

I think we see that now during COVID, as well, I think there has been more coverage of social care in the media, but it's generally seen through a careful lens. And we know that social care is much broader and wider than that, and it's much broader and wider than, than just older people, you know, working age adults. And I think we that's been quite stark, I think during COVID, the some of the assumptions that are made about social care, and the people don't understand its breadth and depth, I think.

Ali Rusbridge 27:18

Yeah, I agree. And apart from understanding on other things that you think would help to, you really get that greater appreciation for what registered managers, you talked earlier about what a complex role and how much they needed, you know, support and peer support? Is there any other aspects of appreciation we could really work on? Do you think?

Oonagh Smyth 27:37

So? Do you mean Ali, how do we value that? Or? Okay, because there's, yeah, because there, I think there's, in this debate around parity of esteem with the, with the NHS, and we talk about that quite a lot. There's something in me, that makes me think I would like value, of social care roles in and of themselves, not just held up against health. And you know, that interaction with health is really important. But we interact with a lot of systems and not just health. And so how do we value and appreciate the roles in and of themselves? And some of that is around recognizing the need for people to see their career, a career pathway, where are they want to, not everybody does? But also how do we recognize that the people who don't necessarily want to move up in operational management in social care want to stay supporting individuals are staying quite, quite close to their teams? Maybe how do we recognize that specialism that people are developing over the years, because often I hear from, from people that they want to develop, they want to stay in social care, but their only option is to keep moving up and moving further and further away. And actually, there's something about recognizing some of those skills and, and valuing that, I suppose. Yeah, I'd agree. Yeah.

Pia Rathje-Burton 29:03

You know, is, it is tricky, because we, we want to we want you know, and obviously we when we when we Skills for Care, we really want social care to be appreciated, and, and not just compared to health, we're really kind of seeing it as a specialized sector, that the frontline workers really have a huge amount of knowledge and need to be seen as professionals as you know, and, and how we do this really, you know, really, really tricky and I think it's, it's a it's a bit that needs to be done a little a little blocks isn't a you know, saying a part of that is about education, the, the public part of that it's about managers themselves, realizing how important their role within that is, you know, you you know, you need to be telling everybody how, what an amazing job you're doing, and it was interesting, we were talking to a manager who was saying, I don't think I do anything special. Well actually it is It is a really complex role that that, you know, takes a lot out of individuals. I'm just talking about kind of teams and and obviously, you have been with Skills for Care for six months, you know, one of the things that we've noticed is that you really like to have fun in the workplace, why do you think that's important?

Oonagh Smyth 30:19

Because we spend so much time in work that it really is really important to me that I can build relationships and have a laugh, and there is a particularly when things feel horrid, you know, sometimes that ability to, to laugh with people can can can move things on or so having those connections. So a few weeks ago, we did our Halloween Quiz.

Ali Rusbridge 30:44

I was gonna say about that, because I was in your team, and you do like to have fun.

Oonagh Smyth 30:50

So I think it's so important. And you know, it just that, I don't know, we spend so much time on work, it just feels like if I never had to laugh and work, I don't think I'd ever laugh. And so I think everybody needs it. But equally, you need to be able to know the balance, I suppose and when, when to be serious and when to and when to have fun. And I I like to be made to laugh as well. So you know, I I tried to take opportunities I suppose to, to do that. And it probably comes from probably comes from my family. I've got far too many comedians in the family who are all jostling to make each other laugh.

Pia Rathje-Burton 31:27

And how do you think managers should do that? You know, you know, how do you think that a registered manager of a care service should inject fun into their workplace.

Oonagh Smyth 31:39

I mean, I've heard some amazing things that registered managers have done over COVID that is, so I spoke to one registered manager who'd sent a pizza making kits out to all of her team. And they, and they all did virtual pizza making and just collecting small tokens of presents to bank people. So it's, it's about humor, but it's also about building those connections, and valuing and appreciating people for who they are. And recognizing that, you know, I'm a real advocate of bringing your whole self to work, and recognizing that people have lives away from work, and that's okay to talk about and people shoot if they want to be able to bring those elements of themselves. And humor is a real part of that. So I suppose I would just the right there'll be some times when it'll be more formal. And sometimes you can arrange things like zoom calls to have a you know, something that's a bit a bit fun. But then other times, it's just about thinking, what would I want? And how do I bring myself into this into this conversation? And for some people that will be humor? For some people, that will be something slightly different. But it's almost recognizing how you are an authentic leader? And what does that mean for you?

Ali Rusbridge 32:54

And that's interesting, because you said earlier about the label of CEO and that, that could be something that put people off and thinking about what you said there about bringing your whole self and again, having been in that quiz group with you, you know, it's very much that you were there as yourself. And it wasn't about a label it was. So that's something you believe in strongly is it?

Oonagh Smyth 33:14

Yeah, it absolutely is. And, you know, I do twice a week bulletins to the whole organization. And it's really important to me, and that, that I tried to bring a bit of myself and help, you know, share just a bit of my life, I suppose. And I think that's particularly important when I'm not meeting people face to face, and we're doing all of this remotely, you know, people need to know who I am in order to trust me. And it's really important that people trust me, and so that I am really open about bringing my whole self. And equally, I know then that if I build teams where they're open about that, then I'll know when somebody maybe needs to talk something through or you know, someone needs a bit of flexibility in their life. And I'll be able to, they'll be able to be open with with me. And to me, that's an absolutely key. Because without that openness, and relationships, I don't think you can really lead in the way that we want people to and building those really open cultures where nobody's afraid to say what they think.

Pia Rathje-Burton 34:16

Yeah, absolutely. I think that's really important. It is, you know, I think it's a real balancing act, because you have to be that professional and people need to see you as a professional, you need to see the role as professional but you need do you need to bring yourself to work to bring your humor into work to, to form to develop those relationships. And ultimately, that trust, as you mentioned, that, that that's, you know, if you are a leader, and particularly if you're a leader of a larger team, it is really, really important that people are seeing us as that person as well as the manager or the CEO or whatever, whatever, you know, whatever your role is really, really good advice.

Ali Rusbridge 34:57

Yeah, thanks for that. So Oonagh, in this podcast series, we're actually going to ask a few questions that we're going to ask everybody. So we're going to finish off our conversations with these questions with everybody. So I'm going to start by asking you, if you imagine, I mean, it could be either that you're doing a presentation or it could be that you're in a social thing, what story or experience do you always tell people?

Oonagh Smyth 35:19

So I always tell people about a young woman that I went to, to visit when I first joined Mencap who was supported by Mencap and meeting her and the experience that one of the care workers was sharing with me around aromatherapy, and the the impact that that had on this young woman's life. So, you know, they sprayed a certain scent, whenever she was getting up in the morning. So she knew that she was getting up, they sprayed a certain scent when she was going to bed. So she knew she was going to bed. And it moved her from a place where she wasn't able to feed herself. And she got quite anxious, to a place where she, she just completely calmed down. Because she knew what was coming. She knew what was planned. And she was able to physically feed herself, but that then led to the care staff, knowing what food she liked. And she, she had no sight you have no hearing. And so taste is just so important. And so the difference between being able to eat something that you love and not

just felt completely life changing to me and the care of that one care worker taking that time to deeply understand the individual, I think for me just typifies what social care is at its best.

Ali Rusbridge 36:41

Yeah, that's a really powerful story. Thank you.

Pia Rathje-Burton 36:44

Yeah. And I suppose suppose being told that you must have watched I've had a really, you know, the fact that you still remember must of had a really big impact on you?

Oonagh Smyth 36:52

Yeah, it was just, I love walking on air, it just, you know, just give me that give me that real, that real sense of the importance of relationships? I think.

Ali Rusbridge 37:05

Absolutely. What do you really, really like about what you do now? It's the second really, that's important there so.

Oonagh Smyth 37:15

I really like the people. So it's really important to me.

Ali Rusbridge 37:20

You don't have to say that because we're here by the way.

Oonagh Smyth 37:25

I like all people, I like the people element of the role, I think I like the being able to combine all of the different bits and say, Okay, how do we work on this as a, as a team in the organization as a team outside the organization throughout the whole of social care, building relationships, building connections, so I'm a real one for collaboration. And I like joining things together, I like growing things to be, I suppose bigger than the sum of their of their parts. And I think that both inside and outside, and it's a bit that gives me most energy, I think

Ali Rusbridge 38:02

That's great. I can see. Our listeners can't see you. But I can see the energy that you your enthusiasm with that. That's great. We've got a slot now that we're calling our time for care slots, where we're going to ask you, what do you think is your most time saving tip that you would pass on to other minds?

Oonagh Smyth 38:23

I'm going to give such a boring answer, but it really is true. I write lists about everything. And sometimes I write lists about lists that I need. What I do not in so at the end of every day, I'll

write my list of what I must get through tomorrow before I reply to an email, and I'll make sure I get through that list. And then at the beginning of the day, I'll go back to that and say, Wait, what, what do I have time to do? And I think what that helps me do is force myself to do some of the deep thinking that I need time to do. And if I leave towards the end of the day, I probably won't be able to fit it in. And I think for me, that says it is the right time saving, but it's also about focusing on the right things. So focusing on the things that are the not necessarily knocking at your door, but but you really need to do them. So so for me that's about Yeah, it's about planning, and it's about lists.

Pia Rathje-Burton 39:15

What it's like to talk to a fellow list maker, I make lists everywhere I go in and I have lists all around my house of my life. I always like to talk to a fellow list maker,

Ali Rusbridge 39:32

We're three list makers here, I am as well. But I want to know what you do when you've still got things on your list at the end of the day. That's my problem. What do you do with them?

Oonagh Smyth 39:41

Well, as long as I think I wasn't supposed to get that done today, so I'll move that to tomorrow's list. That's fine. But sometimes I'll also get things done that weren't on my list and I'll go back and write them on my list

Ali Rusbridge 39:53

as well. So you can cross them off Brilliant. Okay, so we've talked so much, and you've talked so much about how you think managers should develop themselves, and really about the appreciation and all of that. And we're going to put you in a very difficult position here. Because we'd like you to think about three words that you could use to describe the ideas that you've gone through today notice is really distilling it down to three key words that you can leave our listeners with as a kind of a summary of your thoughts.

Pia Rathje-Burton 40:31

A bit of a take away.

Ali Rusbridge 40:32

Yeah.

Oonagh Smyth 40:35

I would say connection. So building connections and relationships, I would say patience with yourself. So understanding, understanding yourself. And I would say networks, so using your networks. Thank you.

Pia Rathje-Burton 40:53

Good summary. Well done. Thank you so much for coming along today. Really, really appreciate taking time to talk to us in the first episode of care exchange. Hope you enjoyed yourself. And thank you so much.

Oonagh Smyth 41:05

Thank you for asking me, I had a lovely time.

Pia, Ali & Oonagh 41:07

Thank you, Bye.

Pia Rathje-Burton 41:18

So thank you very much to our guest Oonagh Smyth.

Ali Rusbridge 41:21

That was a really interesting conversation, I thought she came up with some very, very good and useful points, didn't she?

Pia Rathje-Burton 41:27

Yeah, I learned so much. And it's so interesting to hear her experiences and I really, I found it so interesting when she was talking about being a coach and how she really used, you know, using that experiences to develop the people that use their coach for, and I can really see how that would be so useful for managers in social care, perhaps not something that register managers have thought about before. Actually one of my first contacts with Skills for Care was that I was a mentor, trained by Skills for Care. So we do have this mentor, offer, which I know is not quite the same as coaching, but it's still about supporting another manager. So if you are registered manager member, and the membership is £35 a year, so really, really cheap. And obviously I was they provide training, and then they match you up with somebody else who have asked to become asked to have to have a mentor, and then you spend time together kind of talking to them talking about issues, I find it really, really interesting. I learnt so much.

Ali Rusbridge 42:30

Yeah, I think that's definitely something worth for people to think about. I also thought it was really useful when she was stressing how important that peer support was. So as well as that one to one support that you can get through mentoring, that whole thing about the peer support that we can provide through the registered managers networks. I mean, that's something that I would say if people haven't joined the registered managers that were kind of definitely recommend them. I know the ones that I support are so useful for people to share their issues and their solutions to things and just the idea is to stop them recreating the wheel. And we've got networks in every part of the country, every local authority area. So it's really good thing to join if people haven't done that.



Pia Rathje-Burton 43:10

Yeah, I will second that, again, as a registered manager, I've joined a local network where I was and I found a so useful, always came back to my service, full of new ideas, and just really enjoyed learning from more experienced managers, but also kind of sharing ideas that I've had and just sometimes just having a talk about something that hadn't perhaps hadn't gone so well. That you know, having somebody who understood what I did, was just so useful. Thank you for listening today. Hope you've enjoyed this episode of the care exchange don't miss the next episode following the care exchange by downloading the podbean app. You can also listen to subscribe for your usual podcast streaming services.

Ali Rusbridge 43:51

And if you enjoyed the care exchange podcast, please share with anyone else who'd benefit and thanks so much for listening. Bye.

Pia Rathje-Burton 43:58

Bye!