

Reducing healthcare support worker vacancies – case studies

Creating a sustainable workforce model for support workers

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust

What was the problem?

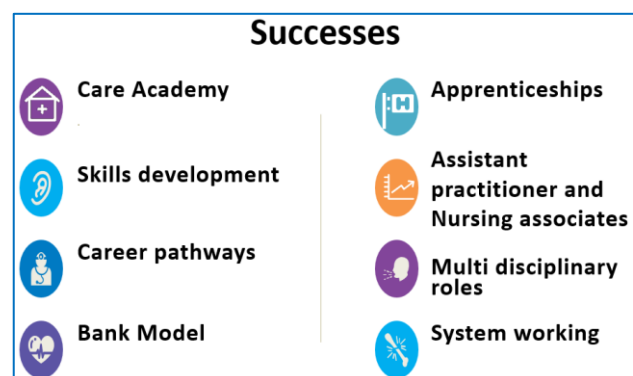
Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust experienced significant problems retaining its workforce, particularly healthcare support workers (HCSWs). The trust covers 800 square miles in a rural area with high levels of deprivation, and its population doubles during summer due to tourism.

Turnover rates were high, and people in the local community perceived being an HCSW as difficult and disruptive to lifestyle, without many career possibilities.

What was the solution?

The trust aimed to:

- reduce turnover
- increase skills retention
- create clear career pathways
- work to full licence



- enhance perception of the HCSW role, talking to young people and students to advertise opportunities in healthcare.

To achieve these aims, the trust:

- identified the workforce requirement using workforce data



- ensured quality of supply
- retained that supply
- developed a sufficient supply of highly skilled staff.

What were the challenges?

Supporting wider system-working and the impact of recruitment on other parts of the health and social care system. Turnover locally in social and domiciliary care was more than 35%. The trust's solutions therefore needed to take account of the wider system, to avoid further destabilising other areas and subsequently reducing its ability to support patients in the most appropriate setting.

What were the results?

- Turnover in HCSW roles reduced by 2% (1% across all roles).
- Retention rates are now above 93%.
- Use of agency HCSWs has been eliminated.
- 99% fill rate for support workers.
- Reduced absence.
- A hybrid model for bank staff, where the trust employs the worker but uses NHS Professionals' systems and expertise to fill the shifts.

What were the learning points?

- Listen, listen, listen!
- Understand how HCSWs feel valued – staff had previously felt more heard and supported in hospitality jobs.
- Work with and understand the wider community.
- Partner with a further education provider – working with local schools and devising clear development pathways.
- Don't be afraid to challenge tradition.

Next steps and sustainability

Change so far has been real and rapid. It is important to build on this through:

- sponsored routes to employment
- the new local school of nursing, where the first cohort will start in September 2019, with individuals being able to start and continue their career locally
- continuing to develop apprentices
- rotating posts between health and social care.

Want to know more?

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To see the other case studies in this series: visit the NHS Improvement website at: <https://improvement.nhs.uk/resources/improving-staff-retention/>

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