



NCVO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Good employment practice case study: Recruitment and retention

Sue Kaemena, Director of HR at The Children's Trust has kindly provided the following case study.

The Children's Trust is a national charity working with children who have multiple disabilities and complex health needs. Their services are offered to children from across the UK and comprise:

- short, medium and long term residential care and therapy;
- rehabilitation for children with an acquired brain injury;
- short breaks (either at our site in Tadworth or in the family home);
- hospice/ palliative care;
- ventilatory dependent care;
- education, care and therapy for children and young people with profound and multiple
- learning disabilities at St Margaret's School.

The Children's Trust are committed to meeting the diverse needs of children and their families, coupled with the ability to deliver the best possible combination of nursing, therapy, medical and educational care.

If you would like to find out more about The Children's Trust, please visit www.thechildrenstrust.org.uk.

What happened?

Four years ago the organisation was suffering from chronic staff shortages, particularly in critical nursing and care areas. There was a general lack of management skill, confidence and a feeling of low morale amongst managers, coupled with high staff turnover.

This resulted in an inability to deliver our services to full capacity, or to extend the reach of our specialist expertise to other children and families in need.

We recognised that there was no single immediate answer. The Children's Trust operates in a high cost area, with much competition for specialist staff that are in national short supply.

Therefore a planned, integrated and multi-stranded human resource strategy was devised, to be implemented over three to four years.

The strategy was devised under four key headings, which were implemented simultaneously so that the integrated approach ensured that the various initiatives worked in support of each other.

The aims under each key heading were:

1. Organisation Culture: to work toward a culture which is positive, open and trusting, not excessively parochial about its constituent parts, quality focused, change and improvement focused, a 'no blame' culture where lines of authority, accountabilities and responsibilities are clear, and an attractive place to work.
2. Organisation Structure: to create more manageable spans of control within appropriate teams, ensuring clarity of responsibilities for managers and staff, responding to potential changes in governance, and reviewing the structure of the senior team.
3. Staffing Levels: to stimulate staffing levels, improve utilisation and productivity of the workforce.
4. Organisation Performance: to raise the standard of management, and gain a demonstrable improvement in staff performance through regular and measurable performance and development review.

Targets were:

- a reduction in staff turnover, to be not more than the NHS equivalent and South East England average by the end of the period;
- a reduction in vacancy levels;
- a reduction in sickness absence by 10%;
- improved employee satisfaction, measured through a staff survey;
- attainment of the Investing in Volunteers quality standard and the re-accreditation of the Investors in People standard.

If the strategy was to work, it needed the full support of the Senior Team, as it formed an integral part of the Trust's 2001-2005 business plan.

The HR strategy was multi-stranded, with many initiatives necessarily occurring simultaneously. The key elements are as follows:

- By late 2001 an HR team had been established which was average in size for the sector. The Board agreed a budget of £70K for Management Development and a firm of consultants worked closely with the HR Director to devise a programme of management development, which was closely monitored and refined along the way.
- In order to begin to tackle staff shortages a new approach to recruitment advertising was taken, using testimonials from current staff, explaining why they chose to work here. When this approach reached the end of its natural life, a specialist charity recruitment advertising agency was appointed to provide a more professional and cohesive advertising style. This was achieved at a cost of £20 per advert.

- Pay scales for care staff were also shortened to offer more attractive pay at the entry point, and clearer progression paths were established.
- Relatively loose job descriptions throughout the organisation were re-written to make accountabilities tighter and clearer. The Performance and Development Review system was then re-designed, first at management level, then rolled out across the organisation, once managers were comfortable with it. The new system incorporated behavioural competencies and ensured that every aspect of a role was discussed with no chance for avoidance of either task or behaviour. Performance measures were also introduced. This new appraisal format was key in supporting a cultural shift from that of some avoidance to clarity of expectation and supported accountability. Training is provided for all appraisers and appraisees.
- Internal structures and spans of control were reviewed regularly in consultation with the Chief Executive, and changes made where appropriate.
- A new sickness absence policy was introduced providing more generous paid sick leave combined with tighter absence controls. Managers were trained and supported in its operation.
- Personal training plans were introduced for all staff and volunteers. Much of the internal training provision was rescheduled, grouping sessions together, making it easier for part-time and night staff to attend more sessions and minimising staff absence from operations.
- We became a City & Guilds accredited centre for NVQ awards in Health and Social Care and ramped up the NVQ programme, training more assessors and internal verifiers.
- The Trust also participated in Volunteer England's pilot of the new Investing in Volunteers award and became the tenth organisation in the country to achieve it.
- In 2003 we conducted a comprehensive staff and volunteers attitude survey. Subsequent work was undertaken with managers and staff representatives to seek further improvements in the supply of information, inclusion in decision making and general satisfaction.
- In the same year, we gained Investors in People (IIP) re-accreditation. The assessor was asked to elicit views on the new Performance and Development Review system and was able to report that staff at all levels were in favour of it, particularly appreciating the clarity of expectation that it provided.
- We have a comprehensive one week induction programme which is constantly evaluated for improvement. In 2003 we also introduced a reunion of inductees three months into their time with us, to learn how we might further improve their vital early months with the organisation.
- A fast track training programme for newly qualified nurses was launched, which has proved very popular and is a significant help in 'growing our own' specialist staff.

- A recruitment video, showing potential candidates the work that we do and our attractive environment, was filmed on a voluntary basis. The result is very professional and copies in CD Rom format are sent out to all interested parties at a cost of 6p each.
- In 2004 it was necessary to respond to the government's Agenda for Change NHS pay initiative, aimed at improving the pay of nurses and therapists. We revised our own salary structures to find a realistic balance that was affordable yet did not jeopardise our attraction of qualified staff. The opportunity was also taken to improve some perceptions of internal inequity at the same time.
- After completion of the initial programme of management development we carried out a strategic Training Needs Analysis, in conjunction with senior team colleagues and with clear reference to the updated business plan.
- A smaller, targeted, follow up programme of management development was then devised and rolled out. To provide further support, the HR Manager and Director also meet with managers proactively several times a year for discussion and coaching on any potential staff issues. In early 2005, we devised and ran our first management conference, held off site, with some forty managers attending. Feedback was very positive with managers feeling valued and involved, and their contributions to our plans for expansion were very helpful.

Who was involved (e.g paid staff, volunteers, trustees)?

HR, trustees and senior management team.

What went well?

The introduction of the revised Performance & Development Review with clear accountabilities of both tasks and behaviours went down better than expected.

What did not go so well?

Despite having greatly simplified the Performance & Development Review for housekeeping and maintenance staff there is great reluctance to use it.

What would you do differently?

Something we are addressing now is more coaching for managers in setting objectives for their staff, which of course, can be task or behaviour based.

What has been the overall impact?

The HR strategic plan managed to exceed its targets:

- Turnover came down by 14% to 4% below the sector average (source: People Count 2005).
- Despite the more generous sick leave entitlement, sickness absence came down by 10%.
- Vacancy levels reduced by 50%.

- The staff and volunteers attitude survey was repeated in summer 2005, showing further gains across almost all areas.
- We received Investing in Volunteers re-accreditation in 2005.
- In September 2005 we were somewhat bowled over at winning the category 'Best Charity to Work For' in the UK Charity Awards, on the basis of staff votes and in October 2005 the title 'Best Independent Employer for Nurses to Work For' in the Nursing Times Top 100 Workplaces rankings.
- More importantly, having a fuller, more stable and motivated workforce has enabled the Trust to provide residential care, education and therapy for a higher number of children, who themselves, have greater dependency, and we have been able to embark on a number of expansion initiatives.

Are you planning any future developments to maximise the impact of this process?

Hopefully this four year plan has put in place a solid platform for the future. The trick now is to maintain and build on it as the organisation grows.

About HR and your workforce

How many paid employees do you have?

101+ full time; 101+ part time

How many trustees sit on your board?

8-10

How many volunteers do you have (non-paid staff, excluding trustees)?

101+ part time

Does your organisation have an HR Strategy?

Yes

Does your organisation have a recruitment policy?

Yes

Does your organisation have a diversity policy?

Not currently a formal one