



South East Region

Learn from Bluebird Care

## Using Innovation to improve recruitment & retention within the care sector

### Background

Bluebird Care (Newbury & Kingsclere) is a home and live-in care provider established in 2007 and currently employs over 100 staff. The company provides a range of social care services including personal care, meal preparation, assistance with medication, help with mobility issues, shopping and companionship. Overall, supporting older people to remain independent in their own homes. All our customers live within West Berkshire and North Hampshire.

With the vast majority of people preferring to stay at home as long as possible the demand for care at home services has grown massively in recent years. This demand can only be met by care providers if they can recruit and retain sufficient staff capacity to deliver this care.

Bluebird Care, like many organisations in the home care sector, faced a huge challenge around recruiting and retaining its workforce, largely due to poor rates of pay, undesirable employment conditions and negative attitudes associated with working in social care:

- Historical terms of employment i.e. the much maligned 'Zero Hour' contracts, with staff only being paid for 'contact time'
- Evening and weekend work not desirable
- Staff not feeling respected or valued by employers/office
- Some employees unable to continue to afford business insurance for their vehicles ( < 25 years old)

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Many home care providers are under huge pressure as they try and recruit and retain enough staff and at the same time maintain a safe and effective service for their customers, making it a huge challenge just to stay in business.

In addition, Bluebird Care had other issues to contend with in the local market; West Berkshire and North Hampshire enjoy full employment rates which means we are not only competing for high quality staff in our own sector but with other sectors such as retail and hospitality. All these challenges and in 2015 the 'perfect storm' of the impact of the Government's austerity measures on local authority budgets and increased employer costs e.g. rises in national minimum wage and workplace pensions, meant that if we did not fundamentally transform our business we would run the risk of becoming financially unstable and face an uncertain future.

### What they did

Developing a clear strategy around employment terms and conditions for our care staff whilst altering our business relationships with our customers, both local authorities and those people funding their own care, meant we could successfully manage these challenges.

Throughout 2017, we planned a series of changes which meant we could launch a unique offering to all our care staff, **salaried employment**. This was so significant because for the first time it gave our care staff a guaranteed income and the legal protection afforded to staff employed on salaried contracts of employment. Initially we offered salaried contracts based upon 6-hour shifts, typically for a 7am or 4pm start. However, from September 2018, we now offer 'flexible' salaried contracts for different shift lengths e.g. 6pm to 10pm or 10 hour shifts from 12 noon to 10pm etc... that will be more attractive to prospective candidates whilst still meeting the needs of customers.

This innovation has completely transformed our ability to recruit and retain staff to match demand service with carer capacity and provide financial stability and certainty for our business.

In addition to salaried contracts Bluebird Care have a well-structured and resourced approach to all recruitment activities undertaken;

- Dedicated recruitment manager responsible for co-ordinating all recruitment activities:
  - Web-based psychometric tests to generate a range of reports e.g. Key attitudes to support conducting values-based interviews, job engagement to determine candidate 'suitability' to carer role and job performance and onboarding report to facilitate effective integration into the organisation
- Diverse range of recruitment activities
  - Innovative use of social, especially Facebook to attract potential candidates e.g. posting in-house videos of existing Bluebird carers discussing their role and experiences of working for us, how they came to social care etc...
  - Generous employee referral scheme, £500 payment available

- Development of material and communication messages to target 50 years + candidates who may be informal carers and might consider a career in care if encouraged to do so
- Good success in re-recruiting our previous leavers

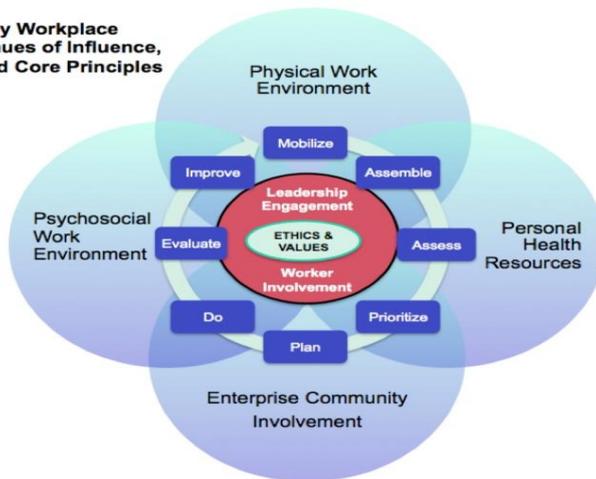
## What they achieved

The transformation of our recruitment capabilities and improved financial performance has allowed Bluebird Care to invest significant time and money in a range of other innovative activities.

Bluebird care has adopted and aligned itself to the WHO 'healthy workplace' model of organisational development i.e. shifting our attitudes and approach to health and the workplace as means of making our organisation more attractive to prospective candidates to come and work for us. Also, to make sure we do everything possible to retain our existing staff for as long as possible.

Figure 1:

**Figure ES1**  
**WHO Healthy Workplace**  
**Model: Avenues of Influence,**  
**Process, and Core Principles**



## 1. Physical work environment

- a. Creation of Kingsclere and Newbury 'Care Hubs' an inviting and nice physical space available to all our staff to utilise for relaxation and learning opportunities, reflecting how we want to value them.
- b. Investment in systems and processes that make the role of care workers easier and more efficient e.g. 'state of the art' care management systems, using docusign® technology to seek to become a 'paperless' organisation

## 2. Personal Health resources

When operating in a high stress environment like social care it is easy to forget the impact their work experience has on the rest of their lives.

- a. Creating a supportive and caring organisation for all our staff e.g. management of ill health and mental health by working in partnership with charity MIND i.e. providing resilience training for all staff, creating Mental health first aiders to provide help on a first aid basis enabling them to support individuals experiencing mental health issues  
Also providing access to healthcare benefit scheme, includes face to face counselling, debt management, relationship and legal advice
- b. Range of staff retention initiatives
  - Care breakdown cover, Year 1,3, 5 and now 10-year clubs to acknowledge long service, 'above inflation' pay awards, 0% loans etc...

## 3. Community Engagement

During 2018 we have encouraged and empowered all our staff to become more involved in the delivery of community engagement activities and they have responded brilliantly. They have organised a diverse range of activities including;

- Using care hub to deliver monthly 'craft and cuppa' sessions for customers/families, footcare and outreach clinics (in conjunction with Age Concern)
- Royal wedding viewing and BBQ
- *Carers Week* activities
- Trip to the seaside
- Silver Sunday, *Sunday Roast* for customers and members of public

## 4. Creation of a Psychosocial environment

The Directors and senior managers lead 'from the front' and work hard to promote a positive workplace culture, with organisational values and beliefs based upon openness, trust and integrity. In practical terms it means,

- Formal recognition of good performance
- Zero tolerance of bullying
- Regular and supportive supervisions of staff
- Staff being able to speak out about practices or behaviours they have concerns about
- Developing a sense of identity which is unique to Bluebird Care i.e. creation of Bluebird Care 'family'

### Top Tips

The recruitment and retention of high-quality care staff is central to the ongoing success of our business. The Bluebird Care leadership team have created and implemented a deliberate strategy to ensure that our organisation is able to thrive in a challenging and ever-changing social care market, based upon the follow key elements:

1. Rigorous and planned recruitment processes and activities
2. Providing comprehensive induction training and support to all new care staff to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to deliver high quality care. Access to ongoing training and development opportunities throughout their career with Bluebird Care
3. Creation of a 'healthy workplace'
4. A service which is innovative in using available technologies to enrich the quality of care provision for both staff and customers alike
5. Recruit staff with a strong sense of social responsibility, actively playing a role in their local community
6. Create a supportive and caring environment where all staff are genuinely valued and appreciated with organisational norms and beliefs designed to support a positive culture
7. Use the **Bluebird Care Career Pathway** to put our staff in responsible roles and stretch their abilities and inspire confidence e.g. Care Mentors or Care Champions

**For more information please see below:**

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