

Career Cafes

How Stow Healthcare are retaining and developing staff



Stow
Healthcare

Alex Ball
Operations Manager
Stow Healthcare

**American author Harvey Mackay once said
“Your workforce is your most valuable asset.
The knowledge and skills they have represent
the fuel that drives the engine of business -
and you can leverage that knowledge”.**

*“What made me stay? Social Care
was never my career of choice.”*

This mantra has never been more relevant to the social care workforce than it is today. According to the latest State of Adult social care workforce in England report published by Skills for Care in the autumn, since the opening up of the wider economy in March 2021 many employers are reporting that recruitment and retention is now more difficult than before the pandemic. Pre-pandemic this was a challenge. Fast forward two years and social care staff are exhausted, both physical and mentally, with many reaching the point of burnout. Is it any wonder recruitment and retention in the sector may seem nigh on impossible?

At Stow Healthcare we wanted to look at this issue afresh. I started by asking myself, “what made me stay?” Social Care was never my career of choice having previously studied Tourism, however the opportunities for progression and development within Stow Healthcare and the wider Social Care sector have given me a career pathway, qualifications and opportunities I never could have dreamed of when I started with the company as a kitchen assistant ten years ago.



At Stow Healthcare we spend a lot of time talking students at local schools and colleges about careers pathways in social care and opportunities within our company. It was during our last session that it suddenly occurred to me – Do our staff know this? Are we making this information clear and accessible to them? Do they know what we are offering in terms of career development? What is it they want to achieve from working with us? This is where the idea for ‘Stow Healthcare Careers Cafes’ was born.

We held a total of twelve two-hour open house café sessions covering every home across the group to give staff the opportunity to come along and discuss their career aspirations and training requirements. The idea being there is always room for learning and development no matter what stage of your career you are at, or what job you do. I initially thought I may have conversations with a handful of staff, this quickly escalated with over 60 staff representing almost 15% of the entire staff team attending either in person or requesting a virtual appointment.

The results have been fantastic. Over 20 staff are now starting the process to complete a diploma in health and social care with us ranging from Level 2-5. We have sourced additional nutrition, hydration and care home specific dysphagia training for our kitchen staff, reviewed external courses for our maintenance staff, and our activities teams will be coming together to attend a bespoke Activities Coordinator development day in May. Staff also offered constructive feedback on the current training offering requesting a move back to more in person training post COVID, plus further developments to our induction offering for new starters and in-house training. The sessions also saw staff stepping forward with an area of interest they would like to develop, and in turn share knowledge with their colleagues through workshop exercises.

Feedback from these sessions has been enlightening. One staff member said *“The drop in session was brilliant and I wouldn’t be starting my qualification if it wasn’t for that.”* Whilst another added *“It has been a form of*



‘reflection’ and I am glad I booked to chat as I was able to explore some areas of training that I would like to do not only for myself, but also how we can grow as a group of nurses to lead the team.”

To summarise, my three key learning points to take away would be:

1) Two ears for listening - Whilst it was important that these sessions were a two-way conversation, it is vital they are led by the staff and what they want to achieve. Let them speak and let them express their wishes. Staff should feel listened to and valued, this is their career and their future; it is important to them and should be respected.

2) The small things can sometimes be the biggest - Retention doesn’t have to cost the earth. Spend money on the small things, some helium balloons, cakes and donuts are all you need to help get these conversations started. The biggest investment is time, but it is worth every second. Take the time to follow up; make a record of the conversation and any actions agreed on both sides and stick to them. We are also sending personalised ‘Thank you’ cards to everyone who took the time to attend a session. Make people feel valued.

3) Don’t look too far out of the box - Whilst it may seem staff are exhausted following the pandemic, many are looking to refocus and reset. Make sure that is you’re your company! Help them find the new challenge they may be looking for. Supporting staff to grow into more senior roles may be easier that recruiting, with the right nurturing and guidance- you may already have what you need right in front of you.



“I am glad I booked a chat - it has been a form of reflection.”