

Richmond Users Independent Living Scheme (RUILS)

Personal Assistant Network and Conference

RUILS is a local, user-led charity supporting individuals (irrespective of age, impairment, health condition or capacity) to live independently at home and in their community. RUILS set up a network for personal assistants (PAs) which offered monthly training, as well as a PA-focussed conference.

Background

RUILS support individuals to live independently in their homes and communities. As part of this work, they run a Work Support Network Forum and an Employer Network Forum. These include discussion boards for members, training and employment advice.

RUILS felt that it was important that they provide similar support for PAs. PAs are an isolated group in the social care sector and often it is difficult for them to get access to training – generally because it is hard to get time off. Where training is available it is often focused on carers rather than PAs.

There were PA networks that existed previous to that set up by RUILS but they tended to be online with no face to face contact. There had also never

been a conference aimed just at PAs before. RUILS saw this as a unique opportunity to get PAs to communicate and train together.

What we wanted to achieve

The overall aim of this project was to provide Personal Assistants with the opportunity to access training opportunities and peer support.

The aim of the PA network was to make PAs feel valued and give them access to a network dedicated to their profession. They had run training for PAs in the past and discovered that PAs really valued being able to share their experiences with one another; a PA network would offer a more formal opportunity for them to share best practice. The conference would also support these aims and objectives. RUILS was hoping to have 40 PAs attend the event.

“The event was well run, well put together...if I had the opportunity to go again I wouldn't miss it- I came away with a lot of information”

Beneficiary

What we did

A co-ordinator was recruited to assist with the running of the PA Network and to organise the conference. The network was promoted through RUILS's Find-a-PA register and through local PA support organisations. The network met once a month with some variation in attendance rates. The sessions with external trainers were the best attended.

Sessions were arranged according to what the PAs said they needed. This included training on moving and assisting, dementia and the role of the PA. Sessions were generally a mix of formal training and informal conversation about any issues that the PAs wanted to raise.

The conference was organised by sending out a questionnaire to PAs. The results of this were then used to determine the content of the training sessions. They advertised the event through their own networks and promoted it on social networking sites.

What we achieved

There was positive feedback from the network members that the PA network had given them an opportunity to share best practice with each other. However, attendance was not as high as they had hoped; though RUILS did learn about the persistence needed to engage PAs. The network also allowed RUILS to build up a network of trainers, some of whom they have worked with subsequently.

The conference was well received, with 45 PAs attending the event. This event was seen by PAs as an opportunity to come together and share best practice. Overall, PAs felt that the training sessions had been valuable, and that it would be beneficial to keep this as a regular event. RUILS made contacts such as Unison, The Grey Matter Group and Fish Insurance, which were extremely useful to them as an organisation.

What we learnt

RUILS learnt that there is a need to bring together PAs, and that those who attended these events valued the experience. However, this project highlighted just how difficult it is to engage this group of workers, who are rarely paid to undertake

training and are extremely busy. Persistence was identified as key to achieving success here.

There was a small amount of funding available for PAs attending the conference, this was an important incentive for PAs. This is something that should be recommended to others trying to incentivise this hard to reach group. It is an important gesture that makes PAs feel valued. RUILS also thought that attendance was high as they arranged the conference a long time in advance, and in a convenient location.

To be able to access PAs it is necessary to have a member of staff available to keep regular contact with them. RUILS do not have the resource to be able to carry on the PA network. They used some of the funding to hire someone one day a week to help run the network and without this extra resource it is very difficult to keep it going.

“ What Personal Assistants (PAs) really valued was being able to talk to other PAs, to be able to hear and share their experiences ”

Project manager

For more information please contact

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Skills for Care Recommends

Skills for Care produces a range of resources aimed at people who employ their own care and support. These can help individual employers to employ personal assistants and develop their workforce.

An interactive guide for Personal Assistants

This interactive website helps personal assistants to learn more about gaining the skills they need for their role.

www.paskills.org.uk

Employing Personal Assistants Toolkit

The employing personal assistants toolkit covers responsibilities as an employer and legal obligations. It includes templates of job descriptions, application forms and contracts of employment.

www.employingpersonalassistants.co.uk

Individual employer funding

Skills for Care can help towards the funding of training for adult social care individual employers. This application form process can help fund induction and longer term development.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/iefunding

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