

Wiltshire Council and Learn to Care

The role of the principal social worker in supporting the ASYE

Background

Wiltshire Council is a unitary local authority with 5000 staff (excluding schools) serving a population of slightly fewer than 500,000 across a large mainly rural area. The council employs 282 social workers in Children's Services and in Adults Services (Jan 2015 figure).

Difficulties in recruiting and retaining experienced social workers are typical of the regional and national picture. Wiltshire is bordered by 7 local authorities with several more in easy reach, so there is local competition between employers. We know we need to do things differently to be the employer of choice and this includes in the way that we recruit and support newly qualified social workers.

What we wanted to achieve

The Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) for newly qualified social workers (NQSWS) quickly became known among social work students, tutors etc. as something to enquire about and to expect from potential employers.

From the employer perspective, although the ASYE was not a statutory requirement, it has become an imperative in being able to attract good applicants in sufficient numbers to fill vacancies.

In Wiltshire we wanted to make sure we had robust systems in place to recruit NQSWSs and to support them during and beyond their first year in practice so that they would stay with us, continue to develop and become our next generation of experienced social workers and managers.

For us, involving senior managers and people in specialist and strategic positions was a vital aspect of this plan and the Principal Social Worker (PSW) has played a key role in this strategy.

What we did

Following restructure of learning and development, the responsibility for the co-ordination of the ASYE programme transferred from Operational Services to a centralised team within HR and Organisational Development. This increased resource for and raised the profile of the ASYE within the Council.

When the PSW role was introduced within the authority a robust connection was established between the ASYE Co-ordinator and operational services. The PSW's close link with frontline managers and individual social workers means that she is well placed to provide professional advice and support; and because of her position in the leadership team and her role in the organisation, she also has the authority to ensure that professional standards are achieved and upheld.

“ ASYE provides direct contact between newly qualified social workers and the principal social worker, and means that this senior practice based role can promote good practice and provide feedback between all levels of the organisation ”

Kim Holmes, Principal Social Worker

As her role has developed, the PSW has been able to support the ASYE by:

- **Promoting Wiltshire Council** - as an employer of NQSWs – talking to final year students on local social work degree programmes about working for Wiltshire, and support available, including the ASYE programme.
- **Recruiting newly qualified social workers** - All adverts for social workers in adults services, including NQSWs have the PSWs phone number and e mail on them so potential applicants can make contact to ask questions. All applications received go to the PSW initially who makes contact with each person. The ASYE scheme is explained to newly- qualified potential recruits. Once offered a post, NQSWs are put in contact with the ASYE Co-ordinator.
- **Updating and advising senior managers** - The ASYE Co-ordinator provides an annotated spread sheet to the PSW each month who follows up specific issues with line managers of ASYEs and with the ASYEs themselves where appropriate. The PSW also feeds back trends and issues to senior managers
- **Advising and supporting operational managers** - Any manager of ASYEs can contact the PSW at any time to discuss concerns about progress, difficulties in meeting deadlines etc
- **Advising and supporting NQSWs** - Any social worker (including NQSWs) can contact the PSW at any time. For NQSWs, this support includes the facility to discuss any concerns with expectations and progress with ASYE
- **Contributing to assessment** - The PSW can observe a NQSW as part of the requirements of ASYE (maximum of one out of required 3 direct observations)
- **Contributing to moderation and standardisation** - The PSW is a member of the moderation panel in Wiltshire Council (with Lead for OD & Learning, ASYE Co-ordinator and PSW, Children's Services)

- **Consistency:** The PSW is the single point of contact for potential applicants and gives consistent responses to enquiries
- **Personal contact:** NQSWs applying for jobs are contacted as soon as their application is received. Social work is a relational activity and this personal approach increases the relational aspect of the recruitment experience, which had become almost exclusively computer based up to the point of interview
- **Support:** via this personal contact with the PSW, applicants and recruits experience early on this aspect for the support available to them

What we learnt

- The PSW needs to understand principles and costs/benefit of the ASYE scheme as well as the details, including policy, content of the ASYE handbook, in order to provide appropriate support to all (see above)
- Close links between Organisational Development (OD) and Learning (part of corporate HR) and Operations (part of Community Services) are essential; however these work much more effectively (and can even overcome lack of close working between departments) when ASYE Co-ordinator and PSW have developed a good working relationship. This includes being clear and firm about topics like 'ASYE cannot be extended because someone has not had time to write up their work' and 'NQSWs cannot observe each other to meet 3 direct observation requirement'.
- Carrying out one of the direct observations where requested is a very good way to have direct contact with a NQSW when they are working and a good opportunity to seek some feedback from customers.
- The PSW as a voice for and in operational services is well-placed to both explain ASYE requirements to operational managers and also to explain employer, Professional Capabilities Framework and the Health and Care Professions Council's requirements to HR and OD & Learning - to improve consistency of interpretation

What we achieved

As a result of the Principal Social Worker's involvement with the ASYE the recruitment and retention of social workers has benefitted in the following ways:

For more information please contact

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Skills for Care Recommends

Skills for Care has helped to develop the ASYE process and provides some practical resources and funding potential for employers involved in providing adult social care.

Assessed and Supported Year in Employment

Our special website section provides an overview of the process, lists how employers can register their NQSWs and includes related case study examples and guidance to demonstrate how other employers are delivering this process.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/socialwork

Continuing to develop Social Workers

Skills for Care has produced core principles, resources and guidance to support employers to develop the social work workforce.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/swcpd

Action Learning for Social Workers

Action Learning facilitation as a useful support package for NQSWs undertaking the ASYE. Our resources include a number of videos which provide the views of, managers and facilitators.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/socialwork

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