

METHODIST HOMES

Homes for the Aged

ORGANISATION CASESTUDY

Methodist Homes is the UK's largest charity care provider, supporting older people via specialist care homes and community work. Their community work focuses on promoting independence through offering low cost or free events and telephone befriending. Prior to the pandemic, they offered a range of community provision, including in-person events and a telephone befriending service for older adults living in their own homes. During the pandemic they moved to a new remote deliver model.



We spoke to a manager and staff member running one local scheme who both started as volunteers within the service before becoming local co-ordinators. The manager was promoted a year ago into her current role when she began managing a team of staff and around 30 volunteers. At the start of the pandemic, the manager recruited several staff members that no longer work for the organisation. They left because the job they were recruited to changed dramatically or no longer existed because of pandemic restrictions.

Her remaining staff member is over 25 and has been with the organisation for 5½ years. They are undertaking a Level 2 Apprenticeship. MHA also supported them in completing Maths and English qualifications prior to starting their Apprenticeship and provides other work-related training as required (e.g. a specialist dementia awareness course which was completed in March 2020 online).

MAIN CHALLENGES OF MANAGING DURING COVID:

Dramatically reduced income because the face-to-face activities they traditionally undertake with their members have not been possible during the pandemic. They have also furlough some staff and in some cases, voluntary redundancies were made. This meant that they had to adapt on how they support their members.

Staff and volunteers have needed to be flexible and responsive to the needs of scheme members during the pandemic, often dealing with emergencies. This constitutes a fundamental shift from running social events and activities. Some staff have required their manager to work through the complex individual situations of members to help them find the best supportive solution. Despite this support from their manager, one staff member recruited at the start of the pandemic, and some existing staff, have left because their role changed so much.



Staff and volunteers have also needed to adapt to running virtual events for members and communicating with each other using teleconferencing technology. Not everyone was familiar with the technology, or confident using IT more generally. The manager has been required to coach staff and volunteers in using the organisation's IT systems and adapting to online communication methods. There have been occasions where staff have had to computer share, however, there is a current roll out of new machines and a refurbishment programme of older ones which are re-distributed where required for use by staff and some volunteers.

When you have people that are not used to using those platforms [teleconferencing] it's very difficult. You send them the link and then you end up having to phone them to tell them what they have to do to get onto the call in the first place - it's about coaching them through everything. So, I've done an awful lot of coaching and mentoring people through the process of being able to get onto platforms like this.

Manager

Her staff member is very experienced and has therefore not required the same degree of support as a new starter. He has appreciated being left to manage his own workload and the relatively 'hands off' approach of his manager which has acknowledged his capabilities, but also stepping in to help resolve IT difficulties. Without face to face contact with his members and other staff, his role could be somewhat isolating, so the efforts made by his manager and regional managers to keep the team in touch via regular meetings and a staff WhatsApp group have been important. Locally the manager has focussed her regular one to one online supervisions on wellbeing.

Because we communicate and we're all in the same boat, then it's the case of they are there as a sounding board and it's great working with them because it enables you to be able to sense check something if you have doubts on it. For me, our communication channels have been invaluable over the year.

Staff Member

For the last two years, the manager and her direct report, along with another staff member from the region have been taking a Level 2 Operational Management Apprenticeship. This began as a classroom-based course but has now been moved online. Staff have formed a natural study support group which helps compensate for their reduced contact time with tutors. The skills that staff have developed through the course have proved useful for future business planning, particularly given the changes the service has experienced.

Over the last year the manager has needed to be flexible and understanding, accepting that staff may be facing issues at home. Communication skills have also been vital, particularly learning to chair online meetings well so that individuals feel able to contribute. They have also needed to update their own IT skills so that they can help others adapt to using new technology.

TOP TIPS FOR MANAGERS



Communicate appropriately, with clear expectations. [CMI clear communication checklist](#).



Provide opportunities for new/low skilled workers to develop their skills and knowledge through [Coaching, Mentoring](#), and [personal development](#).



Make use of programmes such as apprenticeships, traineeships, kickstart etc to attract new staff and support existing staff to develop. [Positive impact of apprenticeships](#). Consider, also, formal qualifications and Professional Membership for the development of key skills to motivate staff and deliver against organisational objectives.

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