



Never Giving Up On Anyone – what are we learning about how Small Supports organisations recruit and retain great staff?

21 September 2023

Partners:



What is a Small Support Organisation?

Supporting people with complicated lives, traumatic life histories, experiences of institutionalisation and complicated support needs

Supporting people 'to move out of / or at risk of being placed in', a secure/forensic long-stay institution

- The person and their loved ones are at the centre
- **A team of people recruited to support the person**
- A home of their own
- Investment in positive and supportive relationships
- A person-centred approach to safeguarding and risk
- Great outcomes for people and families
- Investing in the local area



What we're sharing today



- Learning from a small piece of ‘scoping research’ :
 - *What are Small Supports organisations doing & experiencing in finding and keeping great staff?*
 - In the context of well-known challenges around recruitment and retention in adult social care generally.
- **March-July 2023**
- **Desk based review:**
 - national picture (England and Scotland)
 - organisational data from 3 small supports organisations
- **1:1 and small group discussions** with cross-section of staff from three established small supports organisations
- Appreciate inquiry approach





The big picture in adult social care

- Hot topic everywhere – is social care in freefall?
- 1.6m people in England, 131k people in Scotland work in “adult social care”
- Massive vacancy rate, takes a long time to recruit people: big issues when organisations rush this process
- Turnover rate too high – 36.1% national average in England:
 - this figure is lower when people are trained and feel supported
 - varies by role & ‘pay grade’, discipline, area of the country, UK nation
 - pay & benefits make a difference but not as much as support & training
 - Measured differently in Scotland (stability index – healthier situation)
- White Paper, *People At The Heart of Care*: commitment to develop universal framework for knowledge, skills, support & a ‘career structure for the workforce’
- ‘Learning Disability & Autism Services’ – better overall than the national picture ; also varies by sector, role, type of support, organisation & environment
- Impact of covid and cost of living pressures



Organisational / national picture	Total posts available	Total in post	Vacant posts	Vacancy rate	Average time in post	Sickness levels	Turnover
National (England)	1.79m total;	1.64m;	152,000	9.9%	6.2 years	10.6 days	34%
	671,000 Learning disability & autism	583,000	88,000	8.4%	3-4 years	9.3%	26%
National (Scotland)	208,360 (Nuffield Trust, 2021)	Approx 131,136	36-50% of services have vacancies	5.1% (all services, 2020); elsewhere says 43%			Stability index of 75.5%
SS #1	264	229	35	13%	4 years, 1 month	4%	24%
SS#2	120	118	2	1.66%	4 years	?	20%
SS#3	156	141	15	9.6%	3.5 years	3.6%	25%

2022-23 data

Data is confusing & does not give you the full picture!

Conversations with Small Supports Staff

- 15 people from 3 organisations
- Range of roles and “seniority”
 - 3 directors / organisational leads
 - 12 members of staff : service leaders, team leaders, support workers, senior support workers, personal development workers, support advisors, service development coordinator, project lead
- Average time with organisation – **7.5 years** ranging from 1.5 years to 16 years +



Topics covered in discovery interviews

- People's discovery of and journey into small supports
 - Finding about the job/org; applying; interviews; selection
- Matching & induction experiences
- Day to day experiences
- Support, training, development, progression
- What people love and value the most
- What people find challenging and how challenges are addressed
- Some general characteristics – how many people supported, how many staff employed, length of time with the organisation, absence, why people leave etc.

**“It's not like
anywhere else”**



Discovery of & journey into Small Supports

Finding out/ finding people

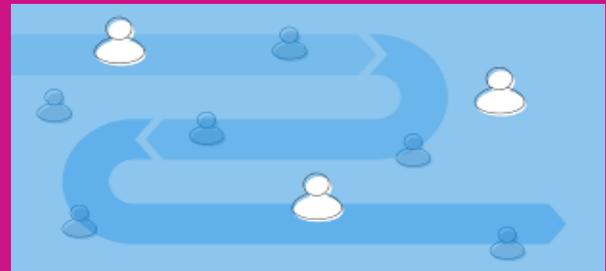
- **Mix of routes:** adverts, personal knowledge, seeking out, word of mouth, stumbling across, mix of “relevant” backgrounds
- **Different adverts:** tailored to the person, organisational values, attributes & interests, honest, shaped with the person &/or families, neighbourhood knowledge/insights a bonus
- **Values based** application

Starting the journey

- **Interview process:** values-based, two stages (match with the organisation then match with the person), scenario based, rigorous
- **Induction era:** values-based, rigorous, tailored, based around building a relationship with the person & the team, alongside essential training and support, shadow shifts are key

Test & learn approach

- **Matching crucial** throughout *“an art not a science”*
- **Takes time** to build relationships based on trust
- **Keep trying**



Day to day experiences



- **Centred on and around the person** : how they are, what's happening, interests, what works, opportunities, how to “be” out in the world (etc)
- **Connection, connection, connection**: what's strong not what's wrong, working / not working
- **Self-managing teams** : person centred, autonomous, mutually supportive, flexible
 - e.g. shifts and rotas
- **“We all know everyone”** - availability of managers and colleagues
- **Reflective practice** e.g. Care Nests

Sit together as a team in a circle with a host/guardian, be in a space & be honest with each other, nothing judged, all confidential. Bonding. Creates a place to be yourself & not be judged



Support, training, development, progression



- Rigorous about mandatory training – attention to detail and follow up with each colleague
- Mix of in-person and online – impact of covid
- Mix of home-grown, bespoke and wider opportunities – sense that home-grown is best
- Mutual support at all levels and all times
- Opportunities to develop in non-linear ways: what are you interested in, what can you offer, what do you need?

Good progression
routes as well as
enabling people to
stay in the role they
love



What I love the most / am most proud of

Seeing people's growth – its fantastic!

- *We treat people well*
- *We go the extra mile*
- *The strong values we have – its all about the people we work for first and foremost*
- *Amazing to see people living in their own homes and managing like everyone else, after having been in institutions for 20 years. Everyone wants the same things*
- *Getting the induction right – having open conversations from the start*



Challenges & how people manage them

“It’s her that keeps me here, keeps me going”

- Same challenges as everyone else
 - Covid and Brexit – *“recruitment more difficult, wasn’t expecting this”*
 - Process delays e.g. overdue DBS checks
- Getting the match right can be hard and takes time
- Shift work can be lonely, but support always at other end of phone *“check-ins to make sure all ok with the person and you”*
- Sleepovers are tough – impact of sleepless nights
- No-blame culture is essential – *“sometimes things don’t work for very good reasons, we need to learn from that”*

It’s a tough job, you have to really want to do it and believe in the mission



Some general characteristics

small in stature, big on aspiration

- **Small number of people supported in each area e.g....**
 - 19 people supported and 79 staff; 19 people and 67 staff; 17 people supported and 45-50 staff; 70 people supported & 235 staff
 - Numbers can only ever be contextual indicators – not a design feature
- Team for / around the person is a **complex balancing act** of right people matched with the person and team - across ‘funded hours’, shifts, week etc.
- **Attention to detail with eye on the bigger picture/ethos**
- **Everyone knows everyone else** – blend of values, skills, practice, systems
- Pay & benefits good compared to local alternatives – **creative, flexible, useful & reflect values**
 - Welcome hampers, helping people move, collecting from station



Central theme / message - values & relationships run through everything

“Its about the person, get the match right and everything else falls into place”

Values

- Shared by everyone
- Lots of examples/illustrations
- Difficulties and challenges are managed by reflecting on values, who & what matters

Relationships

- As important for staff/teams as it is for the person you're working for
- Benefit of being small – everyone knows everyone and what's important to each person



Some other big themes / messages

- **Learning organisations** – reflect, test & learn, open & inclusive culture
- **Size matters** – but so do skills and systems that reinforce the culture of small supports
- **Teamwork and mutual support** at all levels and in all places
- No-one said “**trauma informed practice**” but in essence this was clear from all conversations
- What are your “pillars of evidence”? **The beating heart of Small Supports does not lie in numbers** (but sometimes these indicate helpful patterns and impact)
- **Appreciative Inquiry** - no-one moaned about commissioners!



Questions, Discussion, *Take-aways*

Anything you want to ask/clarify?

Does this resonate?

What are your take-aways?



"A Hole in My Bucket?"

How spending decisions impact on the wealth and wellbeing of our communities.



Mike Richardson, NDTi, shares learning from work to investigate the local economic impact of commissioners investing in small bespoke support organisations in their locale.

Online
12-1 pm, Thursday, 19 October 2023



Thank you!

21 September 2023

Partners:

