



## Disability Sector Case Studies

### Recruiting and maintaining staff

What practices good organizations engage in that support people with a disability to recruit staff to work with them and how the organization sustains their staff through a range of learning and development supports.

In the area of recruiting and maintaining staff a range of strategies and practices exist. Different things work for different agencies. What follows here are two case studies that provide some examples of strategies that are used to recruit, engage and maintain disability support work staff.

Two case studies are presented below. Both describe:

- the different methods and strategies that organizations use to recruit their disability support staff
- how they use learning and development to sustain their disability support staff

### Organization No.1

The first organization is a large Melbourne metropolitan agency that provides disability support staff across a range of accommodation and support environments.

## Summary

This organization reports significant improvement in staff retention over the last few years due to:

- ❖ Improved selection process
- ❖ Strong orientation
- ❖ Ongoing training
- ❖ Supervision for all full time and part time staff

## Recruitment

To attract and recruit disability support workers this agency:

- Runs advertisements in local and/or Melbourne newspapers. This occurs in a planned way, when the casual pool of workers is running low.
- Offers full time and part time long term employment to workers in their casual pool. This approach has many advantages. It means that the organization is generally only offering permanent employment to staff whose work practices they have already observed, a great advantage for the agency and clients. The advantage for workers themselves is that they already know what their job involves. They have had an opportunity to see the full picture of both what is expected of them and how the organization works. As a result workers who find that the job does not suit them have the chance to leave whilst still in the casual pool . This leads to less staff turnover in the ongoing employment group of workers.
- Group interviews are held for recruitment. This cuts the time and cost of interviewing.
- Behavioural interviewing is used for the group of applicants. This involves the applicants giving real life experiences of situations they have found themselves in and explain how they responded. Interviewing in this way gives the employers the opportunity to find out not just about people's technical expertise, but about how they approach other workers, how they problem solve and what their past work experience has been.

Instead of asking what a worker might do in a particular situation, they ask what they have actually done in such a situation.

### Sustaining staff through learning and development

The support of staff through learning and development begins immediately with this organization:

- **Orientation** is seen as extremely important. This organization has a structured self paced orientation. New workers use Ready4work materials which can be used in a variety of ways. In this example the organisation contextualise the package with their own materials around policies and procedures. Ready4work is used as the basis of the orientation training. Workers are set up with a mentor, usually the house supervisor in the residential setting, and the office-based supervisor for outreach workers. If several workers commence work at the same time, some small group training is run using the Ready4work workbook theory and activity sheets. This might include the Occupational Health and Safety training, client information systems, orientation to the organization, working with people with a disability and others.

New workers then work through the Ready4work training materials on their own, self paced. This usually means that agreed timelines are set by the mentor and new worker, and they meet at regular times to discuss progress.

- New workers also attend one full day of **training** before they commence paid work. This day is held in a classroom environment and includes fire safety, medication, incident reporting and documentation.
- **Buddy shifts** follow. New workers are paid to do buddy shifts, this is there workplace training on site. They are welcome to continue buddy shifts (within reason) until they feel confident to work alone. Obviously this varies from job to job and worker to worker.

- A **review interview** is offered after a few weeks of work so that the new worker can meet with the supervisor and discuss any issues or concerns either have.
- Ongoing **formal supervision** interviews are part of this agency's planned approach to sustaining staff. Supervision is provided to all full time and part time staff. The focus is on worker's self development. Workers are given the chance to discuss and reflect on their work, and develop an individualized training plan. The aim is to hold meetings roughly fortnightly. (There is a lot of variation in this due to the very different number of hours worked.)
- Supervisors are also looking at the development of **organizational capabilities**. That is, they want to detect in their staff the capabilities that they want everyone in the organization to have. Supervision gives the opportunity to work on these.
- Opportunities for **ongoing training** come from Supervision and could include anything from a First Aid update, to training in Alzheimer's disease. The agency is trying to move away from group training when it is not necessary and looking more at mentoring and 1:1. For example some group training had been organized for one set of workers. When their training manager asked how it had gone a worker replied, "Oh they run a good session, but I've been to that one three times." They want to look at individualizing training to meet needs.

### Organization No. 2

This organization is a small to medium sized agency which provides accommodation support to people with a range of disabilities, but whose primary disability is sensory loss.

#### Issues in getting the right staff and maintaining staff

A few years ago this agency felt that they were facing some serious issues in attracting and keeping staff. They saw the major problems as:

- All the work offered is shift work (morning, evening and overnight)
- DHS can usually pay workers more
- Succession – how to you get workers to stay and eventually become good house managers and role models?

A strategy around recruitment, training, and salary packaging was developed by the training manager and other management staff.

#### Recruitment

This agency has found that they are recruiting successfully now by:

- **Recruiting locally.** They only advertise positions for disability support workers in the local newspapers near to where the work is located. Because so much work is early morning, evening, weekend and sometimes split shifts, they have found that the people more likely to be happy to continue with this arrangement are those who do not have to travel far.
- **Running information sessions.** When their casual pool is dropping, this agency runs an information session to recruit new casuals. They spend time describing exactly the work that is involved and find that some people will self select out of the process before interview because they are informed and do not wish to continue. This organization finds it a

tremendous advantage to inform workers of exactly what the job entails including the challenges and benefits prior to employment. In the past this self selection often used to happen after they had already employed people.

- Working closely with the **local TAFE**. The organization gladly takes Certificate IV in Disability Work students on their work placements. The benefits are mutual. They get to see the students as disability support workers in action and the students have the opportunity to experience what it is like to work for this agency.
- **Including people with a disability** in the final selection process. New workers are invited to undertake buddy shifts in the residential setting for which they have been potentially employed. It is up to the service recipients to finally approve employment. This is done via a house meeting.

### **Sustaining staff through learning and development opportunities**

1. This agency provides a **calendar** of regular ongoing training for which staff are **paid and backfilled**. The idea of payment to attend training is important to help people feel acknowledged and assisted to do their job well.

This training includes:

- Orientation
- First Aid
- Lifting, hoist use
- Medication
- Privacy
- Other topics that are identified via staff meetings

2. A program of **traineeships** is identified as extremely important in sustaining and developing staff. Eligible workers are offered traineeships in the Certificate IV in Disability Work and respond enthusiastically. The agency feels that loyalty

is built up by this program. Workers are glad to be offered the opportunity to undertake formal training, and then tend to stay with the agency after their traineeship is finished. Some of these workers are those who then go on to become House Supervisors. Workers who have trained with and in the organization feel they have opportunities to progress and help solve the succession issue.

3. Although not related to training, **salary packaging** for workers at this organization means that they can compete with Department of Human Services wages in the local area. This helps maintain staff in the organization.

## Links

### Behavioural interviewing

At [www.ssu.uts.edu.au/careers/fstudents/interviewtesting/behavioural\\_iq.html](http://www.ssu.uts.edu.au/careers/fstudents/interviewtesting/behavioural_iq.html) you can find an explanation of behavioural interviewing and example questions for behavioural interviewing (University of Technology Sydney).

Go to [www.careerone.com.au](http://www.careerone.com.au) for an explanation of [behavioural interviewing](#) and examples of the sorts of questions that might be asked. Look at menu on left side of page. Click on “job hunting advice”, scroll down to “Interview advice” and click on “Behavioural interviews explained.” At this address, again explanation of behavioural interviewing and examples of the sorts of questions that might be asked.

Behavioural interviewing advice can also be found on the DISTSS website at [www.distss.org.au/LD/cjp/bahavioural.doc](http://www.distss.org.au/LD/cjp/bahavioural.doc), including some behavioural interviewing questions at [www.distss.org.au/LD/cjp/interviewQuestions.doc](http://www.distss.org.au/LD/cjp/interviewQuestions.doc).

### Formal supervision

[www.infed.org/biblio/functions\\_of\\_supervision.htm](http://www.infed.org/biblio/functions_of_supervision.htm)

Describes historically the function of supervision in the social work context and Kadushin's model of the three pronged approach to supervision: administrative, educational, supportive.

This website: [www.infed.org/biblio/learning-organization.htm](http://www.infed.org/biblio/learning-organization.htm) makes the next step of linking supervision to learning organizations

Traineeship information for employers and employees – follow the links for employer or employee at

[www.newapprenticeships.gov.au/employer/](http://www.newapprenticeships.gov.au/employer/)

### Traineeship Information for Employers of Employees

Follow the links for employer or employee at

[www.newapprenticeships.gov.au/employer/](http://www.newapprenticeships.gov.au/employer/)

NTIS is the official national register of information on courses, qualifications, Training Packages, units of competency and registered training organisations:

[www.ntis.gov.au](http://www.ntis.gov.au)