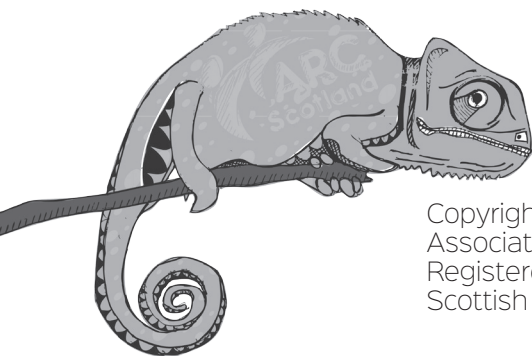


**A collective approach  
to improving  
recruitment in the  
social care sector**

A pilot initiative



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# Aim

This short report sets out the learning from a small initiative to pilot a partnership approach to address challenges with staff recruitment experienced by social care organisations in Fife.

We hope it will inform the development of similar initiatives that help to address this critical issue within the provision of care and support in Scotland.

# Background

Members of Fife Adult Provider Forum\* have frequently raised challenges associated with recruiting and retaining support staff. Following these discussions, a group of nine care provider organisations indicated a willingness in meeting to discuss a collaborative approach to tackle this issue.

*\*For information about local forums for care providers, see "Working together in Challenging Times", ARC Scotland (2015).*

An initial meeting of the interested organisations was held in June 2014, facilitated by ARC Scotland. A local voluntary sector enterprise agency (BRAG Enterprises) that provides support to individuals who are looking for work also participated. Later, Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) became interested in the work and participated in the delivery of the programme.

The participating social care provider organisations were: Alzheimer Scotland, Cornerstone, Crossroads Fife Central, Gowrie Care, Quarriers, Real Life Options, RNIB, Scottish Autism and Sense Scotland.

Despite taking diverse and creative approaches to staff recruitment, recruiting a full quota of staff remained an on-going challenge for most organisations. It was noted that young people can be attracted to the sector, however there is a need for mature and experienced staff. It was also noted that while each organisation had their own essential criteria to meet in their recruitment processes, there was a shared values base and broadly similar terms and conditions offered for frontline staff.

It was quickly agreed that an 'Introduction to Care' programme could be collectively delivered by the organisations present, with ARC Scotland providing a coordinating role. The programme would be designed to present the diverse job opportunities available in a localised geographic area, helping to address some of the narrow perceptions that exist concerning employment in the sector.

The programme would seek to reach diverse groups, including people already in employment, women returners and people from minority ethnic communities who may already have experience in the sector.

# Developing the programme

Following discussion with participating organisations, the following objectives were arrived at for the programme:

- To enable provider organisations to work collectively to address the difficulty they have with recruiting good staff in Fife
- To provide a high quality introductory programme that attracts the people with the right values into the care sector
- To provide a more cost-effective approach than the traditional recruitment methods
- To provide job applicants with an introduction to the necessary core skills.

It was agreed that the ethos and approach for the programme would be:

- To focus on person-centred approaches and values and be consistent with the values and principles of Self-directed Support
- To be innovative, fun and participatory with an emphasis on personal development and self-reflection
- For people who use services, their carers and families, to be actively involved in the delivery of training- and to be paid to do this
- To include introductions to core skills essential to all organisations
- To build in an awareness of the possibilities for future career progression in the care sector, for example through SVQs
- To provide training in employability skills for participants that wish it.

With the above objectives and ethos in mind, ARC Scotland agreed to draft a course programme and send it to participating organisations for comment and feedback.

It was initially hoped to speed up the recruitment process by conducting a PVG check at the beginning of the programme. However, as individual organisations would require to conduct a separate check following recruitment this objective was discounted. An overview of the requirement for a PVG check would be included in the programme. Issues concerning the PVG check and complications associated with lone working arrangements in some organisations led to a further decision not to offer participants practical experience in a work setting as part of the programme.

Along with focusing on person-centred approaches and input from supported people and carers, the programme would also include introductions to mandatory training such as working with vulnerable people, adult support and protection, health & safety and moving and handling. This aspect of the programme served only to raise awareness of these areas and did not seek to replace the provision of mandatory training delivered to new staff within individual organisations.



Organisations were invited to deliver specific sections of the programme related to their areas of expertise. This would allow the participants to learn first hand about the range of organisations operating in their area and the differing needs of the people they support. This included elements, such as behavioural support, person-centred planning, introduction to autism and dementia.

Completing this course would let providers know that people had explored and considered the key values and attitudes associated with working in the care sector and had an awareness of the different employment opportunities open to them. This would provide a sound base for the full training programme which would be required if they found employment later.

It was agreed to pilot the programme in Kirkcaldy, where several providers had vacancies. If this was successful, we would seek to hold similar courses in other areas of Scotland. Dates were agreed and venues booked to deliver the course over 4 days in February 2015. The chosen settings of Alzheimer Scotland's Fife Dementia Resource Centre and Fife RNIB would give participants a flavour of working in a social care environment.

The full course programme is shown at the end of this report.



## Supporting the work

ARC Scotland's role was to work with the participating provider organisations to coordinate and facilitate the process from designing to delivering the programme. ARC Scotland has facilitated the Fife Adult Providers Forum since 2008, so good working relationships and communication were already in place with the different stakeholders involved.

The role of BRAG Enterprise was to provide tailored employability support to meet individuals' specific requirements. BRAG Enterprises had also worked in partnership with a private sector social care organisation to deliver an introduction to care programme for unemployed young people. Their experience of this helped to inform this work.

SSSC showed interest in this work at an early stage and agreed that their Workforce Development Officer would come to do a session on the first day to describe the role of the SSSC and the need for Registration. This included an interactive online quiz <http://www.aquestionofcare.org.uk/home-page> to test out participants responses to various scenarios that might arise in a care setting. This was helpful for capturing people's attention the first day, and giving them an insight into their own values and attitudes.

Finally, Alexander Warren from AJP Dreams assisted with the programme by delivering a session from the perspective of a supported person called 'Flamboyant Dreaming' see: <http://www.ajpdreams.co.uk/AJP%20Dreams.html>

## Publicising the programme

The course content was agreed with participating organisations in December 2014 with a view to delivering the programme the following February. An attractive A3 poster was produced in hard copy and electronically and distributed widely in community, careers and college venues across Kirkcaldy. The participating agencies were asked to circulate information across their networks. A short application form was designed and made available on ARC Scotland's website.

Interested people were asked to contact ARC Scotland. Enquiries were received from colleges, voluntary and volunteering organisations, as well as people who had seen the poster in community and care settings. Eight applications were received from people with a broad range of backgrounds and experience. One person subsequently called off due to other commitments. The gender breakdown was four women to three men.

Two women applied because they had experience of working with adults with learning disabilities in Spain and were keen to get similar work in Fife. One woman saw our poster in the care home where her grandfather lived and was interested in pursuing a career in care, but didn't know how to get started. Another was seventeen years old and wanted to help young people who experience social anxiety. Two of the men had worked previously in factories and wanted to get more satisfying work. One had made this decision while sharing the care of his young son, while the other had seen his father get a good quality of life from working for a mental health organisation. The third man already managed a hostel for homeless people, and wanted to expand this into a social enterprise.

The course ran for four days over a two-week period in February 2015. Each day lasted from 9.30 till 3.00.

All seven participants completed the programme. There was full attendance at each of the four sessions.

## Cost

Staff time from participating organisations, ARC Scotland, BRAG and SSSC was provided free. Venues were provided by Alzheimer Scotland and RNIB for no cost. The total cash cost to delivering the programme was £247. This included paying for input from supported people and carers, refreshments and travel expenses. Funds for this were provided by ARC Scotland. There was no cost to participants for attending.

# Feedback from participants

Feedback was received from participants at the end of each day and at the end of the programme. They were given a 'reflection form' to complete each day to serve as a record of how their learning and ideas changed and developed over the two-week period. This was intended to help their personal learning and development and was kept private for them.

Time was set aside at the end of each day for the group to jot down on post-its some of their thoughts and feelings about themselves and the course topics for that day. These were put up on the wall for everyone to see as a way of charting their progress. This helped to draw out some feedback and generate discussion individually and as a group. Quotes received each day included:

## **Day 1 – Getting started in care, online quiz, career progression, registration**

*Expected it to feel much more formal – pleasantly surprised*

*Really pleased that people are so open and willing to talk*

*Informative, engaging and varied*

*Possibilities! The start of something new*

*A very supportive industry for both sides involved*

*Anxious that we 'hit' the right note, enjoyable, tiring (said by a trainer)*

## **Day 2 – Values and attitudes, professional boundaries, communication skills**

*Interesting to know about what causes the damage to vision*

*Open-minded, awareness, confident*

*Impressed how the RNIB building takes visual impairment into account*

*Easy to follow, interesting and interactive, deepened my understanding*

*A lot of new information about sensitive issues, but it felt comfortable and safe*

*I'm glad everyone came back today*

*Interesting influence between dementia and vision loss.*

## **Day 3 – Risk, issues for carers, person-centred care, behavior that challenges**

*Made me think about the harder parts of care, and how they can be dealt with*

*Touching, game-changer, informative*

*Today had the biggest impact. I learned so much, and it has given me a new option*

*It's lovely to see that everyone came back!*

*Great to hear from Viv about her family's story*

*Overload, hit by reality*

*The real stories are the best way to learn*

*See the person – not the label!*

*End of programme evaluation responses from participants were overwhelmingly positive. **Comments concerning improved knowledge and confidence included:***

*I feel a lot more comfortable and less scared about it, more certain*

*Much more confident, grateful*

*It has reinforced my belief that this is the right career path. More info= strength*



*I'm more confident. I think that I can do it even though I'm aware that I have to improve (my English)*

*A good point was being shown around the RNIB building. It gave more reality than the classroom*

*I feel more confident about sending myself out into the care world.*

*I've always wanted to work in the care environment, but this training has been a step to carry on*

*It showed me how many avenues will be open to me in the care industry*

*I have good info on companies and the industry in general*

*Hopefully I will move forward with more confidence*

*I feel more understanding and thoughtful. I think more when I see strangers, and wonder if their actions are ignorant and rude, or if it's because of a disability/illness*

**Most participants commented that the most helpful part of the programme was hearing directly from supported people and their carers:**

*Personal experiences. It's the best way to become more aware*

*I enjoyed it when Viv came in and talked about her autistic son. It opened my eyes completely, and opened some doors in my mind*

*Personal experiences were the best part because I could find out the facts anywhere, but it's not so easy finding out people's personal journeys.*

**Comments concerning progressing learning into a career in the care sector included:**

*I definitely want to work in the care sector*

*I was a bit scared and uncertain, but this course cleared my doubts about the line of work I want to follow*

*I was sure that it was what I wanted to do, so this course just reaffirmed what I want*

*Positive I will work in care*

*It left me wanting more. I want to improve my knowledge*

*I will make contact with the companies who were involved*

*I'll take this learning to introduce myself to the care sector*

*Next step is an appointment with BRAG, not for more info, but to talk about the best place for me*

*I will volunteer to get some experience and references*

*I will look to get more training and networking with service providers and service users*

*I really want to improve my knowledge about autism, I'm truly interested to work in that*

*I never thought of work in autism, and now I'm pretty sure that is what I want to do*

## Participant outcomes

As illustrated by some of the comments above, not all participants felt ready to progress directly from the programme into employment within the sector. Follow-up with the participants show that one woman got a job as Care Assistant in a care home in Glenrothes. She wrote “Your course helped me with my confidence to get me through the interview. I want to thank you for everything, the course was amazing!” However, her job was not with one of the participating organisations.

The two Spanish women continue to look for paid and voluntary work to get more experience here, as their previous work in Spain has not been recognized. One man is making good progress to get his hostel for homeless people approved by the Care Inspectorate. He recently contacted ARC Scotland to say he will shortly be advertising for two support workers and would welcome applications from the other people who attended the programme.

One young woman has been offered a place on a Social and Childcare course in Fife College. She will also be carrying out voluntary work in a social care setting over the summer.

The other two people are trying to make progress, but face challenges with the benefits system and developing the core skills that will help them to progress to employment. BRAG Enterprises and ARC Scotland remain in contact with participants to offer support and advice when it is called upon.

Despite these positive outcomes from participants, to date (12 weeks following completion of the programme) none of the participants have found employment with any of the organisations that helped to design and deliver the programme. Reasons for this are explored in the following sections.



## Feedback from participating organisations

Following delivery of the programme, representatives from participating organisations met to reflect on the pilot. People expressed the view that it was a very positive process for provider organisations working together on this initiative and this sense of partnership could be further developed. Comments included:

*Making links between providers has been really useful*

*I really feel that I could phone you up (other provider organisation) if I was recruiting to look at a joint event. It's not a competition*

Many of the participating professionals commented on how well the group had 'bonded' and the high level of engagement and inquisitiveness they showed throughout the programme.

It was good to know that one person had secured a job so quickly after the course and that she recognized the benefits of taking part to her confidence levels. However, given that none of the participating organisations had so far recruited through the initiative, there is a question over the return on investment for staff time.

Over the 10-month period it had taken to design and deliver the programme, many of the participating organisations had managed to fill the vacant posts that motivated them to engage with the partnership. They were therefore not able to promote suitable vacancies in their organisations to participants at the end of the programme. However, all said that they would welcome applications from participants in the future.



## Learning

1. Social care organisations are willing to set aside individual commercial concerns to work collectively to address challenges associated with staff recruitment
2. Some people who wish to consider a career in the care sector benefit from an informal intermediary step, such as was delivered by this programme, to help develop their awareness of options open to them and confidence to engage
3. Through harnessing the specialist knowledge of local organisations, supported people and carers, it is possible to deliver an engaging and cost-effective introductory programme that will motivate people to progress a career in the sector
4. In an introductory programme, it is more important to focus on values, attitudes and peoples lived experience- rather than than skills and knowledge, which can be developed once people have progressed to employment
5. The length of time taken to develop and deliver the programme meant that most participating organisations no longer had vacancies and therefore (to date) have not had any direct return on the time investment they have made
6. Participants may wish to seek outcomes related to further study or voluntary work, rather than employment. These are valid outcomes, however again do not necessarily result in a direct benefit to participating organisations
7. Given the above, it may be necessary to seek a small amount of additional resource to offset the costs to providers associated with the delivery of future programmes
8. The cost / benefit ratio for providers could be further improved by increasing the number of provider organisations that directly contribute to the delivery of the programme (8 organisations participated in delivering this pilot)
9. It is highly beneficial to have a local employability organisation involved in order to provide continuity of support beyond the programme for those who are not ready to progress directly to employment.

## Next steps

ARC Scotland will discuss the implications of this pilot with members of the Fife Adult Provider Forum and gauge interest in running a second pilot in another area in Fife (possibly St Andrews) later in 2015.

We will seek to substantially reduce the development time in order to provide more direct access to employment opportunities within organisations that choose to participate and seek to increase the number of participating organisations.

We will plan to support outcomes such as voluntary work and further study, as well as open employment, in the programme planning.

ARC Scotland and BRAG will, as far as possible, continue to monitor and support the progress of the participants who attended this programme.

*With sincere thanks to all the individuals and organisations that invested their time, goodwill and commitment to this pilot*

For more information or to discuss holding a similar programme in your area, please contact Brid Cullen or James Fletcher at ARC Scotland

**James Fletcher, Director ARC Scotland**

James.fletcher@arcuk.org.uk

0131-663 4444

<http://arcuk.org.uk/scotland/>

