

Disability Sheffield Centre for Independent Living

Testing innovative approaches to the recruitment of personal assistants (PAs)

2016-2017

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Background

Disability Sheffield is a not for profit disabled people's user-led organisation that supports individual employers.

We're also part of the Sheffield individual employer and personal assistant (PA) development group – this is a group of individual employers, PAs, carers, Sheffield City Council and Sheffield Clinical Commissioning Group. The group exists to ensure that social care developments in the city benefit from lived experience.

Sheffield has ongoing issues with the recruitment of PAs and we wanted to work with local education providers to increase awareness of the PA role and vacancies amongst students, particularly on relevant courses.

In the past we've worked with Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Sheffield's Careers and Employment Services and found this was a successful way of recruiting PAs who were flexible and willing to learn. However we also found that some students had a lack of understanding about the variation within the PA role and were unaware of the opportunities for development and career progression.

To increase this understanding and awareness, we used Skills for Care funding to develop and run six taught sessions with university students studying relevant courses at Sheffield Hallam University.

We worked with the Health and Wellbeing Faculty at Sheffield Hallam University to organise this. We also did additional careers fairs and drop in sessions with the Careers and Employment Service at the University.

We also developed supporting resources which could be adapted for different types of events.

Aims

The aim of this project was to share a broader understanding of the PA role to encourage more students to consider it as a career choice.

We wanted to:

- encourage more students to consider becoming a PA whilst learning or as part of a career pathway
- empower more individual employers and PAs to share their experience and knowledge, and develop their skills by presenting the sessions
- enable higher education providers to access learning resources to enhance their curriculum
- deliver a sustainable increase in PAs available for employment.

We aimed to recruit five individual employers and five PAs to co-produce the sessions and support the delivery of them. We wanted to speak to over 200 students on courses with Sheffield Hallam University Health and Wellbeing Faculty.

We hoped that this would result in an increase in the number of people visiting the website and registering on the PA register.

In the long term we hoped that the sessions and resources would be embedded into the university curriculum, and that we would be invited to further recruitment events through the Careers and Employment Service.

What did we do?

We recruited a coordinator to manage the project and agreed a schedule of tasks for each stage. This became a working project plan using a traffic light system to show what was completed (marked in green), what was in progress (amber) and what was still to do (red).

We then identified individual employers and PAs to get involved in the project – we used existing contacts to do this.

We identified what the taught sessions would cover.

Originally we wanted to hold a discussion forum with students to identify their perceptions of the PA role at the beginning of the project, and compare this to their perceptions at the end. However due to timetabling this wasn't feasible.

Instead, we sent out a questionnaire to students to understand what their perception of the PA role was – we'd then use this to develop resources to dispel myths and misconceptions.

The questionnaire covered three areas:

1. What is an individual employer and PA: including information about paid carers and PAs and the different tasks they might do as a PA.
2. Where they would go for information about being a PA or to find job adverts.
3. Insight into the best ways to communicate with students: including what format information should be in and the types of social media they used.

This was emailed to 20 tutors to circulate to their MA and BA students in the Health and Wellbeing faculty.

We also sent it to community nurses, GPs and other health colleagues through the CCG to gauge their understanding.

From the feedback we highlighted key themes which formed the basis of six taught sessions and supporting resources.

We trained individual employers and PAs to deliver the sessions

The coordinator developed a training session to support individual employers and PAs to deliver the sessions. It includes practical tips about presenting and key messages about the project.

We tested the session on the wider group before delivering it.

Here's the presentation we developed:

[Good practice: supporting presentations trainer notes.](#)

We developed and delivered six taught learning sessions at Sheffield Hallam University.

We tested the sessions with the group and made suggested changes before delivering them to students.

The [Learning and information resource](#) gives an overview of each session, what they hope to achieve and how they can be used in different settings.

The sessions can be standalone or as part of a wider programme:

One	<p>Personal budgets and personal health budgets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Download the presentation.▪ Download the glossary of terms. <p>This session was delivered at the request of the University. We delivered it once to 38 second year BA Social Work students.</p>
Two	<p>Terminology and difference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Download the handout. <p>This session explains the different terms used to describe different social care roles and how a PA is different to other care workers.</p>
Three	<p>What is the role of a PA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Download the overview of activities.▪ Download the 'What the PA role is' true or false handout.▪ Download the 'The importance of the relationship' handout.▪ Download the 'Scenarios: what the role of the PA is' handout.

	<p>This session explores the role of a PA and what values, behaviours and attitudes you need to do the role. It looks at a range of scenarios where there is potential for conflict or risk at work and asks people what they'd do to resolve it.</p>
Four	<p>Being a PA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Download the handout. <p>This session looks at five main areas of care and support a PA might provide, and the types of activities that might be involved.</p>
Five	<p>How to become a PA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Download the handout. ▪ Download the 'Working as a PA – all you need to know' leaflet. ▪ Download the 'How to register as a PA' leaflet. <p>This session gives information about employment. It explains how students can register as a PA in Sheffield.</p>
Six	<p>Personal assistants sharing their experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Download Alex's PA journey. ▪ Download Francine's PA journey. ▪ Download Lucy's PA journey. <p>This session is an audio of three PAs saying how they became a PA and what they do in their role.</p>

We delivered sessions two – five to over 60 students – we did this in three sessions delivered to those on a BA social work degree, MA social work degree and applied nursing and social work degree.

We attended a careers and employment drop in centre. The case studies from session six were played on a video screen and we delivered session two to four as an informal session. We also gave out leaflets to those interested. In total six people dropped in and we spoke to fifty people outside when we were leafleting about the session.

We also attended another employment fair that had over 327 delegates, 100 of which came to speak to us.

We promoted the sessions within the university

We developed a communications plan that outlined how we'd promote the sessions and raise the profile of the PA role across the University.

We placed a link on the Sheffield Hallam University UniHub (coordinated by the Careers and Employment Service). This promoted the session about being a PA and linked to our PA register.

147 viewed the advert and 51 clicked through to the application form. Whilst 84.6% of these clicks were from students in the Faculty of Health and Wellbeing, there were also students from business, engineering and creative courses that were interested.

We evaluated the sessions with students.

We asked students six questions to evaluate the sessions:

- Did the training meet the expected outcomes
- How well was it presented
- Was the learning informative
- Were the resources used helpful
- Will you use the information
- Would you recommend this learning to others

What did we achieve?

We found that more people had visited the Disability Sheffield website since the project started.

Increase in PAs registering

Between January and March **721** looked at the PA register home page, **141** people went straight to the PA register home page, **58** people went straight to support for individual employers and PA page and **52** people went straight to the blog promoting the sessions.

These had increased from the quarter before (October – December 2016) where 341 people looked at the PA register home page, 108 went straight to it and 21 people visited the support page.

We also promoted the sessions on the Sheffield Forum and 355 people viewed it.

In total 21 people fully registered to become a PA, 25% of whom are male, and a further 19 have partially completed the application.

From the evaluation forms following the taught sessions in University, 16 people have requested a follow up call with more information, and others have directly emailed Disability Sheffield to request information about becoming a PA.

Emily Morton, Chief Executive of Disability Sheffield said:

“[\[We’ve seen a\] definite increase in being a PA, increased number of people using the PA register, queries, \[and accessing information\] regarding becoming a PA](#)”

Increase in individual employers advertising their vacancies

We also saw an increase of 50% in the number of individual employers advertising their vacancies on the register between November 2016 and March 2017. This means there are more employment opportunities for PAs registering.

Ongoing support from Sheffield Hallam University

The Sheffield Hallam University Careers and Employment Service now have a permanent live advert that promotes the PA register and vacancies.

We've also agreed to attend three recruitment events per year and the opportunity to have one specifically for Disability Sheffield.

Going forward individual employers and PAs will be delivering sessions two – five as part of four study skills days across the Faculty for Health and Wellbeing. Session one will become part of an adult pathway personalisation curriculum to strengthen their teaching.

What did we learn?

We found that co-producing all resources and learning materials worked well as this gives more ownership to individual employers and PAs. Trialling the resources and evaluating them at each stage meant we were able to ensure they were fit for purpose but also able to sign them off quickly.

Working with Sheffield Hallam University brought lots of benefits to the project. The resources and sessions are influencing and enhancing the taught curriculum, and the input from those with lived experience has added value to the sessions and stimulates discussions.

One participant said:

“I found all of it useful, I had little knowledge on the role of personal assistants. I liked the presence of the service user and his PAs in the session having their say about their own experience “

We found that it was particularly important to offer the training sessions to individual employers and PAs who delivered the session, to develop their presentation skills.

We found that having a range of resources meant we can adapt what we deliver based on the setting. For example we had resources to support one to one meetings, group discussions and careers fairs.

From our experience we found that smaller groups worked better than large lecture theatres – we’d suggest groups of around 25 people.

Throughout the project we found it difficult to communicate with Further Education Colleges. They represent a whole cohort of people who could benefit from this work so we need to dedicate more time to this.

We’d also recommend increasing the footfall at the drop in sessions and taught sessions by promoting them outside of the university, for example we could promote them through recognised training providers.

We’d also suggest having a ‘plan b’ in case individual employers and PAs are absent due to sickness, last minute – always try and have a reserve.