

Royal Liverpool University Hospitals NHS Trust uses the team leader/supervisor apprenticeship to prepare their newly appointed Volunteer Project Recruitment Administrator for the challenges of the role.

Case Study

Royal Liverpool University Hospitals NHS Trust has a staff of 6,500 and in the region of 300 volunteers who are centrally managed by a small Volunteer Services Team. Volunteer Project Recruitment Administrator Julie Sheridan is currently doing a level 3 team leader/supervisor apprenticeship. We caught up with Julie and some of her colleagues to find out more about the apprenticeship and the impact it is having.

Julie is an experienced member of the volunteer team and has previously held positions in education and as a learning mentor. Recently appointed to her current

role, the team leader/supervisor apprenticeship is a way of formalising some of her existing skills whilst also developing a range of new ones to support the complex environment in which she works. Primarily Julie's role focusses on the recruitment and on-boarding of the volunteers. There are lots of different factors to deal with on a daily basis from placing adverts, interviewing potential volunteers, organising the relevant checks to be carried out, setting up volunteer agreements, troubleshooting issues as they arise, training and coordinating training sessions for volunteers and liaising with staff on the wards. To keep a handle on it all Julie needs to have excellent people and communication skills.

Caption for photo



The trust has partnered with a new training provider, Everton in the Community, to deliver this apprenticeship and Julie attends college for an afternoon every other week. Aside from the face to face sessions at college the training is underpinned by e-learning, self-study and on programme assessments which all add up to make sure she is receiving at least 20% off-the-job training required for an apprenticeship.

“We chose this provider because they are very professional, focussed on the learner experience and happy to take small cohorts. Feedback from other employers using Everton in the Community was also excellent,” said Annette Pollit, Learning and Development Lead

The trust has a well-formulated approach to selecting which apprenticeship is right for the individual. A workforce review analyses the competencies that are needed in the team, identifying where there may be any gaps; a training needs analysis checks what the individual has already done and where they may have both the scope and the aspiration to develop further; and a review of the content of individual apprenticeship standards is carried out to see which one could be the best fit. The prospective apprentice, their line manager and the learning and development team are all involved in the process.

“The Team Leader/Supervisor apprenticeship seemed to be right for Julie. There are so many things that she has already done in previous roles and the work we do as a volunteer services team is so complex and multi-faceted that a range of management and leadership skills seemed like the perfect choice,”

said Alison Germain-Martin, Volunteer Services Manager who is Julie’s line manager.

Julie only started the apprenticeship a couple of months ago and is part-way through the first module. The cohort she is with is very small and so she has plenty of one on one time with the course tutor. The only drawback is that there are less opportunities for group activities and interaction which Julie would also like to experience. The team are exploring ways to address this.

Alison previously supervised apprentices on the apprenticeship frameworks (predecessors to standards) and noted that the team are still adjusting to the new model. **The relationship between employer, apprentice and training provider is the cornerstone of the new style apprenticeships** and both Alison and Julie felt they will benefit from the tripartite meetings that support Julie’s apprenticeship agreement. These reviews are built into the apprenticeship and are scheduled to take place at 3-month intervals. Tri-partite meetings are a chance for Alison as the mentor, Julie as the apprentice and the training provider to check against the apprenticeship standard and end point assessment plan and ensure that Julie is moving through the learning at an appropriate rate. It is also a chance to ensure all gaps in knowledge and experience will be

addressed with plenty of time to avoid a rush or panic towards the final stages of the apprenticeship and when preparing for end point assessment.

“We have been able to talk through some of the more global issues that have come up in Julie’s learning to date, sharing personal experiences and looking at how they relate to the role,”

said Alison.

“It’s important that there is a correlation between the learning in action and the development of the service.”

Overall the trust has about 160 individuals on apprenticeships in a range of non-clinical roles including customer service, business administration, management, leadership, HR, finance and service improvement as well as a range of clinical roles such as senior healthcare support workers, assistant practitioners, advanced clinical practitioners, healthcare science associate and nursing associate. Future developments may include registered nurses and other allied health profession degree apprenticeships. The trust is working with the board to see if there is any scope for using their vacancies to help fund apprentices in high priority areas like nursing.

“It has taken time for people to recognise the potential impact of apprenticeships”

said Annette

“Originally to drum up interest we started by advertising the ones that people were more familiar with such as customer service, business administration and support worker. But now it is gradually becoming more and more accepted within the trust. People at all levels are engaging and taking apprenticeships themselves from senior managers all the way down. We are also working to ensure that people can step in directly from pre-employment programmes into apprenticeships.”

Numeracy and literacy are a key element of all apprenticeships. Luckily for Julie she already has the necessary certificates but for others in the trust there are opportunities to develop these skills both within and outside of the apprenticeships. Additional support is also available for staff from overseas or for whom English is not their first language. Whilst some apprenticeships, such as senior healthcare support worker, have a unit that focusses on study skills, in others, these skills may not be covered explicitly and so the apprentice may need extra help from their tutor, line manager or mentor to figure out the best ways to present their work.

“I had to stop the tutor and ask how to do referencing,”

says Julie.

“It just wasn’t something I’d ever had to do before.”

Soon there will be a business administration apprentice at level 3 joining the team. This means that in a few weeks’ time Alison will be mentoring and line managing two apprentices as well as line management of the others in her team and supporting the 300 volunteers. Volunteer services frequently have very small staff numbers. Like other small professions, this means that there is a risk that embracing the apprenticeship agenda could mean that the capacity of the team’s manager may be stretched.

“Taking on an apprentice is more than just agreeing to release them from work,”

said Alison. However, she could certainly see the benefits of an apprenticeship.

“People join volunteer services from a range of different routes and until recently there has been no consistency between the qualifications that they have. The apprenticeship means that people have transferable skills that can be recognised in a host of other organisations and roles.”

There can also be challenges with doing a ‘generic’ apprenticeship too. Some of the learning feels hard for Julie to apply directly to her work.

“We did a piece of work on recruitment, which is obviously a major part of my role, however recruiting volunteers just doesn’t fit neatly with HR processes. They don’t have an employment contract and so the same principles do not all apply.”

However, by working through these issues between them Julie and Alison are able to identify the differences so that Julie can both understand the theory yet apply it in a way that exactly fits the service in which she works.

So what advice do the team have for other volunteer services thinking about employing apprentices?

“We see the apprenticeships as a way of growing your own. It’s a talent pipeline, starting right from the bottom to the top of the organisation. It lets them grow into our organisation’s vision and values. Many of our apprentices are existing staff. These are local people, with local connections who are most likely to continue working with us for a long time. By developing our staff we can create opportunities for them to fill vacancies at different levels.” says Annette.

“Don’t underestimate how much time it can take to mentor an apprentice,” she says. *“Depending on the age and experience of the person it can vary considerably. Julie is self-motivated and very independent but another apprentice could need additional pastoral support, especially if it is their first job or they are returning to work after a long gap,”* says Alison

And to the apprentices themselves?

Julie says *“Give it a go!”*