
COMPENDIUM OF GOOD PRACTICES IN STAFF ENGAGEMENT, MOTIVATION AND RETENTION

December 2018

01.

INTRODUCTION

For over twenty-five years, the European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR) has been supporting its members in identifying the factors that will allow them to increase the quality of rehabilitation service to person with disabilities (PwD). Among these factors of higher quality and organizational performance are the level of staff engagement, motivation and retention. Specifically, EPR is supporting their members in understanding their current staff engagement, motivation and retention levels in comparison to that of others, but also how to improve those levels by observing and understanding what similar organisations are doing across Europe.

In the 2017 report “Recruitment & Retention in Social Services, Unlocking the Sector’s Job Creation Potential!”, commissioned by Social Services Europe, details the factors associated with better performance on staff motivation and retention for organisations working in social service delivery with access to training and lifelong learning, a successful employer brand presence, making the jobs more accessible, and the introduction of more engaging leadership practices.

This research has also identified several barriers to recruitment and retention, namely that social services often lack resources to address the growing range of needs in society, and that working conditions, training and pay must improve so that social services work is valued as a profession.

This compendium of good practices in staff engagement, motivation and retention looks at success factors from five organisations working with persons with disabilities and their solutions for looking after employee well-being, continuous development, thereby ensuring high quality of services and loyalty, including suggestions to other organisations. These five reports are further completed by recommendations to local and European policy makers to support the continuation of these good practices in other contexts.

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¹ https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/9f45fc_bea7508e73f4c57b43b3a19b1fe07ac.pdf

02.

APPACDM DE COIMBRA

APPACDM de Coimbra is a Portuguese organisation employing 234 persons, providing a wide range of services to persons with disabilities. They are based in Coimbra, in Portugal.

Key Findings

- A management style that is results based rather than hours-based for middle to upper management, and offers extra vacation days to those who exceed performance goals
- Empowerment of staff to feed into the organisation's plans (with a small bonus to the best initiatives/ideas)
- The quality culture survey that helped identify blind spots in employee satisfaction

In a country hit hard by an economic recession, APPACDM de Coimbra, a service provider to persons with intellectual disabilities, generally does not struggle to find qualified staff for more technical positions. Its stability over the years has earned it a good reputation for technical staff looking for a stable position, and its above-average retention rate reflects that as well.

Digging deeper into staff motivation

As an organisation with a strong focus on service quality, APPACDM regularly monitors the satisfaction of its staff along various quality indicators, and for several years 90% of their staff respondents² declared feeling motivated at work. Since 60% of respondents said they were “highly motivated” at work, APPACDM decided to use the Quality Culture Survey³ tool to investigate the staff satisfaction and motivation factors at work, and better understand where the organisation over and under-performs.

The Quality Culture Survey results identified specific areas where motivation was under 65%. From there, the organisation identified a series of actions, such as: offering physical activities like Zumba® specifically offered to staff members over 50 years of age to promote fitness and team spirit; a form of recognition for staff exceeding performance on their annual evaluation; or a training budget that can be accessed by staff on request. For the latter, those identified in their unit or service as having the best performance get extra days off. While these initiatives do not cost a lot of money, it is expected that in the coming months, when the 2018/2019 Quality Culture survey results will be compiled, the organisation will see an improvement in its measure of satisfaction over these specific areas.

Working autonomously

APPACDM de Coimbra believes that to make a job more attractive, it must provide some autonomy for the staff to do what they need to do and focus on results rather than efforts. Service users give the organisation goals and the organisation lets staff working on achieving it, rather than ask for timesheets or telling staff which methods to use.

Staff well-being and active ageing

As the average age of service staff gets higher, and as service users get older themselves, organisations delivering physical everyday services to persons with disabilities must find ways to avoid the physical

² With a participation rate of above 90% over the last 5 years

³ <https://www.equass.be/index.php/activities/consultancy-proj/projects/tvlc-project>

consequences of the job on the body. The fitness sessions offered to older staff support this, alongside with assistive devices and equipment designed to avoid injury when carrying or lifting service users.

Planning the services

The staff satisfaction survey includes suggestions for improvements. In each service, teams send their input and suggestions they come up with in meetings for planning the service. To increase participation in this process, staff were invited to write suggestions on paper, in case they are not confident enough to give their feedback in a group setting. This adjustment led to a staff participation rate of over 90%. APPACDM de Coimbra also organises a contest for the three best ideas from staff, with a financial prize attached to it.

Advice to other organisations looking to work on their staff satisfaction, retention and engagement

APPACDM de Coimbra recommends the Quality Culture Survey exercise to organisations looking to identify areas of over- and under-performance. Whatever the tool used⁴, it should be external, to avoid blind spots, and if possible, externally validated and suited to the sector

03.

THE CEDAR FOUNDATION

The Cedar Foundation supports individuals and families living with disability, autism and brain injury by delivering a range of services that enable people with disabilities to get the most out of life and to be fully included in their communities. They are based throughout Northern Ireland and have over 560 staff members.

Key Findings

- Investors in People (IIP) Platinum award organisation, the IIP detailed assessment report steers future improvement
- Staff engagement from the beginning, the IIP awards recognised the commitment Cedar has to staff development
- Very strong focus on coaching and mentoring of staff, for succession planning, dealing with challenging behaviour

Living and believing the values

Adherence to the organisational values is a major factor in staff motivation at the Cedar Foundation. As the Investors in People (IIP) report remarks, staff are aware that they make a difference, and understand and share the core values of collaboration, equality, dignity, achievement and resilience. These values were developed with staff, which explained why the organisation successfully managed their adoption in every day work. They are the first social care organisation to have been awarded Platinum status.

⁴ An alternative would be the *Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI)*, based on Quinn and Cameron's Competing Values Framework Model.

Valuing staff

Cedar engages in benchmarking activities, to understand how their policies affects the well-being and satisfaction of staff. Policies like recognition of high performance, the specialist training programmes, family-friendly policies with regards to leave of absence and working from home are put in place to ensure happiness at work.

Training, coaching and supporting staff

Cedar organises a robust induction programme, including coaching and mentoring training for management staff, to make sure there is succession planning and a skill transfer. A sustained investment in training and development is provided, from the beginning of employment, and covers a wide range of expertise and competences.

For staff working in more demanding positions, like working with people with challenging behaviour, that means access to more support and specialised training to develop the necessary skills to work in that environment, and a higher pay to reflect the nature of the job. In more highly intensive environments, the work conditions are also adapted, with reduced shift patterns, a time-out facility for staff and debriefing after incidents to review lessons learned. These adaptations are very effective and valued by staff.

Performance and quality at the centre of the service

From the beginning of their employment at the organisation, staff are engaged in performance management. Staff understand the quality objectives for themselves and the organisation, and how they can contribute to those. To support this, staff have their own individualised workplan including a learning and development plan.

Attracting talent

Attracting staff can be difficult for some positions, for example the less qualified roles within the supported living services. Cedar works to encourage people to view those roles as a profession, by highlighting career development within these fields and showcasing video clips of staff in these roles and how they developed in the Cedar Foundation. These video clips are on the Cedar Foundation website.

Advice to other organisations looking to work on their staff satisfaction, retention and engagement

Externally assessing the level of staff engagement and satisfaction with the collaboration of Investors in People (IIP) helps the organisation better understand where the performance can be improved , but can also be a great source of pride for an organisation, and a way to brand Cedar as an employer of choice.

FUNDACION INTRAS

Fundación INTRAS is a Spanish provider of services to persons with a disability. They have 290 staff members and are mainly active in and around the city of Valladolid

Key findings

- When dealing with a difficulty in recruiting certain profiles, INTRAS differentiates itself by offering flexi-time and working
- from home whenever the role allows it.
- Being included as a content expert on EU projects and attend international meetings is one of the perks for its staff, and they make sure to involve practitioners whenever possible.
- While salaries are not very high, they have been able to withstand the economic crisis without too much movement to the staff, and that has earned them loyalty from the staff.

Flexibility at work

INTRAS offers some staff a flexible work arrangement, such as working from home, working different hours, whenever the role allows it. This allow the foundation to attract qualified talent that might otherwise choose to work in the private sector for higher wages, but was not offered that flexibility there.

Innovative benefits

Another way that the Foundation offers unusual benefits to staff is through European projects. INTRAS is regularly involved in European Projects, such as in the research and development of new technologies, or in volunteer exchanges across Europe. In it, they involve their technical staff and practitioners as content experts, to contribute to international project meetings abroad.

Stability in team

While salaries in disability services are generally not very high, and despite the funding cuts to the sector, INTRAS has been able to withstand the economic crisis without too much variation to the staff composition, and that stability has earned them loyalty from the teams. The stability further benefits the clients, who appreciate to have familiar faces in their services. Another way to reward loyalty and talent is to train and promote from inside, especially for management positions that are more difficult to fill.

Continuous learning and support

Through the European projects and its internal training programme, staff has access to concrete training programmes that give them the possibility to grow with the organisations. For staff in more demanding roles, such as dealing with challenging behaviour, staff must have the training and the tools to engage with the demands of the role without their own mental and physical well-being taking a toll. INTRAS also offers solutions to avoid burn-out such as a workplace psychologist, the reallocation of roles and tasks.

Quality from the bottom to the top

Staff at all levels are engaged in planning and defining activities that will improve the offering of INTRAS, increase productivity or raise the profile of the Foundation. Teams can also earn productivity bonuses, which encourages continuous improvement. Staff can approach the director with their own improvement ideas, thanks to an open-door policy for the workplace.

Advice to other organisations looking to work on their staff satisfaction, retention and engagement

Employers can find creative ways to make the job prospects more attractive for their employees, whether it be by offering flexibility in their work arrangements or by bringing them in as content experts in international research projects.

05.

JG BENEDIKTUSHOF

JG Benediktushof Maria Veen is an organisation that employs 550 people serving persons with disabilities with labour training and inclusion, living services and therapeutic services. It is based in German, near the city of Reken. Benediktushof is part of the JosefsGesellschaft group of companies

Key Findings

- A place to work that is less top-down, higher management accessible to staff
- A great focus on employee well-being and health, to reduce burn-out stress and absenteeism
- The Great Place To Work⁵ report challenges the organization to do better, and continuously improve

Attracting local talent

To attract and retain qualified staff, Benediktushof is advertising its work and vacancies in the local newspaper, in local schools, on Facebook, to target persons likely to take part in a traineeship in the organisation (20 in 2018). In Benediktushof's field of work, nurses and educators are the hardest profiles to find. To make their positions more attractive, JG makes sure that persons can work in an attractive environment.

Reducing stress and burn-out with sports

Aware of the studies linking lower burn-out and stress-related absenteeism in workplaces that encourage physical activity, Benediktushof created a series of actions to encourage sports at and around work for its staff. Staff can also take part in physical activity in their work-time. The sickness leave rate is at 5%, lower than the 7% rate benchmark for comparable organisations.

A welcoming environment

Benediktushof believes in providing a welcoming environment and atmosphere for their staff, much like a hotel welcomes its guests. New staff are provided a folder with the most important information. In addition, there is a day at which the Benediktushof is shown to the new staff and the CEO welcomes the staff with some personal words. The philosophy at Benediktushof is that every staff is valued for their contribution, regardless of the position. For this reason, the organisation makes sure that the CEO is accessible to all, with an open-door work culture, different to what you would expect to find in similar organisations in Germany.

Supporting the staff and the organisation through the challenges

The centre provides special training and grieving support with a coach, as the job can be tough for some staff positions, for example when a service user dies. Alongside physical wellbeing, psychological and spiritual wellbeing are important to Benediktushof.

⁵ <https://www.greatplacetowork.com/>

Likewise, staff can contribute to the growth and wellbeing of the organisation by participating in an annual meeting of two hours, where everything that could be improved is discussed. A scorecard system helps staff better see the target for the next year, and suggestions for improvement are also collected in written on a questionnaire, as well and informal calls to the CEO.

Progressing and growing at Benediktushof

Key to the motivation and satisfaction of staff are the opportunities for growth and learning provided by the organisation. The internal further education program, a one- or two-day education program, teaches staff useful practical skills. Sometimes it can lead to a promotion, like becoming head of department. Staff can work on different projects to vary their workload and experience gained at Benediktushof.

A quality place to work

Benediktushof takes its goal to be a better organisation very seriously, and so everyone in the staff was very proud to be one of the Great Places to Work⁶ in Germany, the only one in health services for this award in Germany, which lead to people asking how that award came about, and how they can do better. Benediktushof also learned that it becomes harder to stay the best than to get there in the first place, and this is keeping the pressure on the organisation to do well.

Recommendations for local and EU policy-makers

It is clear to Benediktushof leadership that there is a connection between employee motivation and satisfaction, and quality of services experienced on the user's side. They believe that if employees are happy and motivated, and can work better, care in different, better ways; there is a high connection with the quality of services. The development of a quality system in organisations providing social services is essential to this approach, and must be supported by local and European as a key criteria for funding.

06.

REA COLLEGE PLURYN

Rea College Pluryn is a vocational rehabilitation service provider providing training and labour integration for young people with disabilities or with labour integration challenges. Its 120 staff work across various locations in the Netherlands.

Key Findings

- Self-steering, self-directed teams allows staff to “become their own boss” and work according to objectives
- Training budget is substantial, allows for many staff development opportunities
- innovative recruiting techniques for hard-to-recruit for positions (shadowing for a day)

A supportive environment

REA College Pluryn invests heavily in the development of its staff through its training budget, which is central to the learning and development plan of staff. These learning opportunities help attract staff with technical skills, like teachers, that are typically more difficult to find. Pluryn also provides a support system for staff in more challenging positions, including specialised training in how to handle aggression, a counselling system for ethical dilemmas, a client suicide prevention programme, and safety training.

⁶ <https://www.greatplacetowork.de/workplace/item/600/Benediktushof+gGmbH>

Be your own boss

Working with self-steering, self-directed teams means that staff is focused on the results and outcomes of the service as a main goal, and can provide ways of working that suit their needs. Staff is involved in shaping the organisation's future through their contribution to the leadership's work. This system offers more freedom for staff, but also a clearer accountability for reaching the desired outcomes.

Finding and inspiring talent

To recruit people in the community, REA College Pluryn also resorts to innovative recruiting techniques for hard-to-recruit for positions, like shadowing the job for a day to know if this is something one might like doing as a profession. The CliftonStrengths⁷ tool (formerly StrengthsFinder) is used to look at team composition and how to capitalise on everyone's skills and aptitudes.

Advice to other organisations looking to work on their staff satisfaction, retention and engagement

Implementing self-steering, self-directed teams can mean a long process of educating and clarifying the benefits and functioning of this participative governance model. It has shown its success in a number of organisations as an effective way to engage staff in result-oriented actions, rather than effort based ones. The sense of accountability to common goals is greater in an environment where everyone can set their work pace. Support services are still needed in self-directed team, including when the job in contact to the client is more demanding.



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The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Commission.

⁷ <https://www.gallupstrengthscenter.com>