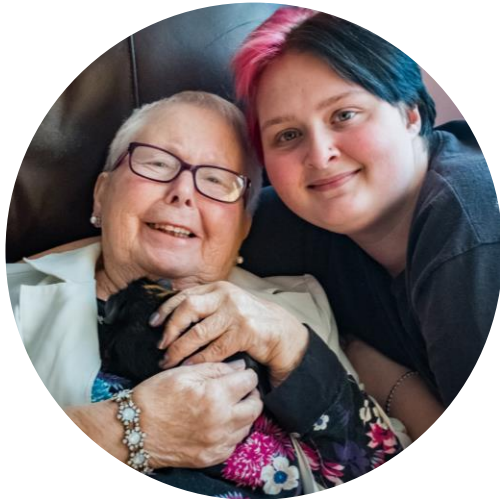


Leadership in Homecare Services – What works well?

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My Home Life England





About My Home Life England



Our Mission

To improve quality-of-life for people wherever they are supported, by empowering confident care leaders and creating sustainable care systems. We do this through high-quality professional development, research, and community engagement.



Our Vision

Empowering care leaders.
Improving care experiences.
Creating sustainable care systems.



- Over the past **19 years** we've worked alongside **more than 2,600 care leaders**, supporting their practice and their engagement with both the wider health and social care system and their local communities.
- Based at **City St George's, University of London** (and part of a wider international initiative), MHLE is founded on evidence and research, informing our work, our programmes and our influence.

Leadership in Homecare Services – What works well?

- This project grew from both My Home Life England's professional development work with homecare leaders, and our wider conversations with providers about a desire to better understand and to be able to share what good leadership looks like in homecare.
- It aimed to bring together the wealth of experience and knowledge within the homecare sector, to both articulate the challenges identified by homecare leaders and to share what they have found works well, in relation to supporting their staff and ensuring high quality care and support.

Methods



Fieldnotes from 5 Professional Support and Development Programmes for homecare leaders over the past 3 years, involving 44 homecare leaders.



Face-to-face interviews with 46 branch managers, care coordinators, care staff and training team staff across 12 branches of a home care provider



A scoping literature review of 'leadership in homecare'



A workshop with 9 homecare leaders in Suffolk to test the key messages

Some definitions!

Homecare Leaders

Broad description for registered and branch managers, deputy managers, care co-ordinators and care training practitioners

Homecare Workers

The direct care and support staff that go out to visit and support people living in their homes



What motivates homecare staff?

Homecare workers

- Helping others/working with people
- Appreciation from people they support and families
- The branch team and colleagues – leadership and a feeling of belonging
- Working locally and flexible hours

“I go home at night with a smile on my face knowing I’ve made a difference”

Homecare leaders

- The positive impact they, and their organisation, has on others
- Every day is different and it can be exciting
- Supporting and developing staff
- Achievement of growing the business and things running smoothly

“[I most enjoy] meeting customers, new business, enabling and developing carers so they are happy and excel”

Skilled and challenging work

“...but if you're not getting the support from people up there, then you're failing down here on your own.”

(Quoted in Silversides and Astakhov, 2023, pp.22)

Working autonomously, high level of decision making

People have a range of living situations and support needs

Responding to family and friends

Environment challenges – homes and neighbourhoods

Responding to crisis or when someone has died

Lack of support and not being listened to

Training not keeping up with expectations of the role



Challenges for leaders

“Running the homecare business, you can feel isolated and overwhelmed”

- Managing unrealistic workload and unpredictable demands
- The continual recruitment of staff
- Maintaining standards and a high level of care practice when short staffed
- Managing risks to the client while not always feeling supported by wider health, social care and housing systems
- Managing risks for the teams working in the community
- Running a business strategically while ‘firefighting’ urgent operational matters
- Building external relationships within a complex and competitive market
- Balancing commercial pressure with a commitment to high quality care

Components of good leadership

1. Feeling safe, supported and valued
2. Communication, collaboration and belonging
3. Creating a positive culture of practice
4. Clarity of roles and responsibilities, processes and policies
5. Strong quality assurance and customer service
6. Sustainability, growth, development and community engagement.



Feeling safe, supported and valued

Trust is key!

➤ Care workers trust that:

- they will be supported when needed by the manager and organisation
- they won't be placed at unnecessary risk
- expectations placed upon them are realistic with opportunities for training to fill gaps
- They can speak up about concerns

➤ Managers trust that:

- their staff will carry out work to expected standards
- staff will raise issues, including when an error has been made

Feeling safe, supported and valued

Feeling valued

- Cash or gift card on birthdays
- Long service awards
- Carer of the month or going the extra mile awards
- Identifying great work or positive feedback in newsletters and in meetings or one-to-ones
- Parties that the team arrange
- Asking “what can we do for you”?

“Carers are gold dust. We show appreciation [for example] Maltesers Monday, Fudge Friday – going out to surprise carers on their shift to say thank you with chocolate. A carer who doesn’t like chocolate was given a steak!”

Communication, collaboration and belonging

- *Being active* in seeking to communicate with staff given reduced opportunities
- A structured approach with time planned for reflection, support and supervision
- Thinking about tone: *“I ring them if I hear some positive feedback, so they receive lots of praise...”*
- Being honest and having difficult conversations as well
- Staff having their voices heard and feeling a part of things
- Prioritising the right communication when time is limited:
 - Pay for attendance at meetings
 - WhatsApp groups and communication tech that supports staff
 - Notes of thanks and calls just to see how they are
 - Thinking creatively about meetings and social events

“[One of the best things about my job is] the great relationship I have with carers e.g. if I send a text out RE help, masses reply”

Creating a positive culture of practice

Positive values and behaviours leaders want to instil or enable within their care teams

Recognising deeply that the 'carer role' is about a relationship with another individual, not just about delivering a list of tasks within someone's home

Seeing themselves as supporters, with a vital role in helping people to stay living at home

Helping teams to connect with the positive difference they make, helping them feel a sense of joy and achievement when working with individuals

Reinforcing that the manager or management team have confidence in them in terms of the great work that they are doing to establish a relationship

Developing and maintaining a culture of celebration, curiosity, support and appreciation with a focus on noticing positive practice

Creating a positive culture of practice

- Avoiding language that objectifies people – e.g, ‘doubles, feeding, toileting’
- Giving people time to get to know each other as individuals, ensuring there is good background information on the person not just their care needs
- Providing reasonable flexibility in how the homecare worker supports the individual
- Asking questions about how the homecare worker feels about the person they support, including what they find hard
- When a person dies, attend to what matters - the person, the carer, any family member - rather than focusing on the loss of ‘the care package’
- Enabling care teams to better understand each person’s health, and working with them to develop a detailed care plan that builds a strong understanding of the individual
- Really knowing the homecare worker enables care co-ordinators to ensure a good match between care workers and individuals needing supporting.



Clarity of roles & responsibilities, processes & policies

- A branch team who have clear distinct roles and responsibilities and are communicating the same messages to care workers and to clients
 - Provides sense of security to care workers
 - Helps with professional boundaries of branch staff

- Consistency around whose role it is to liaise with each individual and/or their family is important for both individuals and care workers
- But – there still needs to be flexibility so people can cover for each other or respond quickly to a situation

“[We have] very clear role descriptions agreed with manager so it’s clear when decisions should be passed on.”

Strong quality assurance & customer service

- Viewing complaints as opportunities to learn, rather than responding to them with defensiveness.
- Using 'quality assurance calls' to maintain relational connection with individual, family members, and care workers and to explore together how the life of the person receiving support can be improved.
- Giving an immediate direct response to an individual when a concern or question has been raised. Giving immediate feedback on actions taken.
- Ensuring clarity for the care worker and the individual's family about how decisions are made, particularly in the context of supporting someone who may lack capacity to make some decisions.
- Developing positive relationships with the wider care and health system, as well as local community groups and representative bodies

"[Clear communication with families] is key and [I'm] mindful of ensuring that the boundaries of what is offered does not bit by bit over time become greater from the relatives within the initial time scale. Spending time really listening and supporting them and also will say no, if need be, to their demands."

Sustainability, growth, development and community engagement

- Diversification and spreading risk
- Linking to local communities, including through social media
- Reputations are built on the care workforce
- Working with the wider health and social care community

“[I have] examples of good reviews from Occupational Therapy, Social Services, GP’s. Networking is a massive part of the Branch Manager role, making sure they know what we do and getting a named contact to communicate with.”

What can help homecare leaders

- Day-to-day pressures can lead to a high risk of burnout and negative impact on care teams
- Time to understand and develop leadership skills, understand their own wellbeing and support needs and to get their own support network in place can have a positive **ripple effect** on their teams
- Importance of ongoing professional support
- Having the opportunity to share what has (and hasn't) worked and hear from others



Impact of the My Home Life England Professional Development Programmes (from 44 homecare leaders)

Leaders need to feel safe and supported:

“Sometimes I feel like I am the main one supporting staff. I need that support too and I get that in this group.”

This helps them better understand how they can use tools to help their teams to feel safe and supported:

“Talking with the others gave me an idea of how to approach a member of staff who was not achieving her potential.”

...And reflect and make changes to how they communicate:

“I have changed the way I address situations... let staff speak so that they answer it themselves.”

Impact of the My Home Life England Professional Development Programmes (from 44 homecare leaders)

Homecare leaders learned and shared ways of creating a positive culture and put their learning into practice:

“We now have a quarterly outing for staff... Employee of the Quarter... More rounded relationships. Yes, there are boundaries, but we can share of ourselves too.”

“We call it ‘lessons learned’... it’s not about blame but learning. We talk about ‘goals’ not ‘outcomes’

They reflected on the clarity of roles and responsibilities, as well as their boundaries:

“I no longer treat the carers like [I am] their mothers, I can see a clearer boundary between them and me.”

“I had a bank holiday with no calls!”

Conclusions

- Homecare leaders and workers were predominantly motivated in their roles by a **desire to support others** and to **make a positive difference** in people's lives.
- Homecare workers were additionally motivated by **strong relationships with their branch and their managers**, highlighting the role of homecare leaders in ensuring their teams feel supported, valued and are working within a positive culture of care.
- The **six elements of good leadership** identified both key aspects of positive leadership, and some practical examples of how homecare leaders achieve this.
- Homecare leaders are often expected to do this with little support.
- For homecare leaders to enable their teams to feel safe, supported and valued, these same leaders need to feel that as well.
- Impact evidence from participation in My Home Life England programmes highlights that it enabled care leaders to feel this support and safety. This allowed them to **identify what was already working well**, to **reflect on challenges**, to **consider new ways of working**, and to **apply learnings to practice** for the benefit of their teams and organisations.

Thank you to...

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- Some of the photos used in this presentation are from the Age Without Limits, positive image library: www.agewithoutlimits.org/image-library



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