

Awareness of Literacy, Language and Numeracy supports Lincolnshire health employees

If healthcare organisations are to succeed in delivering improved healthcare services and better patient care, a workforce that reaches its full potential is critical. That's why Skills for Health has been working with employers across the UK to raise awareness and integrate Literacy, Language and Numeracy (LLN) and ICT within the health sector.

One way this has been achieved is through the development and delivery of the City & Guilds Level 2 Award in Literacy, Language, Numeracy and ICT Awareness, contextualised for the healthcare sector. Skills for Health held a series of successful pilots across England, during which the Level 2 Award - a qualification designed to provide an awareness of Skills for Life - was delivered for those who promote access to learning.

Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

Eight employees from Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust participated in the City & Guilds course. It soon became clear that the issues raised and lessons learned during the three day course could help to underpin the Trust's Skills for Life strategy, which focuses on raising the workforce's LLN skills.

The Trust had recently prepared a strategy for taking forward activities as a result of signing the Skills Pledge, so the awareness training came at an opportune time. The combined strategy, plans and implementation are focused on helping the Trust deliver improved care for service users, underpinning its reputation as one of the top providers of mental health services in the country.

John Lukjaniec, the Trust's Head of Training, explained why an integrated approach to Skills for Life is pivotal to supporting their efforts around the Skills Pledge:

“ It's very important to us at Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust that all our employees have the opportunity to achieve their potential. By signing the Skills Pledge we are giving a clear expression of the value we place on our employees and that they should train to a minimum standard.

Training is a key aspect of our business plan, and the LLN and ICT Awareness course has been instrumental in identifying early priorities and action we can take. ”

Embedding Skills for Life throughout the Trust

One of the first priorities is development of an implementation plan to train staff to support employees so they can more easily access learning and development. The Trust plans to upskill its training team so they are sufficiently skilled to disseminate the information across the organisation.

The work has already started, with one trainer in a band 6 role recognising that she needed extra skills in numeracy to support her analysis of course evaluations. After completing a Learndirect course, she achieved a level 2 numeracy qualification which demonstrates that LLN is not just an issue for employees in bands 1-4: a powerful illustration that literacy and numeracy needs extend across all levels of the workforce.

Integrating LLN activities into organisational processes

Although Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust is still at the early stages of realising its commitment to the Skills Pledge, it has already introduced a range of measures. It is building identification of LLN needs into personal development reviews, linked to Knowledge and Skills Framework role profiles, so that all staff members will have a clear understanding of what is required of them and that they are provided with opportunities to address any skills gaps.

The Trust also has career pathways in place, so that employees can progress beyond basic skills qualifications, and so further develop their career. For example there are NVQ schemes at level 2 and 3 and the Trust is developing an associate practitioner programme.

Other early achievements include creating opportunities for unregistered staff to become registered healthcare professionals. A group of employees are being supported to access a pre-registration nursing course with the Open University through flexible work based learning. This has been extremely successful and the first cohort is now becoming part of the registered nursing workforce.

The Benefits

- Improved skills of trained staff so they are more confident in identifying LLN and ICT needs, including their own
- Basic Skills development helps people onto learning pathways
- Enables Trust to develop staff from within, and improve staff retention rates
- Employees feel they are being supported and developed by the Trust
- Employees better understand the role they have to play in helping the Trust achieve better quality services.

Eleven other organisations took advantage of the contextualised City & Guilds training programme, which was piloted across all regions in England. Evaluation showed that the programme has supported the participating organisations in many ways:

- 94% felt more confident about promoting the benefits of taking action on LLN to others in their organisation
- 91% felt more confident about signposting people with LLN needs to appropriate help and resources
- 88% reported an increased understanding of national LLN strategies associated with the health sector
- Increased capability of participants to understand the impact of LLN on service delivery and patient care.

Skills for Health welcomes the success of the contextualised training, seeing that it has delivered a successful outcome to those with roles supporting learning and development. We look forward to seeing the results of changes made so that all employees reach their potential and help to deliver improved healthcare for patients.