

LLN training overcomes the language barrier Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Foundation Trust – pioneers English for Speakers of Other Languages training

Whatever their qualification level, and no matter how experienced your staff may be, if they lack the necessary language skills, it can present a barrier to delivery of effective healthcare services. In the UK health services, there are many people who could benefit from enhancing their literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) skills.

Managers at Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Foundation Trust recognised that highly experienced staff recruited from overseas might benefit from extra support. Although the recruits had interviewed well, once in post on the ward, some struggled with understanding their patients. The Trust serves a large population of retired people, many of whom come from across the UK, so dealing with regional accents was a major challenge for the adaptation nurses. It was clear they would benefit from enhancing their LLN skills through a specially devised English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) training course.

The training began in 2002 when a group followed an ESOL course delivered in house by the Bournemouth and Poole College of Further Education. The first cohort of learners emerged with a level 2 Short Course in UK Rapid Speech qualification. Two further cohorts of learners completed the 20 week long course over the next two years.

In 2006, managers looked at delivering ESOL training to laundry staff, as there had been concerns around the ability of some to follow language instructions and resulting health and safety implications. Around thirty people followed a certificated basic use of English course, and several learners went on to progress to other roles. It was encouraging that many members of staff were keen to access the training, with some bringing along their less confident friends, because they saw how others had grown in self assurance and skills. Since the introduction of ESOL training, many people have come forward for training, including staff who have been in post for a number of years, those working in support services, self referrals and a doctor.

“ Thanks to the ESOL training, people have developed professionally and grown personally and we now have a safer environment to work in. The patients are receiving better care, and being communicated with more clearly which can only help their recovery. As a holder of Investors in People and Improving Working in Life Practice Plus award, we are committed to enabling our staff to maximise their potential. ”

Jan Ryan Training Manager, Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Foundation Trust

A key strategic objective of Skills for Health is to improve participation in learning and employability in the health sector workforce through implementation with partners of a strategy to improve literacy, language and numeracy and information technology skill levels. There are many ways in which enhanced LLN skills levels can benefit the health sector. For example, a raised level of awareness of LLN underpins the personal development review (PDR) process within the NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework.

The Benefits

- Staff were more confident using English as their primary language in the workplace.
- Patients received improved service from staff.
- Staff were able to continue their career pathway, and move on to other roles.
- Customised on site training.
- Nurses progressed to other learning including International English Language Testing Systems course and foundation degrees.

From the beginning, managers at the Trust never underestimated the abilities and commitment from their staff undertaking the ESOL courses. Using creative ways of helping learners to attune to the English language – for example using a metronome to emphasise the rhythm of speech patterns – has helped them emerge with a new found confidence in their language skills, which has benefited everyone, including colleagues and patients.

The Trust has seen how the delivery of LLN training has contributed to a more confident, better skilled and qualified workforce. Organisations like Skills for Health continue to promote the benefits of LLN training with a range of interactive tools which have been developed specifically for the health sector.

Skills for Health is the Sector Skills Council for the UK health sector (the National Health Services, independent healthcare providers and voluntary organisations). Our purpose is to implement solutions that can deliver a skilled and flexible workforce to improve health and healthcare.

Use our interactive guides to find out more about LLN and how you can unlock the potential of your workforce at: www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/lln