

Profession for the Future

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Mencap: Recruiting from the heart

How a team with boundless dedication managed to transform the way the Royal Mencap Society finds and keeps its people

The situation

The Royal Mencap Society works with people with a learning disability to improve their quality of life. So it's vital that its employees form strong bonds with the people it supports.

But as any charity will say, it's not just about finding the right candidates. It's about keeping them, too. Mencap supports people with a learning disability to live as independently as possible in their own homes and in the community. Of its 8,500 employees, approximately 5,000 work directly with over 5,000 people with a learning disability, helping them with day-to-day tasks and sharing in their hobbies.

The challenge

Mencap has always looked for employees who embody its values (inclusive, trustworthy, caring, challenging and positive). But with competition fierce in the sector, it can be difficult to find good people. Especially ones who are the right fit for the people they'll be supporting.

We always took a person-centred approach, but felt we could do more to reflect our organisational values. Now, our ads are very specific, for example, "buses, pizza and the colour yellow." If you like all those things too, it's not even going to feel like a job for you.

Ashley Fovargue

Senior Talent Acquisition Specialist

The solution

Mencap put together a team of HR professionals, with two goals:

1. To make the charity's values more prominent in its recruitment advertising, so it can recruit people who share them (and will be more likely to stay).
2. To give people with a learning disability a real choice in who will support them, and a meaningful role in recruiting for non-direct support positions.

The model the team created puts people with a learning disability at the heart of Mencap's recruitment process, from ads right through to appraisals. And thanks to their passion and dedication, they achieved it in just six months – without any extra resources. Hiring a support worker now starts with a one-page profile of the person who'll be receiving the support. This sets out their likes and interests and forms the basis of the person-centred ad. Applicants then complete a written test and, if they make the shortlist, attend two interviews: a values-based one with managers and an inclusive one with the people they'll be supporting. It's the second interview that really decides if that person's a fit. And if the inclusive panel doesn't gel with a candidate, he or she doesn't get the job.

The inclusive approach isn't limited to recruiting support workers, either. People with a learning disability sit on the interview panel for every role at Mencap. They can also apply for jobs as paid inclusion consultants both internally and outside of the organisation. Supporting the whole process is a suite of tools, including sample one-page profiles and guidance on writing questions (replacing a standard set). There are even stickers the inclusive panel members can use to log their opinions.

Bringing about such a significant change was never going to be easy. The team had to work hard with recruiting managers to embed this new approach. They did this by holding round tables to get managers' feedback. This led them to trial the new approach for a month in one area, then refine it before rolling it out across the UK.

The hiring managers themselves were wary at first. 'Having candidates do two interviews each means more time out for managers,' explains Ashley. 'But once they saw the fruits of putting in the extra effort, they never questioned it.'

The results

The new model has been a huge success, and not just with hiring managers. Feedback from people with a learning disability has been overwhelmingly positive, too. As Mark McDonnell, who sits on inclusive panels throughout Mencap, says: *'It makes me feel great. I'm a social person, so it's nice to meet people. I'd love to do more to help people in the community.'*

Top tips

Delivering something so meaningful has also had a big effect on the team. *'It's the thing I'm most proud of doing in my working history – the impact it's had is incredible,'* says Ashley. *'You can't know what that feels like until you try it.'*

Gary Donley, a support worker who was recruited under the model, agrees. *'The personal satisfaction you get when you develop a relationship with someone you support is something money can't buy,'* he says. *'They're really excited to see you and run to you when you come in. That's why I look forward to going to work every day.'*

This is what impact looks like

Mencap has made a tangible impact in the workplace by bringing great people practice to life. Take a look at the specific values and standards they demonstrate in the process



Demonstrated professional values:

[\(/profession-map/core-purpose\)](/profession-map/core-purpose)

Principles-led
Evidence-based
Outcomes-driven

[Explore professional values \(/profession-map/core-purpose\)](/profession-map/core-purpose)



Demonstrated knowledge:

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Business acumen
Change
Culture and behaviour
People practice

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Demonstrated behaviours:

[\(/profession-map/core-behaviours\)](/profession-map/core-behaviours)

Ethical practice
Commercial drive
Insights focused
Situational decision-making
Passion for learning
Professional courage and influence
Valuing people
Working inclusively

[Explore core behaviours \(/profession-map/core-behaviours\)](/profession-map/core-behaviours)



Demonstrated specialisms:

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Talent management
Resourcing
Diversity and inclusion

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