

RESIDENTIAL FORUM

A COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE - REGISTERED IN ENGLAND - REGISTRATION NO. 4802524
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Leadership in Residential Care

Leadership is a subject that can arouse considerable discussion across all walks of life. Politics, Sport, Education, The Military, Commerce are just a few of the areas that prize leadership as an essential to the work that they under take. Residential Care has not in recent years had leadership to the fore. In fact to the contrary people who exhibited leadership, particularly heads of residential homes sometimes had their motives questioned if they displayed overt characteristics of leadership. However, in more recent times politicians, civil servants and regulators have recognised that those responsible for managing and those responsible on site for delivering residential care have a responsibility to exercise leadership when caring for others.

With this in mind the Residential Forum, through one of its regular workshops sought to identify areas of concern and possible ways forward to enable the appropriate characteristics of leadership to be displayed in residential care establishments.

The workshop was given the opportunity to examine the job description of one of the most senior civil servants who has the responsibility for social care services in a Government Department

It stated that the post holder would

- create and secure a clear commitment to a clear vision
- initiate and manage change in pursuit of strategic objectives
- is visible, approachable and earns respect
- inspires and shows loyalty
- builds and supports a high professional team
- acts decisively having assessed the risks
- accepts responsibility for the actions of the team
- demonstrates the high standards of integrity , honesty and fairness in serving the public
- builds and maintains a quality culture

This list could apply to any managerial post and it shows that residential care has to provide no more or no less when it comes to developing leaders in its service.

What then is in the way of leaders in residential care? The Residential Forum identified many hurdles that prevent some of the list above and amongst them were the following

- problems of image and perceptions of residential care
- underfunding of training
- need for political direction
- need for clear political strategy
- attitudinal change
- the infrastructure is not able to deal with leadership issues
- methodology of inspection as regards leadership
- passion and conviction is lacking within the service
- there is a considerable fear factor
- tasks overtake outcomes
- pressure on staff distorts outcomes
- organisational issues often invalidate input
- the residential care service is not 'punching at its weight'

The personalisation model of service gives an excellent opportunity for managers in the residential care sector to ensure that the service is creating an environment where all staff can contribute to empower those they serve.

The diverse nature of the workforce should be able to enhance the components of leadership yet it is often seen as a hurdle. The large turnover of staff leads to a mindset of 'why bother' when examining workplace issues.

The general public rightly expect leadership in all of the areas where the public purse is used. The residential care sector is sometimes, understandably, prone to take the role of victim. Morale is, at present, low and potential leaders are reluctant to 'put their head above the parapet.'

What can we do to begin the process of enabling people to use leadership skills? The Residential Forum identified many opportunities and amongst them were the following

- Good leadership can lead to better targeting of resources
- That management training in social care must contain components on leadership
- Use the potential of a Skills Academy to develop leadership models for social care
- That an aversion to the use of residential care is never likely to motivate leaders
- Residential care may need to be redefined to bring out the best leadership model
- The mindset of low esteem of residential care must be eradicated
- Leadership needs to be visible
- Skill sets, mentoring and coaching need to be available
- Recognise and use as a positive the breadth and depth of the role of home manager
- Enable people to act as leaders by speaking out on the positives of residential care
- Provide a Forum for residential care leaders
- Enable managers to take justified risks and deal with the fear factor
- Use government initiatives to promote leadership in residential care
- Remove the scepticism about leadership in the residential care services
- Use leadership to enhance the personalisation model

It is not often recognised that some of the most innovative care has been developed in the past by people who we would now regard as former leaders in the residential care services. We must encourage people who have skills in residential care to use them, to make their job seem even more worthwhile than it already is and gain satisfaction from seeing others develop. Successful leadership is not about patriarchy, control, dependency and compliance. The Residential Forum was reminded of a Chinese proverb 'The bad leader is he who the people despise. The good leader is he who the people praise. The great leader is he of whom the people say 'We did it ourselves'.

Established in 1994, the Residential Forum seeks to promote high standards in residential care and to contribute to improving the quality of services and practice. The Forum encompasses all parts of the residential sector - statutory, voluntary, not for profit and private.

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