



Warwickshire County Council
“Work for them”
Children’s Social Work Recruitment Campaign
PPMA Award Submission for Best Recruitment Creative Concept

The brief

Up until 5 years ago, Warwickshire Council had a long history of an incredibly stable Children’s Social Work workforce, however following a number of leadership changes, this position started to decline. Caseloads increased and we struggled to recruit and retain experienced social workers.

Turnover of Children’s social workers went from below 12%, to nearing 30%, and caseloads have been as high as 35 per social worker, where by our aspiration has been to get them closer to 15.

The council decided on an “invest to save” strategy, in order to manage the reducing funds available for children’s services. The agreed initiative set out to recruit an additional 40 social workers above establishment, so that individual social worker caseloads could be reduced, thus allowing more time for social workers to spend with children and families in the hope that the number of children requiring the higher end of our services would reduce.

In November 2016, we were tasked to recruit an additional 40 Social Workers into the business on top of the vacancies that already existed. We knew that we were not alone in having difficulty recruiting Children and Family Social Workers, as many of our neighbouring authorities are also experiencing recruitment difficulties, therefore we knew that our campaign needed to be different.

The Campaign

The “Work for Them” campaign was designed in partnership between the Business, HR, Recruitment and Communications. The campaign was complemented by a talent pool approach to recruitment, which allowed for potential social workers to apply to Warwickshire and then be matched to the most appropriate vacancy, thus reducing the time it takes to recruit, ensuring that people are recruited to the best fit role as well as improving the candidate experience.

Dedicated recruitment resource was appointed which sat within the business, as well as being linked to the corporate recruitment centre. This allowed the opportunity for oversight on the project, as well as support for managers at interviews and improving the candidate experience, where they only needed to deal with one recruitment advisor, who in most cases they had already met, and in return this reduced the time to hire significantly.

The creative media campaign saw a number of children depicted as the boss, showing that if you work for Warwickshire, you are working for the children – “working for them”, with the tag line “We work for our young people every day – could you?”. The campaign was taken nationally including the Metro and Community Care, as well as a local radio and back of the bus advertising campaigns. Costs for the campaign were kept to a minimum by using children of employees who eagerly volunteered to be models for the day.

A revised recruitment microsite for Children’s Social Workers was launched, which provided all the information prospective candidates would need to encourage them to apply.

We also made contact with our social worker leavers over the last couple of years and invited them to come back to Warwickshire.

A Work for Them event was held, which gave social workers the opportunity to attend and listen to Warwickshire’s approach to the profession as well as allowing individuals the opportunity to be interviewed for the posts available. Throughout the day we had talks from the Head of Service, Principal Practitioners, who lead our centres of excellence, the Director of academic studies at Warwick University, a family psychotherapist, the service manager for the Multi- Agency Safeguarding Hub and from our foster carers and social workers.

We also introduced a refer a friend scheme, which paid employees £300 for successfully referring someone to work as a social worker in Warwickshire.

The wider initiative also saw a pay review for Children’s social work posts, to enable more scope for progression, as we had identified that Warwickshire was one of the lower paying authorities across the West Midlands Region. We also revised the career pathway for Social Workers.

Work is now underway to ensure our retention strategy is effective to ensure that the additional staff we have recruited are encouraged to stay and progress through their career in Warwickshire. We have recently undertaken a series of retention workshops with staff, to listen to what Social Workers like about working in Warwickshire, what frustrates them and what Warwickshire could do to encourage Social Workers to stay. This information along with the exit interview information, has been used to develop a retention strategy – “Our Workforce Pledge” which is due to be launched in early 2019.

The Impact

Whilst work continues to ensure that we have the right number of Children Social Workers in Warwickshire, there has been an incredible increase in the number of social workers being appointed to Warwickshire and a pleasing reduction in the number leaving.

During the period April 2017 – October 2018, a total of 162 Social Worker were appointed, an average of 9 per month, this compared to an average of 3 social workers appointed per month in the previous twelve months up to March 2017. This is nearly treble the average recruitment per month. By comparison the number of leavers prior to the campaign was 5.12 per month, has reduced to an average of 3.85 leavers month since the campaign was launched. As a turnover rate this has reduced from nearly 25% to around 15% and getting

closer to the target of 12%. We have also reduced agency social workers, from a high of nearly 30 to 6.

Application per month increased from 14 to an average of 24, and at its peak has been as high as 47 applicants.

We also found a reduction in the time to hire, before the campaign started, the time to hire was well over 3 months and now the average time is less than 3 months from application to start date.

We attracted 9 ex social workers to come back to work in Warwickshire.

Since March 2018, there was a net increase of 65 Children Social Workers and caseloads have reduced to around 18 per social worker. As a team we are delighted with the outcome of the campaign and will continue to use the brand as we enter a business as usual phase.

Kate Sullivan
HR Business Partner
Warwickshire County Council.