

Preceptorship at Oxleas Foundation Trust

Felicity and Hannah

Hannah Tomkins and Felicity Devereux are both Allied Health Professional Preceptorship Leads, at Oxleas Foundation Trust. They work with new allied health professionals (AHPs) to help and support them starting out in their careers. As well as this, Felicity is also a qualified podiatrist and Hannah is a qualified physiotherapist. We spoke to both to understand a little more about their trust and experiences of building a preceptorship programme in their organisation.

Background

“With Oxleas being on the outskirts of London and colleagues seeking further opportunities closer to the centre, in 2017 it was highlighted that our trust had one of the lowest retention rates of AHPs in London.

“We found that because of where we are geographically located, in between Dartford and Greenwich on the outskirts of London, that a lot of people were applying for a job with us, but then would potentially look to move further into London to the acute organisations. Our younger workforce, pre-pandemic, were advising us that they wanted to access some of the ‘big name’ internationally recognised acute organisations and that which for a 20 minute longer commute had a substantial salary difference.

“To retain our staff, two one day a week posts were created to support new AHPs just starting in their professions. The trust hoped this would help increase the retention rates by developing and implementing a specific AHP Preceptorship Programme. Due to the success of the two roles, full-time posts have now been created.

“Now, with us both working on a full-time basis, we’ve managed to achieve a lot in a relatively short amount of time. As far as we are aware, the way we deliver our programme is the first of its kind and we’re both very passionate about preceptorship”.

How it started

“In Oxleas there was a well-established Nursing Preceptorship programme and we also recognised that some AHP groups had mandated profession specific competencies or guidance, but there was no consistent approach across all of the AHP professions. We found that because of this, some of our AHPs felt isolated and there were some with no specific support structure.

“We noticed that a lot of new colleagues just couldn’t relate to the existing Nursing preceptorship content and dropout rates of AHPs were really high, and that’s where we came in with an AHP specific programme”

Preceptorship case study – Felicity and Hannah

How the idea developed

“To start with, we met with the Heads of Professions to establish what, if anything, was already in place and what their expectations would be of the Preceptorship programme. We also conducted focus groups with band 5 and 6 AHP’s across different professions and we found that this helped us to consider new ideas and see things from their perspective. We also approached the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), professional governing bodies and looked at similar Preceptorship programmes across neighbouring trusts and ICS’ for inspiration.

“Surveys were also very useful as it allowed us to ask, “If you could have anything, what would it be?” and this helped us shape our programme by gaining a wealth of feedback. To ensure that we could engage all AHP professions, we aligned our Preceptorship with the HCPC as not only does this link all of us, but also the Preceptees could relate to the content and standards.

“Working on the programme development just before and then throughout the Covid period meant from the outset, a lot of effort went into adaptations for a virtual preceptorship. Due to adapting and becoming fully virtual, we were able to welcome individuals from a range of different Trusts, locations, and work settings and therefore able to provide support over a really difficult period for those that were joining. We also found this helped ease some of the pressure on Supervisors/Preceptors, during a difficult time, by adding another layer of support.

“We now have this virtual model, which works really well and that's how we've been able to grow”

The challenges

“A lot of the challenges we encountered were when we were setting up the programme. It was in 2018, and virtual platforms such as MS teams and other software’s were not widely used. We would have to get everyone to a certain place at a certain time, therefore we had a number of people unable to join, due to their own personal circumstances.

“We initially launched the Pan-London expansion just before the first lockdown in 2020, and we quickly adapted the programme in response to Covid. This was the main challenge really, we now have a virtual programme, and you could say that we have adapted to this really quite well, being able to connect preceptees across the area, and that has been one of the silver linings of Covid.

“Engagement was a challenge as we had to deal with lots of different types of stakeholders, 14 different professional groups all of which have different ways of working, requiring different elements of support. Some individuals for instance, may well have already had a good support package; therefore, we needed to consider what our model could do for them.

“I think the biggest challenge was ensuring preceptees could participate in the preceptorship alongside working. When you are newly qualified, you are really enthusiastic. You want to get involved in anything that you can, but you then get wrapped up with everything going on, and that is when engaging big groups of preceptees gets harder.

“Once you get to band 6, band 7 level, you’ve got a lot of pressures. You are working in a fast-paced environment with lots to think about and, also, probably doing clinical supervision. Adding preceptorship on top of all of that, can be challenging”

Preceptorship case study – Felicity and Hannah

How others have benefited

“Preceptees have really benefitted for multiple different reasons. One of these is the AHP community we have built, which leads to networking opportunities and peer support. We have found this has led to amazing engagement on the programme. It especially helps those who may be the only AHP within their team or the only Band 5.

“We recently had some feedback on how the patient’s quality of care has been improved due to the programme. We found that AHPs go back, look at their past research, look at journals and then communicate their findings to the team and this has then led to them changing something or implementing something new.

“I feel it also benefits preceptors, as we provide a support group and training to ensure that they feel confident with the content.”

How Felicity and Hannah have benefited

“We love our job! We get to meet other professionals that we would have never met before and this feels like a massive step, as in previous roles there was sometimes the feeling of isolation within our profession. There’s been more opportunity to develop, not only professional skills, but personal skills. We speak to people at grades a lot higher and this has led us to link in with professional bodies, for example, we met with the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) last week! We get to work with AHPs from all different professions, not just our own.

“We really didn’t expect to be on this career path, but it has given us the opportunity to develop skills, meet people from all over the country and share the joys and the challenges of the role with colleagues, due to the massive network of AHPs – especially on Twitter.

We would both recommend this role to anyone! The opportunity to help shape someone’s first role and therefore the rest of their career is extremely rewarding”

Felicity and Hannah’s advice

“Do it! But we think it’s really important that your Trust has someone who can dedicate a lot of their time to the cause. Both of us have achieved so much by being able to do the role fulltime. Find out what your workplace already has in place and think, what do you want? Look at workshops, online forums, professional bodies, even get in touch with us if you want to! We’re always happy to help and offer a range of Preceptorship packages that you can become involved with.”

If you would like to learn more about preceptorship programmes and how they can help you, please feel free to contact:

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