



## WORKFORCE FLEXIBILITY: A CASE STUDY

We spoke with the CEO of Millsted Care and Dayspace, Hannah Millsted-Bowdery, about offering flexible working to their workforce.

Millsted Care and Dayspace is a family-run company providing person-centred residential and supported living homes, as well as day services in Surrey and South London. The team specialise in working with adults with a learning disability.

### HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN OFFERING FLEXIBLE WORKING?

We've been offering flexible working arrangements for 27 years. I'm proud to lead a company that promotes flexible working and genuinely is and can be flexible. People often say it's too difficult – but it really doesn't have to be. It takes more conversation, a lot more planning, and some headaches on rotas – but it's absolutely doable.

### WHAT TYPE OF FLEXIBILITY DO YOU OFFER?

We have many flexible working patterns across our care services. One of our Support Workers works three set days between 8 am and 2 pm as this suits them. They occasionally cover a 5 pm to 10 pm shift at the weekend – because we're flexible, they offer the same flexibility back.

### CAN PERMANENT EMPLOYEES REQUEST WHEN THEY WANT TO WORK?

Yes – and we do our best to accommodate requests. One care team member has prior commitments on a Wednesday and a Saturday – so we don't rota them to work on either day. We also offer various contract types to suit individual needs, including zero and minimum hours, providing flexibility and variety.

### ARE YOU FLEXIBLE IN OTHER WAYS?

We've reviewed our employee benefits and policies to ensure flexibility. One example is that we offer full maternity pay for six months. We find that most people stay with us and return to working their previous hours or flexible patterns.

### DOES OFFERING FLEXIBILITY OPEN THE DOORS TO YOUNGER WORKERS?

Absolutely! In our day services, year on year we welcome back students who work purely outside of term time. In fact, it works so well that we often have more availability from our student pool than shifts we can offer!



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### WHAT ABOUT ATTRACTING NEW SKILLS?

We've found that flexibility attracts people with excellent creative skills – which is important to us and the people we support. In our day services we have actors, artists, teachers, cooks, and fitness instructors. Without flexibility, attracting such a diverse range of skills would be much more challenging.

### DOES YOUR APPROACH TO FLEXIBILITY HELP OTHER TEAMS?

Being flexible also appeals to our office-based team, especially our returning Mums. Our Chief Financial Officer joined us having never worked in the care sector before. It's worked out well because we can offer hours that complement the school timetable – and they love it!

### HOW DO YOU MAKE IT WORK FOR EVERYONE?

We take a fair approach to flexibility and operate a priority system for childcare commitments. If we can't offer first choice flexibility, we look at alternative options. We do expect team members to work some weekends in our care services which everyone is happy to do. In return, we guarantee a full weekend off each month.

### WHAT TECHNOLOGY DO YOU USE TO MANAGE ROTAS?

We find it best to manage rotas on a spreadsheet – purely because our experience of shift-based software doesn't always accommodate managing the flexibility we want to offer. I am still on my quest to find flexible software to allow us to move away from spreadsheets!

### WHAT DO STAFF TELL YOU?

Our teams tell us they appreciate a better work life balance because of our flexibility arrangements. Staff often tell us that most companies say they are flexible, but really, they aren't. It definitely sets us apart when we're recruiting and retaining talent.