

## Steps Ahead Care & Support Limited

# Steps Ahead Care & Support Limited

### Inspection report

Unit 130 City Business Park  
Somerset Place, Stoke  
Plymouth  
Devon  
PL3 4BB  
Tel: 01752 547257  
Website: [www.stepsaheadsupport.co.uk](http://www.stepsaheadsupport.co.uk)

Date of inspection visit: 20,21, 22 and 27 October 2015

Date of publication: 26/02/2016

### Ratings

#### Overall rating for this service

Outstanding 

Is the service safe?

Good 

Is the service effective?

Outstanding 

Is the service caring?

Outstanding 

Is the service responsive?

Good 

Is the service well-led?

Outstanding 

### Overall summary

The inspection took place on 20, 21, 22 and 27 October 2015 and was announced. The provider was given 48 hours' notice because the location was a domiciliary care agency and we needed to be sure that someone would be present in the office.

Steps Ahead Care & Support Limited provide a personal care service to people living in their own home. On the day of the inspection eight people were supported by Steps Ahead Care & Support Limited with their personal care needs.

The service had a registered manager in post. A registered manager is a person who has registered with the Care

# Summary of findings

Quality Commission to manage the service. Like registered providers, they are 'registered persons'. Registered persons have legal responsibility for meeting the requirements in the Health and Social Care Act 2008 and associated Regulations about how the service is run. The registered manager was also a director of Steps Ahead Care & Support Limited.

During the inspection, staff within the office were friendly and relaxed. There was a calm and pleasant atmosphere. Everybody had a clear role within the service. Information we requested was supplied promptly, records were clear, easy to follow and comprehensive.

People, those who matter to them, staff and professionals all spoke positively about the service. Comments included, "The consistency and standard of care is excellent", "I'm very impressed with the professionalism that is shown by everyone at all levels" and "Steps ahead never let me down, they are exceptional".

People valued their relationships with staff. People felt really well cared for and that they mattered. One person said, "They are fantastic, number one, they go the extra mile and are always there for me". A relative commented, "The best thing they do is care, they are very sensitive to [...]s needs. He's treated like a piece of porcelain, handled with delicacy and care".

People were supported by staff who promoted them to remain as independent as possible, and who were creative in their ways of communicating to help people to express their views. Staff had an in-depth appreciation of how to respect people's privacy and dignity.

People told us they felt safe. Staff had undertaken training on safeguarding adults from abuse, and put their knowledge into practice. Where staff had raised alerts the service managed the concerns promptly and where required, conducted thorough investigations to protect people.

People were protected by the service's safe recruitment practices. Staff underwent the necessary checks which determined they were suitable to work with vulnerable adults, before they started their employment.

People were supported by staff teams that received tailored training that reflected their individual needs, and supported how they wanted and needed to receive their

care. Staff put their training into practice and delivered outstanding care. A health care professional commented, staff were excellent at using their initiative and brilliant at carrying out directives.

People and those who mattered to them were involved in identifying their needs and how they would like to be supported. People's preferences were sought and respected. Staff focused upon a person's whole life to promote their wellbeing and give people an outstanding quality of life. Relative comments included, "They have become part of our family, we can't do without them. It's like a calling they have so many strong attributes it is not just a job to them, it's like they have been sent from heaven", "I have been in the care profession all my life, and to me the standards of Steps Ahead are of a very high class, exceptional. The carers love [...] to bits, they laugh with him, not at him and they keep him as him. They treat [...] how I would always treat him, he's like a member of their own family".

People told us staff provided consistent personalised care and support. Care records were focused on empowering people to have control. Staff responded quickly to people's change in needs, which was communicated to those that needed to know.

People were promoted to live full and active lives and were supported to go out and use local services and facilities. Activities were meaningful and reflected people's interests and individual hobbies.

People were supported by staff who placed a strong emphasis on the importance of them maintaining a healthy balanced diet. Dietician's advice was sought, and personalised training which took into account people's individual health needs was delivered, so that people with complex needs were not at risk from poor nutrition or dehydration.

People's risks were anticipated, identified and monitored. Staff managed risk effectively and actively supported people's decisions, so they had as much control and independence as possible.

People knew how to raise concerns and make complaints. People and their relatives who had raised concerns confirmed they had been dealt with promptly and satisfactorily.

# Summary of findings

Staff described the management to be very open, supportive and approachable. Staff talked about their jobs in a strong positive manner, and were highly motivated. Comments included, “Since starting work with the company, it is the happiest I have ever been. They take time to get to know you, you are not just a number which is so nice” and “I really enjoy my job, I feel appreciated and get thanked for even little things I do to help”

Staff were encouraged to be involved and help drive continuous improvements. This helped ensure positive progress was made in the delivery of care and support provided by the service.

There were effective quality assurance systems in place. Action was taken to address areas where practice could be enhanced, and as a result, changes had been made to help ensure the service moved forward and continually improved.

# Summary of findings

## The five questions we ask about services and what we found

We always ask the following five questions of services.

### Is the service safe?

The service was safe. Safe recruitment practices were followed and there were sufficient numbers of skilled and experienced staff to meet people's needs.

People were supported by staff who had a good understanding of how to recognise and report any signs of abuse. Staff acted quickly to protect people.

People were protected by staff who understood and managed risk. Staff managed situations in a positive way when people displayed behaviour that challenged them.

People were supported to have as much control and independence as possible.

Good



### Is the service effective?

The service was effective. People were supported by staff who had the right competencies, knowledge and skills to meet their individual needs and give people an outstanding quality of life.

The service was proactive when working in partnership with external organisations to ensure staff followed best practice.

People were supported by staff who confidently made use of their knowledge of the Mental Capacity Act 2005, to make sure people were involved in decisions about their care and their human and legal rights were respected.

Links with health and social care services were excellent, staff improved their practice by following advice and guidance that had been sought.

People were supported by staff who placed a strong emphasis on them maintaining a healthy balanced diet. Staff sought advice from dieticians to help ensure individual's needs were met.

Outstanding



### Is the service caring?

The service was caring. People described the caring approach shown by staff as exceptional.

People felt they mattered and valued the strong positive relationships they held with staff.

People were supported by staff that were remarkable in maintaining their independence. Respected their dignity and maintained their privacy.

People were supported by staff who had an in-depth appreciation of their needs and took prompt action to relieve their distress.

Outstanding



### Is the service responsive?

The service was responsive. Care records were personalised and focused on a person's whole life. Staff had a thorough understanding of how people wanted to be supported.

People were empowered by staff to be involved in identifying their choices and preferences, and have as much control and independence as possible.

Good



# Summary of findings

People were encouraged to maintain hobbies and interests. Staff understood the importance of companionship and social contact.

## **Is the service well-led?**

The service was well-led. Management were approachable and had clear values that were understood by staff and put into practice.

Staff were motivated to develop and provide quality care.

The service worked in partnership with other organisations and used recommendations to improve practice and provide a high quality service.

Quality assurance systems drove improvements and raised standards of care. New ideas were promoted and implemented regularly to provide a high quality service.

**Outstanding**



# Steps Ahead Care & Support Limited

## Detailed findings

### Background to this inspection

We carried out this inspection under Section 60 of the Health and Social Care Act 2008 as part of our regulatory functions. This inspection was planned to check whether the provider is meeting the legal requirements and regulations associated with the Health and Social Care Act 2008, to look at the overall quality of the service, and to provide a rating for the service under the Care Act 2014.

The inspection was undertaken by one inspector, took place on 20, 21, 22 and 27 October 2015 and was announced. The provider was given 48 hours' notice because the location was a domiciliary care agency and we needed to be sure that someone would be present in the office.

Before the inspection, the provider completed a Provider Information Return (PIR). This is a form that asks the provider to give some key information about the service, what the service does well and improvements they plan to

make. We also reviewed information we held about the service. This included previous inspection reports and notifications we had received. A notification is information about important events which the service is required to send us by law.

During the inspection we spoke with the director, the registered manager and nine members of staff. We spoke with two relatives, two physiotherapists, an occupational therapist and a social worker who had supported people who had received personal care from Steps Ahead Care & Support Limited. We also visited two people in their own homes, and spoke with a further two people who used the service.

We looked at three records related to people's individual care needs. These included support plans, risk assessments and daily monitoring records. We also looked at six staff recruitment files and records associated with the management of the service, including quality audits.

# Is the service safe?

## Our findings

People told us they knew what keeping safe meant and felt safe whilst being supported in their own home. Comments included, “I very much feel safe in their hands” and “Yeah, I feel safe”. Relative comments included, “I have confidence in the carers. When I go out, I know [...] will be kept safe and well”, “I can rely on the staff to keep my husband safe in my absence, that is important” and “I trust the staff to keep [...] safe. Trust has to be earned and they have earned it”. A healthcare professional commented that staff not only managed people’s safety well, but were also very good at managing their own safety too.

People were supported by staff who had received training in safeguarding, and could recognise signs of potential abuse. Staff confirmed reported signs of suspected abuse were taken seriously, investigated thoroughly, and appropriate alerts had been made to protect people. For example, one staff member talked us through an alert they had recently made on behalf of a person they supported. They confirmed they reported their concerns to the registered manager, who promptly made a referral to the local safeguarding team, to help protect the person from avoidable harm. They said, “Any concerns we raise about people’s safety is acted on immediately. We are listened to and supported throughout the process, and more importantly the client is kept safe”.

People were supported by suitable staff. Robust recruitment practices were in place and records showed checks were undertaken to help ensure the right staff were employed to keep people safe. Staff confirmed these checks had been applied for and obtained prior to commencing their employment with the service. One member of staff said, “I was asked to bring in my ID and other paperwork needed to complete various checks. I waited till all the checks had come back and showed everything was ok, before I was able to start my job”.

People were protected by staff who understood the plans in place to respond to emergencies or unforeseen events. People and staff had telephone numbers for the service that were operational twenty four hours a day, 7 days a week. This ensured a member of staff was always contactable if needed. One relative commented, “When I needed Steps Ahead in an emergency, I rang them and the manager stopped what they were doing and acted immediately. They came out themselves, took over

everything, they arranged staff for the duration of my hospital stay, kept [...] safe and were just brilliant”. A member of staff said, “What makes me feel safe is knowing there is always someone on the end of the phone whenever I need them”.

People were supported by sufficient numbers of staff to keep them safe. The registered manager confirmed, staff were specifically matched to support people on an individual basis and therefore had the right skills, knowledge and experience to meet their unique needs. The registered manager regularly reviewed the staffing levels, so that people received reliable and consistent care and to help ensure staff could be flexible around people’s needs. For example, one person required two to one staff support if they decided they wanted to consume alcohol. Alcohol impacted on the person’s mobility and safety. Staffing would therefore be increased to meet this person’s need. A staff member said, “When [...] decides they want to have a drink, we get an additional member of staff to help support and we adapt how we support them. For example, may encourage them to complete more physical activities later in the day to prevent risk of injury”.

Before Steps Ahead Care & Support Limited provided support to people, a comprehensive initial risk assessment took place. This confirmed the service would be able to safely meet the needs of the person concerned and took account of risks associated with lone working and helped ensure staff would be protected. Environmental risk assessments indicated where risk could occur and measures were put in place to minimise the likelihood of incidents occurring.

Staff were knowledgeable about people who had behaviour that may challenge others. Care records, contained risk assessments regarding people’s behaviour that may put themselves or others at risk. This enabled staff to receive personalised guidance on how to best meet an individual’s need and helped keep people safe. Staff sought to understand the cause of behaviour that distressed people. Incidents were recorded and behavioural charts were used to identify patterns. The results were analysed and used to change practice and reduce the causes of behaviour that put people at risk. For example, one chart highlighted incidents increased on a Monday and Tuesday following weekend exertions. Staff discussed this with the person and suggested ideas and activities that would encourage them to unwind and relax

## Is the service safe?

from Sunday evening through to Monday to support them to manage their own behaviour. Positive actions that had been successful in de-escalating situations and reducing incidents were shared amongst staff to enable learning to take place. A healthcare professional commented that staff managed behavioural issues very well. They explained, staff looked out for triggers, communicated them to others and discussed ideas where changes could be made to help keep people safe.

People were supported by staff who understood and managed risk effectively. Risk management plans recorded concerns and noted actions required to address risk and maintain people's independence. A healthcare professional commented that the main thing they were impressed with, was the speed at which risk assessments were updated by staff following a change in a person's need. People confirmed they were involved in decisions around the risks they took and staff confirmed they followed risk management plans to ensure restrictions on people's

freedom and choice were minimised. For example, one person who had been assessed as a high risk of falls, wished to live a very active and independent life. Staff respected and supported their choices. The person had total control over which mobility aid they wished to use on any given day and staff only stepped in to support when requested by the person to do so. A health care professional commented, Staff enabled people to feel safe by their presence, but were skilled at promoting people to have as much freedom, control and independence as possible.

The registered manager confirmed, staff were not currently responsible for the management or support of safe administration of medicine to anybody who used their service. Staff were appropriately trained and confirmed they understood the importance of safe administration and management of medicines. The service had medicine policies and procedures in place which were in line with current and relevant guidance and regulation.



# Is the service effective?

## Our findings

People felt supported by knowledgeable, skilled staff who had the right competencies, and effectively met their needs. One person stated, “The carers are wonderful, no need to ask them to do anything, they notice things very quickly and are very good at their jobs” A relative said “You couldn’t ask for any better, [...] has dementia, staff need a certain level of understanding and they have that. They have the right skills to deal with [...]’s individual needs”. Health and social care professionals consistently fed back that the standard of staff employed by Steps Ahead Care & Support Limited were of an exceptionally high professional standard.

People were supported by compatible staff that had been specifically matched to meet their needs. For example, one person who was studying music at university was supported by a member of staff who had achieved a degree in music. The registered manager confirmed they used staff’s learning and experience to deliver care that met people’s individual needs. They said, “If we did not have the specialised knowledge or interests amongst our existing staff team to support a person’s individual need, we specifically recruit for that role”. Staff comments included, “When I first joined I was asked what my interests were, ever since then I have been matched with people of similar interests”, “One of the best things about Steps Ahead is that they take care in matching the right staff with the clients, it really helps to make everything a success”, “They endeavour to match staff to people’s interests which is really good” and “Both my strengths and weaknesses are looked at, and I’m then matched with the clients I’m most suited to support”. A healthcare professional added, Steps Ahead Care & Support Limited were very professional and committed to finding the right care worker for the right person.

Staff received a thorough induction programme and on-going training to develop their knowledge and skills. They told us this gave them confidence in their role and helped enable them to follow best practice and effectively meet people’s needs. Newly appointed staff where necessary, completed the new care certificate recommended following the ‘Cavendish Review’. The outcome of the review was to improve consistency in the sector specific training health care assistants and support workers received in social care settings. Staff also

shadowed other experienced members of staff until they and the management felt they were competent in their role. The registered manager added that an existing member of staff was in the process of completing the care certificate themselves. This would give them a better perspective of what new members of staff would need to achieve and enabled them to better support those going through the process. Staff comments included, “My induction made me feel ready and confident I had the right skills” and “All my training was completed before I even stepped foot in someone’s house. I was never thrown in at the deep end, I shadowed for a week and I felt really confident”.

In addition to the mandatory training, staff received tailored comprehensive training that reflected how an individual wanted and needed to receive their care. For example, one person had specific needs around their mobility. A physiotherapist had designed an individual exercise plan, that staff were required to follow in order to maintain a person’s health and fitness. Staff received training from the physiotherapist alongside the individual themselves, in the person’s own home using the person’s own equipment. This helped ensure staff had the precise knowledge and skills to effectively carry out their role. The physiotherapist commented that they worked with staff to ensure they were capable and had the right competencies to carry out their advice in practice. They added, staff were excellent at using their initiative and brilliant at carrying out directives. Ongoing training was then planned to support staffs’ continued learning and was updated when required. Staff felt this enabled them to confidently and consistently provide personalised support. One staff member commented, “Training is planned really well and adapted so that it helps us know exactly how we can use the training to support each individual client’s needs”.

The service worked in partnership with other organisations to help ensure their staff followed best practice. The registered manager confirmed they were fully committed and signed up to “The social care commitment”. This is an adult social care sector’s promise to provide people who need care and support with high quality services. The seven “I will” statements as set out in the commitment were newly incorporated into staff induction, supervision and appraisals. The registered manager was also a professional member of the British Institute of Learning Disabilities (BILD), they commented, “This means we are committed to the values and principles of BILD when



## Is the service effective?

delivering our staff with accredited training". For example, staff received MAYBO conflict management training which was BILD accredited. This helped enable staff to meet their duty of care and regulatory requirements in a way that promoted positive values and behaviours.

Staff were supported to achieve nationally recognised vocational qualifications. The service sourced support from and had established links with external agencies that provided funding on behalf of their staff. This enabled and encouraged staff to take part in training designed to help them improve their knowledge and help provide a higher level of care to people. It also helped staff to develop a clear understanding of their specific roles and responsibilities and have their achievements acknowledged. Staff confirmed they had been supported by the management to increase their skills and obtain qualifications. Staff told us this gave them motivation to learn and continually improve. Comments included, "I've already been supported to achieve my level 2 and 3 and we are talking about doing my level 4" and "I've always expressed a need to learn, the manager has taken on board my passion for training and encouraged and supported me to continually develop my skills".

Staff received effective support through supervision and appraisals. Supervision was a two way process, used as an important resource to support, motivate and develop staff and drive improvements. Open conversation provided staff the opportunity to highlight areas of good practice, identify where support was needed and raise ideas on how the service could improve. Staff confirmed supervision was used to develop and review their practice and offered support. Comments included, "The management are so approachable, I can have informal supervisions whenever I need them, there is always plenty of opportunity to discuss any issues I might have" and "I find my supervision very beneficial, it's an opportunity to air our views, say how we feel and express our thoughts".

People were supported by staff who had the right skills to communicate with them. People, those who mattered to them and health and social care professionals all spoke highly of staffs ability to communicate effectively. Comments included, "Communication is key in my opinion and staff are excellent in the way they support [...]", "One of the staffs main strengths is their ability to communicate at all levels, I'm very impressed with the staffs skills in this area" and "The carers ability to communicate with [...], is

one of the reasons I feel we have had so much success". A member of staff discussed with us an issue they had with supporting one person who used Makaton to communicate. Makaton is a language programme which uses signs and symbols to help people to communicate. They commented, "I did have a concern that my Makaton skills were a bit rusty. As somebody I supported used Makaton to communicate very well, I asked if I could be put on refresher training. This was actioned immediately. In the meantime I was given a book to refer to, which was very helpful".

Staff understood and had knowledge of the main principles of the Mental Capacity Act 2005 (MCA). The MCA provides a legal framework for making particular decisions on behalf of people who may lack the mental capacity to do so for themselves. The Act requires that as far as possible people make their own decisions and are helped to do so when needed. When they lack mental capacity to take particular decisions, any made on their behalf must be in their best interests and as least restrictive as possible. Staff were confident to put this into practice on a daily basis to help ensure peoples human and legal rights were respected. Staff considered people's capacity to make particular decisions and where appropriate knew what to do and who to involve, in order to make decisions in people's best interests. A staff member commented, "It is important to give people as much choice about everyday decisions as possible, like where they wish to go, what they want to wear, or what they want to do. When necessary we are involved in meetings which include people's families and professionals, everyone comes together to decide what is best for the client". Another stated, "I always like to ask a person if they want me to help them and ask their consent, to take that choice away from someone, would be very demeaning". A health care professional confirmed, staff attended best interests meetings, had positive involvement in discussions, and had made changes in practice to ensure people's human rights were sustained.

People were supported and encouraged to maintain a healthy balanced diet. Staff placed a strong emphasis on the importance of protecting people from risk of poor nutrition and dehydration. Staff sought advice and received specialised training from dieticians. Staff confirmed they used their learning, innovative methods and positive relationships to encourage people to significantly improve their dietary intake and wellbeing. For example, one person had the capacity to decide what meals they liked, but did



## Is the service effective?

not have the understanding of the health implications of eating an unhealthy diet. Staff liaised with a dietician and received bespoke training that focused on the individual's body mass index (BMI) and their related health issues. Staff assisted the person in deciding meal options designed around their likes and dislikes, and focused on the advice from the dietician, such as portion control. The person was then involved in preparing their meal choices. A picture was

taken of the end result. The picture was then inserted into the person's specially designed recipe book. Written notes of the ingredients and the method that needed to be followed were included. The person went through their unique recipe book at the beginning of each week and selected the meals they wished to eat. Shopping trips then took place to ensure they had the right ingredients to maintain the persons chosen menu for any given week.



# Is the service caring?

## Our findings

People consistently described staff as having a caring attitude and felt staff treated them with kindness and compassion. Comments included, “They are fantastic, number one, they go the extra mile and are always there for me”, “My carers are wonderful and very caring” and “We really get on, do everything together and have a good giggle”. Relatives stated, “The carers are exceptional, they love [...] to bits and treat him with care and respect” and “The best thing they do is care, they are very sensitive to [...]’s needs. He’s treated like a piece of porcelain, handled with delicacy and care”. Health and social care professionals all spoke highly of the caring nature of staff.

Staff had genuine concern for people’s wellbeing. Staff commented that they felt passionate about the support they gave, they explained the importance of adopting a caring approach and making people feel they matter. Comments included, “What really makes my job is having the opportunity to spend time with the people I support, I love it and have so much fun” and “I feel embarrassed by the satisfaction I get from realising I’ve done something to help make someone’s day. I get a sense of accomplishment when I can make a difference in making someone’s life great”.

People and those that mattered to them valued their relationships with staff. They consistently described staff as going above and beyond their duty of care when providing support. For example, one person explained how they had managed to lock themselves out of their own home. Remembering the service held a spare key in their office, so that staff could access the home to provide support, they contacted Steps Ahead Care & Support Limited and explained their predicament. They told us, “I explained I was locked out and my key was immediately bought out to me, I was amazed at the kindness shown”. Other comments included, “They have become part of our family, we can’t do without them. It’s like a calling they have so many strong attributes it is not just a job to them, it’s like they have been sent from heaven”, “I have been in the care profession all my life, and to me the standards of Steps Ahead are of a very high class, exceptional. The carers love [...] to bits, they laugh with him, not at him and they keep him as him. They treat [...] how I would always treat him, he’s like a member of their own family”.

Staff showed concern compassion and understanding in a meaningful way. Staff interacted with people in a caring supportive manner and took practical action to relieve people’s distress. For example, one relative described how their husband showed signs of distress whilst in the bathroom. They commented, “They talked with him, they spoke of different things, took his mind off what was causing him upset, and changed his emotions quickly. [...] was happy and smiling again. They are very skilled at helping him settle when he feels distressed”. A staff member commented that they knew people well and understood how small things can quickly cause upset. They drew from past experiences and learned from when people had reacted positively, and used their learning to help make people feel comfortable. They added, “I find [...] will copy your emotions, you appear anxious and so will they, you smile and they smile with you, it really works. I always talk to them at eye level, keep my eyes open wide and wear a big smile, I get a great response and really regain their focus”.

People confirmed their privacy and dignity were respected, and they were encouraged to be as independent as possible. Staff understood the importance of respecting people’s own values and upholding what is important to them. For example, one person held great importance to their appearance and the way they dressed. Staff knew the significance this would have on the person’s wellbeing were this not respected at all times. We observed the person interact with staff and they were immaculately dressed. Their loved one commented, “[...] loves to look impeccable, if at any time [...] spoils his clothes, the carers immediately help [...] to get changed. His image is so important to him; staff know this and respect it”.

People were supported by staff who knew their individual communication skills, preferences and abilities. Staff were skilled at responding to people appropriately no matter how complex the person’s needs were to help ensure people felt they mattered, and had control. For example, one person had very limited speech following a stroke. Staff spent time with the person, and knew their unique ways of letting staff know if they required them to interact with them or not. Their relative commented, “Staff are very sensitive to [...]’s needs and know him well. They know if [...] closes his eyes, they need to leave him to rest and they do”.



## Is the service caring?

People received care and support from a consistent staff team who understood their history, likes, needs, hopes and dreams. The registered manager commented, "Right from the initial meeting we establish what people's goals and aspirations are, and then everything is set up to give them the best chance to achieve them". Staff were employed who shared people's interests and were matched to individuals, so staff could respond to people's diverse need and form close bonds and understanding relationships. One person told us, "I find the carers I have to support me, have similar interests; it helps to have somebody who shares the same thoughts, and makes conversations easy to come by". A relative commented, "Having consistent care staff who know [...] so well is the main reason he is improving as well as he is". A health care professional stated, consistency of staff is what the service does best which has a positive impact on people's lives.

Peoples care records were extremely detailed and evidenced peoples perspectives on their whole life's ambitions. For example, one noted a person's dream of moving into what they titled their 'forever home'. The registered manager confirmed this had now been achieved. Staff had supported them fully with the whole process from finding the perfect place to moving in. A staff member said, "Our aim from the very beginning all centred on getting [...] into his 'forever home'. All support was geared around making that happen. Now it has been achieved we are in discussions with [...] about setting new goals". The registered manager commented, "It's a truly great feeling when you see people achieve their goals".

# Is the service responsive?

## Our findings

People received consistent personalised care, treatment and support. Once Steps Ahead Care & Support Limited agreed to support a person, an initial assessment took place. The person, those who matter to them and professionals were actively involved in the whole process. Evidence was gathered of the person's life story to date, their skills and their aspirations for their life ahead. Staff were then selected or if required recruited to match the person's identified choices of how they preferred to manage their health and have their care needs met. A relative said, "We employed a different care agency initially, and had all sorts of problems with finding the right staff to meet my husband's needs. When we first met with Steps Ahead we were promised consistent carers who had the right skills to support [...], and this is what we got. We have been taken from hell to heaven".

People were empowered to have choice and control over who provided their personal care. People were supported to be involved as much as possible in deciding whether or not staff members selected to support them, met their needs. For example, one person decided after a period of time working with somebody, that they no longer wished to have their support. The registered manager took on board the person's comments and promptly arranged for the current member of staff to stop their support, and a new staff member to take over their role. Their relative said, "It wasn't the carers fault at all he was a very dear chap and good at his job. [...] just decided one day he didn't get on with him anymore. I spoke with Steps and they found a new carer straight away, they too have been excellent".

People and their families where appropriate were involved in planning their own care and making decisions about how their needs were met. Staff were skilled in supporting people to do this and assessing people's needs. Staff told us how they discussed ideas about what would make a positive difference in people's daily lives and supported them to achieve their aims. Staff struck the right balance between empowering people and including healthcare professionals and family in treatment and support plans. For example, one person wished to take part in a sponsored walk to raise money for a charity close to their heart. Staff liaised with a physiotherapist regarding various exercises that would be suitable to aid muscle strength, and worked with the person at the local gym to enable

them to build up the power in their legs. Staff respected the person's decision to take the associated risks with completing such a task. The person accomplished their goal alongside members of their family and support staff, who all completed the walk together.

Staff saw support plans as fundamental in providing good individualised support. Each person had a plan that reflected their needs, choices and preferences, and gave detailed guidance to staff on how to make sure personalised care was provided. People's changes in care needs were identified promptly and with the involvement of the individual were reviewed and put into practice by staff. Meetings were then held with the individual's staff team, and the changes were discussed so that each member of staff fully understood the up to date needs of the person. For example, one person had been assessed as requiring two members of staff with all transfers. Two carers were added to the persons support package and the information was immediately communicated to all staff within their team. All staff adhered to the new regime and met the persons need. A staff member said, "We have really good care plans, they are very detailed and we constantly add to them, note changes in people's needs and act on them".

People were protected from the risk of social isolation and staff recognised the importance of companionship and keeping relationships with those who matter to them. People were enabled to take part in personalised activities and encouraged to maintain hobbies and interests. For example, one person when they moved into their new home, was supported to prepare meals for when their family visited, something which staff commented was very important to them. They were also supported to continue to use the leisure facilities that were some distance away from the area they now lived in, in order to maintain the relationship they had built with various instructors that they trusted. Another person was supported to attend a memory clinic in the community which brought them great joy and gave them the social contact they thrived. A relative commented, "It is so important to [...] to be kept functioning socially, this has always been what he enjoys the most".

The service had a policy and procedure in place for dealing with any concerns or complaints. People and those who

## Is the service responsive?

matter to them knew who to contact if they needed to raise a concern or make a complaint. People and relatives, who had raised complaints, had their issues dealt with straight away.

We looked at the one written complaints made to the service. The complaint had been responded to in a timely manner and thoroughly investigated in line with Steps Ahead Care & Support Limited's own policy. Action had been taken and the outcome had been recorded and fed back to the person concerned. The registered manager told

us, they used concerns and complaints to improve their service and raise standards of care. For example, following the complaint they received, practice had been changed. Staff rotas were now e-mailed to the person weekly and any changes were communicated promptly. Confirmation of receipt of the rotas was also sought to ensure there could be no further errors. The person said, "I made a complaint once around communication, there had been a mix up. I was listened to and they acted on what I said. Everything has been good since".



# Is the service well-led?

## Our findings

The director and the registered manager recognised innovation. They actively sought and acted on the views of others and placed a strong emphasis on continually striving to improve. For example, the imaginative ways staff supported people to maintain a healthy balanced diet and the endeavour shown in matching staff to people's interests and needs. Health and social care professionals highly praised staff initiatives and described the service as being a role model to others, having consistently maintained success in their practice over time.

People were at the heart of the service. The service worked in partnership with other organisations to help enable people to achieve their goals, hopes and dreams. People and their loved ones described the characteristics of the service to be, 'Fantastic', 'Wonderful', 'Exceptional' and stated, 'They go the extra mile'.

The director and the registered manager took an active role within the running of the service and had good knowledge of the staff and the people who were supported by Steps Ahead Care & Support Limited. There were clear lines of responsibility and accountability within the management structure. The service had notified the Care Quality Commission (CQC) of all significant events which had occurred in line with their legal obligations.

People, their relatives, health and social care professionals and staff all described the management of the service to be approachable, open and supportive. Comments included, "I can call the manager whenever I need to. She also comes out to see me and makes sure everything is ok", "The management are so open and easy to talk to they make sure everyone gets listened too, are happy and well supported" and "I have always found them to be available, organised, open to suggestion and professional whenever I have contacted with them".

The registered manager told us staff were encouraged and challenged to find new ways to enhance the high quality service they provided. Staff told us they felt empowered to have a voice and share their opinions and ideas they had. The registered manager talked us through suggestions made by staff that had been implemented into practice with success. For example, one staff member had noted a person often chose not to complete their daily exercise plan as advised by their physiotherapist. They felt this

could have a negative impact on the person's rehabilitation. They suggested that if staff were to complete the exercise programme with the person it may encourage them to partake. This was trialled and had a real positive effect. Now all staff that support the person complete the plan daily alongside the person. The registered manager said "It resulted in a significant improvement in their mobility. I've even been to see them and taken part in doing sit ups, it worked fantastically".

The registered manager explained how they used reflective practice to ensure staff not only sustained their current practice but continually sought ways to improve it. The management had introduced staff quizzes, with questions specifically designed to help ensure staff were up to date with current best practice. For example, a healthy eating quiz. Results highlighted areas where learning and development could be needed. The registered manager commented, this was something they were looking to develop further, and could see the potential it could have on helping to ensure staff retain vital information when carrying out their role.

The registered manager told us their core values were, for people to be supported to live as full a life as possible, staff to be equally supported, and to have an open and transparent service. feedback from people, friends and relatives, and professionals were sought in order to enhance their service. Questionnaires were conducted that encouraged people to share ideas that could be implemented into practice. Staff understood the values of the service and consistently included them in their work. Staff comments included, "The management are keen to make sure both the clients and the staff and supported to be happy" and "clients and staff are both listened too, if something can be done better then it's done better". A relative said "The values I hold are shared by Steps Ahead and they deliver them exceptionally". A healthcare professional commented, the service were keen to seek advice from professional's, were very open about their strengths and weaknesses, and took on board advice to improve practice.

The service worked in partnership with key organisations to support care provision. Health and social care professionals who had involvement with the service confirmed to us, communication was good. They told us the service worked in partnership with them, followed advice and provided good support. A social care



## Is the service well-led?

professional confirmed communication was of a good standard, they stated the service was always fully engaged, attended meetings appropriately and gave constructive and clear information when asked.

Staff told us they were happy in their work, understood what was expected of them and were motivated to provide and maintain a high standard of care. Comments included, "Since starting work with the company, it is the happiest I have ever been. They take time to get to know you, you are not just a number which is so nice", "The managers are keen to make sure I'm comfortable, happy and have all the support I need. I am and I do", "I really enjoy my job, I feel appreciated and get thanked for even little things I do to help" and "I love my job and I'm really really happy".

There was an effective quality assurance system in place to drive continuous improvement within the service. Audits were carried out in line with policies and procedures. Information following investigations were used to aid learning and drive quality across the service. Areas of concern had been identified and changes made so that quality of care was not compromised. For example, one area of concern had been highlighted with regards miscommunication that led to a medical appointment having been missed. Practice was changed, responsibility was established, and clear instructions were communicated to staff on the exact process that must be followed to help ensure no further appointments would be missed. The registered manager confirmed no appointments had been missed since the investigation had taken place, and the new procedures had been introduced.