

Linkage Community Trust

Abbey House

Inspection report

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Ratings

Overall rating for this service

Outstanding 

Is the service safe?

Good 

Is the service effective?

Good 

Is the service caring?

Outstanding 

Is the service responsive?

Outstanding 

Is the service well-led?

Outstanding 

Summary of findings

Overall summary

This unannounced comprehensive inspection took place on the 5 December 2018.

At the last inspection in January 2016 we rated the service good overall and in four key questions. The caring key question was rated outstanding. At this inspection we found the service had improved its overall rating to outstanding.

Abbey House is registered to provide accommodation for persons who require nursing and personal care for up to 13 younger adults living with a learning disability and or autistic spectrum disorder related conditions. Most younger adults attend the local Linkage college facility full-time and reside at the service during term-time only. The service is a large detached period property in a central location in the town close to all local amenities. At the time of the inspection the service was supporting 13 people.

The care service had not been developed and designed in line with the values that underpin the Registering the Right Support and other best practice guidance in that it was registered to accommodate up to 13 people and would be considered a more congregate setting, however the service was registered prior to the Care Quality Commission(CQC) implementing this guidance. Values such as, choice, promotion of independence and inclusion underpin the ethos of the service and what it continually strives to achieve for people. People with learning disabilities and autism using the service can live as ordinary a life as any citizen during their placement at Abbey House. Following graduation, many people have chosen to stay in the area, living in residential care settings or supported living placements as they have developed such close friendships, support networks, secured regular work placements or paid employment and feel part of the community.

There was a very experienced, popular and well-established registered manager in place at the time of our inspection. A registered manager is a person who has registered with the CQC 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.

This service was selected to be part of our national review, looking at the quality of oral health care support for people living in care homes. The inspection team included a dental inspector who looked in detail at how well the service supported people with their oral health. This includes support with oral hygiene and access to dentists. We will publish our national report of our findings and recommendations in 2019.

The genuinely caring and inclusive culture at the service was outstanding. Staff demonstrated extremely caring values and showed a very positive regard for what was important and mattered to people. Staff were compassionate and kind and went 'above and beyond' to ensure people received positive outcomes. The trust developed between people and staff helped promote people's independence, confidence and helped them achieve excellent outcomes. The registered manager and staff were very proud of the support they

provided and people's achievements were celebrated.

Respect for equality, diversity and inclusion was fully embedded within the service and integral to everything the staff did. Staff used innovative and effective ways to communicate with people and follow each person's wishes on their preferred method of communication.

The registered manager and staff had an excellent understanding of people's needs. A wide range of educational, vocational, leisure and voluntary activities were offered to people who used the service to aid independent living and support strong community inclusion. Staff found ways to improve people's lives by introducing creative activities that opened new possibilities for people and encouraged them to be active and healthy. Positive risk taking was driven throughout the organisation to support people to lead fulfilling lives and reach their full potential.

The service was exceptionally well-led by a registered manager who demonstrated strong values, led by example and had embedded an open and caring culture. They worked in partnership with other organisations, shared best practice and strove to continually improve the service. Robust quality monitoring systems ensured any shortfalls were identified and addressed. Improvements were driven by the consistently high levels of constructive engagement with people, their relatives, staff and stakeholders; whose views were valued and supported positive changes within the service. People's concerns and complaints were taken seriously.

Staff were very positive about the team work, the support they received from the registered manager and about the empowering culture that was promoted by the service. Staff felt valued, had a high level of job satisfaction and were very proud to work at Abbey House.

The service provided safe care to people. Staff completed safeguarding training and could describe the action they would take if they had concerns. Positive behaviour plans directed staff to effectively support people's behaviour that challenged the service. People were supported to take their medicines independently and safely. Staff completed assessments to help minimise the risks people had. There were sufficient staff deployed to meet people's needs and they were recruited in a safe way. The environment was safe and comfortable.

People were supported to have maximum choice and control of their lives and staff supported them in the least restrictive way possible; the policies and systems in the service supported this practice. When restrictions on a person's liberty was necessary the registered manager had ensured the correct application had been made to protect the person's legal rights. People's nutritional needs were well met. Staff were provided with a learning and development programme that nurtured their knowledge, skill and professional development. Staff undertook champion roles to promote good practice across the service and benefitted from regular meaningful supervision and appraisal to ensure their well-being and high-quality care.

The five questions we ask about services and what we found

We always ask the following five questions of services.

Is the service safe?

Good 

The service was safe.

The service facilitated positive risk taking in a safe way. This included safe administration of medicines.

Staff were recruited safely and there were sufficient numbers of staff who had the skills to meet people's needs.

Staff understood their responsibilities in protecting people from abuse and knew how to respond to any concerns appropriately.

Is the service effective?

Good 

The service was effective.

People were supported by a team of skilled and competent staff who received on-going training and development.

People's choices and rights were well respected and supported. Where people were unable to make specific decisions, systems were in place to ensure these were made in people's best interests and in the least restrictive way.

People's health and nutritional needs were met. Staff contacted health professionals in a timely way when required.

Is the service caring?

Outstanding 

The service was extremely caring.

The service had an outstanding approach to equality, diversity and human rights. All staff interaction with people centred on equal relationships, respect and dignity.

Staff used creative communication methods to engage with people to support them to express their views and make choices.

Very positive, honest and trusting relationships were formed and

valued by people who used the service and staff. Staff had an excellent understanding of individualised care to meet each person's diverse needs.

Is the service responsive?

The service was extremely responsive.

The exceptional support people received stretched, challenged and motivated them. People were at the heart of care planning; creative tools supported people to achieve outstanding outcomes.

People were encouraged to pursue their hobbies, interests and education that fulfilled their aspirations and increased their confidence, well-being and independence.

Very strong links were established with local networks and organisations. As a result, people who used the service were valued members of the local community.

Outstanding 

Is the service well-led?

The service was extremely well-led.

The leadership, management and governance of the service assured the delivery of high-quality and person-centred care. Staff felt valued and very proud to work for the organisation.

The service was open and transparent and worked in partnership with external organisations, with an emphasis on continuous improvement and better outcomes for people using the service.

The vision and values of the service were fully understood by the staff and these made sure people were at the heart of the service. There was a culture of sharing and celebrating success.

Outstanding 

Abbey House

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.

This unannounced comprehensive inspection took place on 5 December 2018. The inspection was completed by one inspector. A dental inspector was also present who looked in detail at how well the service supported people with their oral health.

We used information the provider sent us in the Provider Information Return. This is information we require providers to send us at least once annually to give some key information about the service, what the service does well and improvements they plan to make. We also looked at notifications sent in to us by the provider, which gave us information about how incidents and accidents were managed.

We observed interactions with people to establish how well they were supported and their relationships with the staff. We spoke with seven people who used the service, the registered manager, five support workers and a speech and language therapist. Following the inspection, we spoke with five relatives and received written feedback from three relatives and two health/social care professionals involved with the service.

We looked at a selection of documentation in three people's care files including their medication records. We also looked at a selection of records used in the management of the service. These included staff rotas, staff recruitment and training records, quality assurance audit checks, accident and incident records, maintenance checks, surveys and minutes of meetings with staff.

Is the service safe?

Our findings

Care and support was planned and delivered in a way that ensured people's safety and welfare. People told us they received safe care. Comments included, "I feel very safe here. All the staff and other people are nice" and "We talk about safety a lot in our key worker meetings. The manager does assessments on safe travel and I have learnt about money."

The provider had effective systems in place to safeguard people from abuse and harm. Staff had all completed training and were aware of their roles in protecting people and how to report concerns. They confirmed they would do this without hesitation to keep people safe. A relative told us, "I trust the staff implicitly. [Name of family member] has always been safe at Linkage and this is a priority for the staff." During the inspection we saw people approach staff and it was evident they were comfortable in their presence.

The service had a very positive and enabling approach to managing risks and people's safety was carefully balanced with their right to develop independence. Assessments were carried out to determine any potential risks involving people who used the service. These gave staff clear instructions about how to keep people safe whilst optimising their independence as much as possible. For example, a risk assessment had information for staff about how to recognise and respond to signs that a person was at risk of presenting behaviour that could challenge the service. Records showed staff had involved external professionals to develop positive support plans for individuals where necessary and for one person this was set up before their placement commenced.

Staff continued to be recruited safely. Candidates were required to complete an application form, attend a competency based interview and have background and character checks completed to help ensure they were suitable to work with vulnerable people.

People were supported by sufficient numbers of staff to meet their needs safely. This included one-to-one support hours in place when in the service and required two-to-one support when accessing the community. The staffing hours each person required was agreed with the commissioning teams prior to the person's admission and reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Most people attended college Monday to Friday and some people went home at weekends. Additional staff had recently been recruited to support one person's transition following their graduation from college to facilitate more community based activities. The provider organised the staff team to work with people at the service and at college which provided continuity of support.

Medicines continued to be very safely managed by the service. People's medicine support needs were assessed and planned for at the start of their placement and reviewed continually. New medicine cabinets had been provided in people's rooms in line with the organisation's revised policy and self-administration programme recently put in place. This five-stage programme had been designed to ensure each person would be able to participate at some level, which would further enhance their independent living skills and

enable them to reach their goals and aspirations. Medicine records were completed accurately.

Accidents and incidents were managed safely. During our inspection visit, we found all areas of the home were clean and tidy. The premises were safe and well-maintained. There was an emergency plan to guide staff in dealing with issues such as floods and utility failure. Equipment used was checked, maintained and serviced appropriately to make sure it remained safe to use. Personal emergency evacuation plans were in place for each person who used the service.

Is the service effective?

Our findings

People told us they were very happy with the staff and support they received. Comments included, "The staff are great and are always there to support us if we need it" and "The staff are nice and help me with my goals."

The provider invested in training to ensure staff were very skilled and knowledgeable. Staff completed a comprehensive induction and they had access to a range of essential training and courses specific to the people who used the service. Staff received regular supervision and annual appraisals that supported their continuous development and maintained high standards of care delivery. Relatives told us, "I've been very impressed with all the staff at Abbey House and college. The care is seamless and the results are incredibly good" and "Staff are extremely skilled and consistent in their approach."

Very effective and personalised transition arrangements continued to be in place. The provider's transition team worked with the service staff to complete comprehensive assessments for all the new students and also to support people moving on to new placements or home, when they completed their course. People were invited to visit and stay overnight to experience activities with other people and staff. One person's relative described how the registered manager had visited their family member at their school and at home to get to know them and obtain relevant information. When the person moved in staff had personalised their diary/ timetable to replicate what they used in school which all facilitated a smooth admission.

The Mental Capacity Act 2005 (MCA) provides a legal framework for making decisions on behalf of people who may lack the mental capacity to do so for themselves. The MCA 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 decisions, any made on their behalf must be in their best interests and as least restrictive as possible. Staff were clear about how they gained consent from people before carrying out care tasks. Assessments of people's capacity had been completed and best interest documentation was in place. This showed decisions made for people who lacked capacity were made in their best interests and included consultation with relevant people. We noted the wording on some records was not clear and this was addressed during the inspection.

People who lack mental capacity to consent to arrangements for necessary care or treatment can only be deprived of their liberty when this is in their best interests and legally authorised under the MCA. The procedures for this in care homes and hospitals are called the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS). People who met the criteria for DoLS had their capacity assessed and one application had been authorised by the supervising body.

Staff supported people to eat a healthy, balanced diet. Each person had a food and nutrition plan in place and where necessary associated risk assessments. One person's care plan directed staff to encourage fluid intake to reduce the risk of seizures. Some people were attending a local slimming club each week to support weight loss or a healthy eating programme. A relative said, "We spoke with the manager who was very tactful in their approach and persuaded [Name of person] to attend Slimming World sessions. It was

handled incredibly well and they have lost half a stone, which is fantastic."

The service fostered good working relationships with other professionals, who praised staff's knowledge, the good communication and effective working relationships they shared. Staff had accessed specialist training from health care professionals involved in some people's care and had encouraged relatives to attend these sessions too. Care was planned and delivered in line with current evidence based guidance and best practice.

People's health needs were well met. Most people accessed routine healthcare and dental appointments in the college holidays. A relative told us, "The staff monitor [Name of person's] health and wellbeing very closely and always let us know if there are any concerns." New easy to read and pictorial health guidance to support people's health and wellbeing had been produced. The dental inspector praised the booklet on oral hygiene that had been provided for people.

The environment was suitable for people's needs. Most rooms had en-suite facilities and bedrooms were personalised to reflect people's individual preferences. A bedroom on the ground floor was equipped to support a person with physical disability.

Is the service caring?

Our findings

People were unanimous in describing the inclusive family atmosphere and very caring support they received from staff. They said, "I love it here. I get to see my friends and have good talk and relax with the staff. It's like my second home" and "We are family and friends here."

The service continued to have strong visible person-centred culture with individuals at its heart and was committed to ensuring people received the best possible support in an exceptionally caring and nurturing environment. Staff took time to build up positive relationships and trust with people and their families. They had an excellent understanding of people's personalities, interests, their aspirations and how they communicated and expressed themselves. A relative told us, "We have found the staff incredibly kind and caring to all of us, without exception." A health professional told us the registered manager led by example and values of compassion and kindness were intrinsic to the service.

There were many of examples where staff had continued to go 'over and above' to provide extremely caring and compassionate support. A member of staff had been working closely with a person over time for them to have their first hair cut with a hairdresser. This included looking at pictures, photos, choosing a salon, looking round and meeting the hairdresser on many occasions. The very patient and creative way staff had worked with this person to get them to try something new, showed real empathy and compassion. Their relative told us, "The excellent planning and the very caring and consistent approach from a very dedicated member of staff ensured the visit was a success, [Name of person] loved the experience. The member of staff goes the extra mile all the time and has developed a very close and trusting relationship with them." Other examples of staff going 'over and above' included accompanying people to health appointments and annual reviews in their own time, to support their anxiety and concerns.

Staff were particularly sensitive to times when people needed more caring and compassionate support. One person's relative was seriously ill and staff made time for the person to discuss their concerns and had arranged specific counselling from the community learning disability team to help them deal with their feelings. Another person had experienced a family bereavement and staff had spent additional time with the person talking about their family member, supporting them to cope with the loss. A member of staff told us, "We are like their parents away from home and sometimes they need a cuddle."

The service continued to ensure people's preferences and opinions were treated with importance. People took part in staff interviews and were asked by the registered manager whether they would like to be supported by the person interviewed. People told us they chose their key worker and could change their minds. Some people had used advocacy services to help them decide their plans after graduation from the college.

Staff continued to demonstrate an extremely caring and welcoming approach to new students. They had recognised how one person may have struggled to settle in and with their agreement, had taken their photograph during one of their trial stays at the service to add to the wall of student photos. This encouraged them to feel at home and welcomed as soon as they moved in. The person had also been

provided with photos and the names of all the staff, so they could familiarise themselves and feel more comfortable with them.

Staff continued to be extremely skilled at supporting people to resolve the conflict and tensions that sometimes arose between young adults. Relatives told us they were impressed with the values of tolerance and respect that staff encouraged.

Relatives praised the standard of communication with the staff. One said, "There is excellent liaison between Abbey House and home. Staff use their common sense and when needed contact us, but not in a ritualistic tick box way, just when it is needed." We observed staff communicated extremely effectively with people in a way that respected their wishes and views. Where people experienced difficulties in communicating verbally, staff used creative communication tools and these included signs, pictures, photos and body language. They were adapted for each person, which enabled people to communicate effectively and by their preferred method.

One person preferred to use a range of pictorial systems to help them communicate. These included a picture exchange communication system (PECS). The speech and language therapist confirmed they had set up the PECS with the staff, ensuring it was relevant to the person and had used photos where possible. The person preferred to communicate their emotions through animals and characters and staff ensured the person had access to model animals or a soft toy throughout the service to facilitate this.

To help one person understand change and different situations, the staff and their relative provided printed 'social stories'. A recent one to support the person going home had included photos of the person, their home, parents, the vehicle and Abbey House. It detailed the dates when they would be going, returning and which staff would accompany them. Staff told us the 'social stories' were very meaningful for the person and a highly effective communication tool.

Without exception we saw staff interactions towards people who used the service centred upon equal relationships, respect and dignity. When they talked with and provided support for individuals, they encouraged them to take the lead. Staff respected people's private space. A relative told us, "Staff always wait outside whilst [Name of person] has a shower due to the risk of seizures. This gives them privacy and supports their independence, but it's also very safe."

All staff had attended in depth equality and diversity training on induction. These values were revisited in refresher training courses and at provider events held in 2018. There was a strong recognition that people were individuals and staff celebrated diversity which was considered a positive attribute for people who used the service and staff. They described how they supported people who used the service around areas such as disability, sexual orientation, culture and discrimination. One person told us, "Staff have helped me to be more confident about who I am and how I express myself." A member of staff said, "We treat each person as an individual. We support them to have informed choices about all aspects of their lives and to know they are an equally valued member of society like anyone else."

Staff understood the need to respect people's confidentiality. Information was held securely and access was restricted to ensure it was not viewed by unauthorised people

Is the service responsive?

Our findings

The service was exceptionally responsive to people's individual needs and delivered care that supported people's choices and developed their confidence and self-esteem, enabling them to achieve their potential and meet their aspirations.

People who used the service told us how much they enjoyed living at Abbey House and attending college. They liked the staff and were all incredibly proud of the progress they had made towards their independent living skills. Comments included, "Home and college are perfect. I'm so happy at Linkage", "Staff encourage me lots", "Staff are absolutely lovely; they all help and support our independence" and "We are very proud of ourselves. I can do the cooking and laundry on my own now, I couldn't do anything like that when I moved here. I feel very confident about life and what I have achieved."

Relatives considered the support from staff in developing their family members independence and social skills was exceptional. Comments included, "The progress [Name of person] has made is enormous. She is so much more confident it is a delight to see. Abbey House and Linkage have given her some very good coping mechanisms which will help her well in future life and relationship management" and "[Name of person] has developed their independence and matured more than we could have dreamed with the fantastic support and opportunities they have in place. The staff manage their behaviour so well. 'Hats off' to Linkage."

Staff demonstrated an extremely positive approach to promoting people's right to independence. As part of the 24-hour curriculum, people were encouraged to develop their life skills within the home and the community. Staff gave us lots of examples of how each person's independence had developed in meeting or exceeding their goals set in areas such as: tidying their room, laundry, money management, shopping, meal and drink preparation, personal care and dressing. The registered manager described how a recent graduate had their own housekeeping budget and times for cooking as they had achieved such high levels of independence. Staff comments included, "The young people here are superstars, we see them growing in confidence which is so rewarding" and "It's a privilege to work with the students. Their progress is amazing and is so pleasing to see. Our work is so satisfying."

Road safety was a key area the staff provided support with and some people were now able to walk to the college independently. The service encouraged positive risk taking to achieve this. The registered manager gave examples of people who had greatly exceeded their expected goals in this area and were also walking into town and to their work placements independently, or using public transport such as buses and trains. One person told us, "With road safety, we went out in groups and walked to college. Then [Name of manager] did a check and I got passed; I'm really proud of that."

The provider recognised the need to empower people and they arranged for people to undertake work placements to enhance their experience and increase the possibility of gaining employment at later stage. These were closely linked to their interests and vocational pathway. Some people accessed multiple placements each week and these included: hotels, shops, cafes, a gym and an animal rescue centre. People

told us how much they enjoyed their voluntary work and one person said, "I work front of house in the hotel bar helping with functions and events. I like it, I have to dress smart like the other staff." A parent told us, "The ultimate accolade is that due to [Name of person's] increased confidence and following their summer volunteer role, they have been offered a job at a vets at the end of college."

People who used the service were at the heart of care planning and actively involved in developing their care, support, college timetables and all aspects of their social life. Staff understood the importance of knowing people's personal histories and cultural backgrounds, so they could care and support them in a very person-centred way. People told us they had been fully involved in writing and reviewing their care plans. One person told us, "My care plans are easy to read and very personal about me. I've done my care progress review with staff, we have regular meetings. I plan what I do each year and agree targets and objectives. It's really good."

Some parents had requested additional support when their relative had returned home for the weekend or holidays. Staff worked with parents and people to develop extended programmes of independence activities which provided continuity in the person's routines.

People at the service all attended the college on a week day or accessed support at the service and participated in a diverse range of vocational, educational and personal development programmes tailored to their key interests. Courses were accredited and students could achieve qualifications in maths, English, retail, hospitality, ICT, media, horticulture and small animal care. The timetable also included enrichment subjects such as performing arts to develop confidence and sports and exercise activities. The provider was partnered with Grimsby Town Football Club and students played in their disability team. A parent described their relative's 'sport leader's' award as a fantastic achievement.

The service promoted the use of new technology in relation to people's health and wellbeing in the form of software applications (apps) on their phones or tablet computers. One person had used 'My Cortisol' app on their phone to give clear guidance to them and others about their emergency medicine. Other people were using the 'Change 4 life' (from the NHS apps library) food scanning app on their phone. This colour coded nutritional information and provided the sugar, salt, fat and calorie content in foods. The app had promoted positive health outcomes for people. Comments from people included, "I understand more about healthy eating now and we talk about this when we are choosing the menus" and "I've lost 6lbs and achieved a star award. I'm doing well and want to carry on. I'm eating food I've never liked before. I have Weetabix and banana for breakfast now." A member of staff told us, "This has had a very positive impact with the students, the app is fun and they are far more interested in the information."

The provider had developed creative activities that promoted and enhanced people's learning and wellbeing. Staff at the service had worked with the college to introduce Lego therapy; staff used this fun pastime to provide challenging and structured learning sessions. Small groups of people worked together to build models and this developed their social and motor skills such as communication, listening for instructions, waiting turns and finding the pieces. Staff told us how much people enjoyed the sessions and how they matched the models to people's interests and had obtained some Jurassic Park Lego for one person who really liked animals. They also said it was a good opportunity for more able students to work with less able students to provide positive peer support.

Staff had used the Linkage Sensory Bus to trial different sensory equipment for one person to assess its suitability and the person's preference, before purchasing some equipment. This had been very successful. The resource is a converted bus offering individuals, schools and organisations across Lincolnshire access to a sensory room and free hire of multi-sensory equipment.

Social interaction and inclusion was a key focus and the service enabled people to develop new friendships at the service and in the local community. Each person was supported to enjoy a range of activities they had chosen. This included support to access planned events at community based social groups and leisure facilities. During the inspection most students attended a local disco in Cleethorpes after their evening meal. They clearly enjoyed getting dressed up and ready to go out together. Staff were creative in accessing bespoke activity and skills provision, such as an art therapist and personal trainer for one person. They also hired a private swimming pool in school holidays, due to some people's sensitivity to loud noise. People enjoyed very active social lives, one person said, "Each week I go to 'Clubbercise', a drama group, slimming club and a disco. We also go out on trips together each weekend which is fun."

The service had successfully implemented and exceeded the Accessible Information Standard (AIS). The standard applied to people with a disability, impairment or sensory loss. Information was available in a variety of alternative formats for people using the service, including the use of symbols, photographs, electronic equipment including iPads and pictorial documents. The use of these formats had been extended greatly and updated since the last inspection so that more policies and procedures, information guides, fire evacuation procedures and information about health and wellbeing were all available to promote communication and understanding in every aspect of people's lives. Where pictures were used these represented the diversity of people living and working at Abbey House and the wider community.

There were regular opportunities for people, and people that matter to them, to raise issues, concerns and compliments. People had a copy of the complaints policy in their preferred format. One person said, "We have house meetings where we can talk about concerns and anything we are upset about." The registered manager confirmed any concerns or complaints would be taken seriously, explored and responded to in line with the provider's policy.

Is the service well-led?

Our findings

The service was exceptionally well-led. Relatives, staff and external professionals were consistently positive and complimentary about the registered manager and the running of the service. Relatives told us, "We can only thank them enormously and commend them highly", "I would definitely recommend the service and college to others" and "The staff and management team work 'with' us and are open and honest in their discussions. They have people's individual needs and aspirations at the heart of everything they do. They do it very well." Another person described how they felt the Linkage philosophy around integration was incredibly positive.

There was an exceptionally strong person-centred culture shared by the registered manager and staff. All the staff knew how to support people to achieve their goals and aspirations. The registered manager encouraged the staff team to be innovative and creative and people achieved levels of independence and confidence they had not previously experienced. One relative told us, "I've been most impressed with the ambition they have had for [Name of family member] and how the organisation has helped them to achieve this, it is integral to everything the staff do." Staff achieved the skills that enabled them to provide high standards of care and develop their careers.

People who used the service had taken part in fundraising for their charities of choice; a local charity for homeless persons and cancer research. They had worked together as a group and held a tea party. They also took part in a fashion show. Some people at the service were members of the Linkage Student Union (LSU) and attended meetings with the provider's management team to give their views and ideas. They organised the annual prom and LSU had been responsible for creating sensory rooms and gyms at the campus. One person was the editor of the first edition of the new student newsletter; this provided a range of topical information and included a survey which people completed by scanning a barcode on their electronic devices.

Some people were also involved in 'Linkage Vintage' a micro-enterprise which upcycled old items of furniture and supported art projects. One person had recently held an art exhibition in a local town and sold many of their paintings. The provider was looking to support the person to set up their own micro-enterprise.

The support people received stretched, challenged and motivated them. The service celebrated achievement and the smallest steps of progress were recognised. This year six people at the service had won the provider's hospitality award for their work in providing meals at a local drop-in centre for the homeless in Grimsby. Other people had been nominated for awards for taking part in the Linkage triathlon, their work with Linkage Vintage and for their work in the local community. The registered manager considered each person had made so much progress with their individual goals this term that they had arranged a mini awards ceremony to recognise and celebrate achievements for everyone living in the home.

The provider had an excellent values and behaviour framework in place where the vision, mission and values were fully reflected throughout the service, in staff approach, and in their delivery of care. The

provider's core values were at the heart of everything they did and ensured staff were fully committed to embracing teamwork, enabling independence and upholding honesty and respect.

Staff continued to demonstrate an outstanding approach to diversity and human rights. The provider had achieved the prestigious national equality standard 'Investors in Diversity Award,' This showed they had a structured and planned approach to embedding the values of equality, diversity and inclusion at the heart of the organisation. The head of care confirmed they had recently completed their self-assessment and drawn up an action plan for addressing areas for improvement as they maintained their commitment to FREDI (Fairness, Respect, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion).

The organisation had also gained 'Investors in People' which reflected the provider's commitment to good business and people management. Linkage college had maintained their good rating with Ofsted.

The provider worked in partnership with a wide range of local and national employers to offer people the experience of real working environments. The provider also had established links with universities and was currently involved in a research project for employability with Lincoln University. They were also working collaboratively with a local authority around the introduction of individual funding packages, which would support a more person-centred model of care.

Health and social care professionals were very positive about their experience of working with the service and their comments were complimentary and reflected very positive and effective working arrangements. Professionals told us, "The service is very well-managed and staff have a very holistic approach to the care of their clients" and "The staff I have worked with know the clients well and are motivated to offer needs led support. I have found the home manager easy to work with and to communicate well with our team."

Staff described an extremely open and transparent culture at the service, where they could make suggestions and were listened to. They felt valued and were very complementary about the support from the registered manager who fostered a very positive team ethic and supported their ongoing development. Comments included, "I love working here. The care is excellent and we have good opportunities. We work as a team, trust each other and feel valued", "The staff here are truly amazing, they strive for us to be better and have taught me so much. The manager is brilliant. This is the best place I've worked" and "I'm really proud to work here, it is an amazing organisation; the work we do is so rewarding. The young people make it so worthwhile, we see such a tremendous change and we are so proud of their achievements."

Continuous improvement was a priority for the registered manager and staff team and they promoted this through collaborative working with other teams and organisations. The registered manager contributed to working groups and had completed project work which had been implemented throughout the organisation. They had developed the new self-medication model and the new training record. Staff were encouraged to develop the service through taking on champion roles for health and wellbeing, equality and diversity, communication and advanced technology. A person at the service was a 'student ambassador' for health and wellbeing.

Abbey House was a part of the local community. People were known to neighbours who engaged with them and they were known in local shops, cafes, recreational centres and work placements. Many people chose to stay in the area after their graduation from college as they had built such close friendships and networks. A relative said, "The staff go the extra mile to make sure [Name of person] is involved in all aspects of life there and they are so happy. It was the best decision we made to choose Linkage."

There were consistently high levels of constructive engagement with people who used the service, relative

and staff. People attended weekly house meetings and individual review and progress meetings. Themed monthly surveys in accessible format also enabled people to share their views. Previous topics had included managing money, keyworkers, making choices, independence and activities in the home. People's comments had led to changes in service delivery with individual menu planning, additional budgetary support and the provision of additional activities such as trampolining and dancing.

Relatives were regularly asked for their views on the quality of the service being provided, this was achieved through phone calls, emails, surveys and meetings. A Linkage parent and carer group had been established and regularly met with the provider's management team. One of the biggest outcomes from this forum had been improvements with the transition process to secure peer support and provide support with funding applications.

Staff were included in making decisions about the development of the service. There were annual surveys and regular meetings. There was also a staff representatives group which one member of staff from the service attended. Recent changes from staff consultation included the mental health awareness courses being held face-to-face rather than on line, due to staff preference. Staff received remuneration for long service within the organisation.

There were robust systems in place to monitor the quality of the service. Audits were undertaken, which ensured that the systems in place to monitor the standards and quality of the service were being managed effectively. The peer review audit system had been revised and further developed in line with the CQC key questions. The recent audit showed overall positive findings and any shortfalls had been addressed. All safeguarding, accident and incident reports were sent to the senior management team for analysis and review to identify any patterns and outcomes to inform learning at service and organisational level. The registered provider had sent appropriate notifications to CQC in accordance with our regulations.

The registered manager was incredibly proud of the 'can-do' ethos demonstrated by the staff team and their hard work to support people to develop their skills and lead fulfilling lives. They told us, "I do believe in Abbey House we have a very strong, visible person-centred culture and go the extra mile in helping each person reach their goals, developing their independence, ensuring they are happy and well-cared for at all times. We will continually strive towards improvements to enhance the lives of the young people accessing our service."