



Supporting people with learning disabilities at night-times and staff rotas

A #NoBedtimes guide for support teams

One of the questions we get asked most frequently at Stay Up Late is 'How can you support teams to write rotas that support people to stay up late?' This information sheet shows how it is possible to write rotas that mean not only do people with learning disabilities lead great lives, but support staff find it better, too.

Case Study One: 'Everyone is quite institutionalised'

Paul Richards, Director of Stay Up Late, recalls a conversation with managers at a social care event: *"They told me they had been there for 30 years, as had the residents and "consequently everyone is quite institutionalised, and that includes the staff". They told me that the unions wouldn't allow rotas to be changed and that it was impossible for the people living there to be involved in recruiting their support staff as 'they are simply far too disabled to be involved.'* Quite simply I see this as an irresponsible position to take. I've not met anyone yet who can't tell you how they want to be supported. The managers are absolving themselves of any responsibility and won't take on the challenge of doing something about it."

Case Study Two: 'Getting ideas, consulting staff and finding solutions'

Paul recounts a meeting with another support provider, Grace Eyre, who are based in Hove and the city's oldest charity supporting people with learning disabilities: *"One of the managers said they'd been really inspired by our campaign and had made significant changes to the way they provided support as a result. They did this through getting ideas from other managers, consulting with staff and de-personalising any problems so as to find the best solution."*

Eight steps to devising a No Bedtimes rota

Here the team from Grace Eyre give us their tips for ensuring the people they support are empowered to lead active and fulfilling social lives.

1. Normalise evenings

Grace Eyre didn't book in extra staff they just made it normal that staff would be needed to support people to go out in the evenings.

2. Re-write the rota

Grace Eyre removed the inflexibility of shifts that ran from 8am–2pm and 2pm–8pm. We know that re-writing a rota can sometimes be a monumental headache. It's like the mother of all Sudoku puzzles. Trying to accommodate all the needs of the people you support and your staff team can be difficult BUT it's your job! Happily, the service manager relished the challenge of re-writing the rota by getting ideas from other managers, consulting with staff and de-personalising any problems so as to find a good solution. Accommodating your staff, within reason, is also important as you want a happy staff team.

3. Explain why the changes are needed

Grace Eyre fully engaged with the staff team to explain what the changes were about and why they were needed.

4. Check on the legalities

Who knows if 'the unions won't like it' is a valid reason? It's of course valid for the unions to uphold staff terms and conditions, as written in their contracts. In this case the union were a great help as they provided clarity about what was relevant which enabled any ambiguous objections to be dismissed. There were some staff on TUPE contracts and for them they got paid a little bit extra. (In reality this is a tiny amount of money and not something the management are worried about as the benefits far outweigh any cost). The unions remained helpful - making it clear what was relevant to terms and conditions for staff employment contracts. This enabled other ambiguities to be got rid of. The lesson here is don't let people use 'the union' as a vague reason when in fact they're just saying they don't want to do it, or don't like the idea.

5. Allow staff time to adapt

Grace Eyre introduced a transition period to allow time for the staff team to adjust.

6. Stop clock watching - a night out is a night out!

Often we hear that people suggest a pragmatic approach to preventing the issues of leaving club nights early is to have the 'hand-over' at the club. We can see why people think this is a good idea but if you go out with someone for the night you want to share the whole evening with them. So staff are there to spend the whole evening with people and be relaxed about what time they leave. Thinking about other evening activities – it's not just about clubbing, the people they support love having a walk on the seafront or having a kick about in the park. Grace Eyre have reclaimed the evenings! No support staff from this house will leave a night at 9pm just because "that's what we always do."

7. Bring a culture of challenge into the work environment

One person wanted to go out for pizza. Under the old way of working the staff would try and work out how to fit that in before the shift ended. Now they see that the point of a trip like that is not just eating a pizza, it's about going out and being present with someone and supporting them to enjoy an evening out in a restaurant. That might include stopping off to do other things too! It's a simple switch in thinking that has transformed their work.

8. Take time to listen to what the people you support want to do

For example, at Grace Eyre, for one man routines are all around meal-times and he'll want to go to bed after dinner. So they've supported him to think about this differently and will go out for a meal to enable him to experience different things in the evening. Not every evening, but regularly and when he wants to.

The challenge for all of us

Contrasting the seemingly hopeless resignation of the managers in the first case study with the inspirational can-do approach in the second highlights the importance of one thing: taking responsibility. If we know something is wrong then it's our responsibility to try and do something about it, whether that's personally or by involving somebody else. Otherwise we become part of the problem.

The team from Grace Eyre give us hope and show us that even in these difficult and challenging times there is so much that is within our power to change in order to support people to live great lives. They know there is still work to do, there always is, but so far it's hardly cost them anything to do it but has transformed the lives of everyone who lives and works there.

Further information

Stay Up Late is a registered charity committed to promoting the rights of people with learning disabilities to live the lifestyle of their choosing.

Visit our website at www.stayuplate.org

Email us at info@stayuplate.org

Stay Up Late would like to thank Grace Eyre for their insights and inspiration in producing these guidelines. You can find out more about them here www.grace-eyre.org