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Shahida says that she is acutely aware that: "On any given day there are around 800 to 900 vacancies in the social care sector in Leeds". That's why LCC and the We Care team set up the We Care Academy. They worked closely with Job Centre Plus and Leeds City College to create a new programme called Step into Care. Shahida says: "Our aim is to remove barriers of entry for the social care sector and help people with the right values, behaviours and attitudes join the workforce."



Prior to kicking off Step into Care, Shahida said she and her team felt there was more to be done to make the social care workforce reflective of the people they supported. A number of key underrepresented demographics were identified, including those from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, males, younger people, people with long term health disabilities and conditions, and people that lived in the most deprived areas. They found that these groups weren't engaging with or coming to work in the care sector, and LCC saw both a need and an opportunity to support these people into care roles.



The factors which presented barriers included a misunderstanding of the sector and roles within it, complicated application forms, or the inability to find or be placed in jobs near their home. Additionally, there was a pattern of high turnover among new starters in the sector. Sometimes, employer-candidate relationships would break down during the first few weeks of a new role meaning that the role became vacant again or candidates would simply realise the requirements of the job and that it was not the right role for them.

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It's important to go into this process with an open mind in terms of the candidates that you seek and accept. People experience many different circumstances, but they can deliver a high level of care if they are given the right opportunities and support.

A thorough recruitment process that includes multiple different checks will help identify appropriate and successful applicants. Previous employment references are only one part of this process, and not having them should not be a barrier to a candidate that excels in the other checks and assessments.

Strong relationships with employers are vital. Take the time to know their needs and to work hard to fulfil them. This not only builds trust with employers, but it helps give each candidate the best chance of succeeding.

Establish partnerships with local stakeholders, such as Job Centre Plus, learning providers or other community support organisations, as they definitely help increase your chances of success.