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care workers, allied, clinical and medical graduates, hairdressers, travel consultants, interior designers, architects, business improvement specialists, IT specialists, education enablers, gardeners and landscapers, builders, maintenance providers, handymen, pet therapists, pet services, nutritionists, chefs, hospitality workers, tour guides, care workers, allied, clinical and medical graduates, hairdressers, travel consultants, interior designers, architects, business improvement specialists, IT specialists, education enablers, gardeners and landscapers, builders, maintenance providers, handymen, pet therapists, pet services, nutritionists, chefs, hospitality workers, tour guides, care workers, allied, clinical and medical graduates, hairdressers, travel consultants, interior designers, architects, business improvement specialists, IT specialists, education enablers, gardeners and landscapers, builders, maintenance providers, handymen

AGED CARE IN AUSTRALIA

EMPLOYMENT DIVERSITY

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SECTION 1 - PROJECT OVERVIEW

Australia's aged care workforce will need to "more than quadruple by 2050", an increase of over 400%. Australian Productivity Commission Inquiry

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

If asked about career opportunities within the aged care sector many people think immediately of nurses and carers. Yet out of the 23 roles on offer at SwanCare only 5 provide direct care or medical services to the residents, while the remainder support the ongoing operation of the business. This common misconception is one of many our project team has discovered to be unfounded.

The purpose of this report is to assist community partners to attract, recruit and retain the right workforce mix to support the consumer directed delivery of critical aged care services required by Australia's ageing population into the future. We aim to do this by highlighting the exciting diversity of roles available within the aged care sector, and dispelling some common misconceptions in relation to employment opportunities and conditions.

With the number of people aged 85 and over expected to be five times larger by 2051 the aged care industry is clearly a growth industry[1]. In fact the Productivity Commission predicts Australia's aged care workforce will need to "more than quadruple by 2050", an increase of over 400%[2]. This provides employees with strong employment prospects – both in regards to career progression and job security. In addition to this aged care employees interviewed commented that they enjoy the meaningful work, and for those in a clinical role, that they were able to develop and practice a wide range of clinical skills due to the range of medical issues faced by older people.

When these factors are combined with the diversity of professional and vocational roles available we found the aged care industry to be rife with opportunities.

So if you have just left Tafe or university and are looking to grow your skill sets, if you are keen to engage in flexible work arrangements to suit your lifestyle, or if you can picture yourself in a high growth industry where personal and professional development are key, whilst performing a job that has meaning – what are you waiting for? The aged care industry is waiting for you.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to assist community partners to attract, recruit and retain the right workforce mix to support the consumer directed delivery of critical aged care services required by Australia's ageing population into the future, by highlighting the exciting diversity of roles available within the aged care sector, and dispelling some common misconceptions in relation to employment opportunities and conditions.

For example:

"There won't be an interesting role for me in the aged care sector as I'm not medically trained"

"If I work in the aged care sector I feel I'll be badly paid"

"I'll lose my clinical skills if I join an aged care organisation as I won't see the variety of conditions I would elsewhere"

Through a case study analysis of local aged care provider and Emerging Leaders in Governance Program Industry Partner, SwanCare, we explore what attracts individuals to the sector and why they stay. We then touch on workforce planning and retention techniques, before finishing with an overview of the many benefits of working within aged care and a summary of our project teams key learning's.

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[1] Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australia's Older Population: Past, Present and Future, http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/featurearticlesbytitle/47B4A1E252B14CD9CA2569DE002139C5?OpenDocument,1999, (accessed 25 March 2016).

[2] Australian Productivity Commission Inquiry Report: Caring for Older Australians http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/aged-care/report/aged-care-overview-booklet.pdf 2011, (accessed 25 April 2016).

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research was conducted through a small scale literature review, a case study analysis of aged care provider and Emerging Leaders in Governance Program Community Partner SwanCare, and nine interviews conducted in various formats with the following people:

- Julie Atkinson, General Manager Residential Care - SwanCare
- Samantha Bowen, Managing Director and Founder - Acorn Network
- Dr Susan Bailey, Field Education Coordinator Social Work and Social Policy – University of Western Australia
- Meisha Chalk, Field Work Placement Coordinator School of Arts and Humanities - Edith Cowan University
- Arnel Braulio, Clinical Nurse Coordinator – SwanCare
- Natalie Hodi, General Retirement Living Manager – SwanCare
- Jeanette Halford, Manager Accounts – SwanCare
- Syrina Perese, Human Resources Officer - SwanCare
- Darren Fritzsch, Program Manager Community Services – Challenger TAFE

The project team gratefully acknowledges the support of the above stakeholders without whom this project would not be possible.

SECTION 2 - BACKGROUND

"It is projected that by 2051 the older population will have grown to around one-quarter of the total population of Australia, with people aged 85 and over predicted to increase from 1% to 5% of the total population." Australian Bureau of Statistics 1999

THE AGED CARE SECTOR IN AUSTRALIA

The percentage of the Australian population aged 65 years and over has grown steadily during the 20th century and is set to grow further during the 21st. It is projected that by 2051 the older population will have grown to around one-quarter of the total population of Australia, with people aged 85 and over predicted to increase from 1% to 5% of the total population.[3]

In broad terms, the aged care sector provides help and support in settings such as private homes, community centres and residential facilities with the aim of improving the quality of life for older people. Employees and volunteers working within the sector provide a wide range of services and supports aimed at enabling older people to remain living in their homes for longer than ever before.

The aged care sector in Australia is currently undergoing a significant period of change. Aged and Community Services Australia (ACSA) attribute this to a combination of factors including;

- the ageing population increasing demand for services while the proportion of the working age population declines;
- increasing competition for workers;
- government policy and funding changes; and
- altered consumer preferences which are directly affecting how services are delivered as well as staffing methods and models

Industry peak bodies such as ACSA recognise the need for the aged care sector, government and training providers to work collaboratively to develop an overarching attraction, recruitment and retention strategy to plan for, and support, the development of a skilled, modern, diverse and sustainable aged care workforce for the future. It is predicted this will require a greater use of technology to continually improve the quality and efficiency of services, a prioritisation of ongoing training to broaden staff skill sets, and further utilisation of flexible work arrangements.[4]

Training providers such as TAFE have been redeveloping their course plans for the past twelve months, in line with changes in the industry, such as supporting people to stay in their own homes for longer. Challenger TAFE have transitioned away from a Certificate IV in Aged Care, towards a Certificate IV in Ageing Support, as well as a Certificate III in Individual Support (Aging, Home and Community). These changes are not only necessary for the industry, they have far reaching benefits for employees. This new training approach will provide a broader skill set and enable employees to operate in diverse roles across many organisations. This aligns perfectly with industry workforce development best practices.

[3] Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australia's Older Population: Past, Present and Future, http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/featurearticlesbytitle/47B4A1E252B14CD9CA2569DE002139C5?OpenDocument,1999, (accessed 25 March 2016).

[3] ACSA, The Aged Care Workforce in Australia, http://www.agedcare.org.au/news/copy_of_2014-news/acsa-position-paper-the-aged-care-workforce-in-australia, (accessed 5 March 2016)

SECTION 3 - SWANCARE: CASE STUDY OF AN INDUSTRY PARTNER

SwanCare has grown to employ over 300 staff in a variety of roles to support the following services; Community Care, Residential Care and Retirement Living.

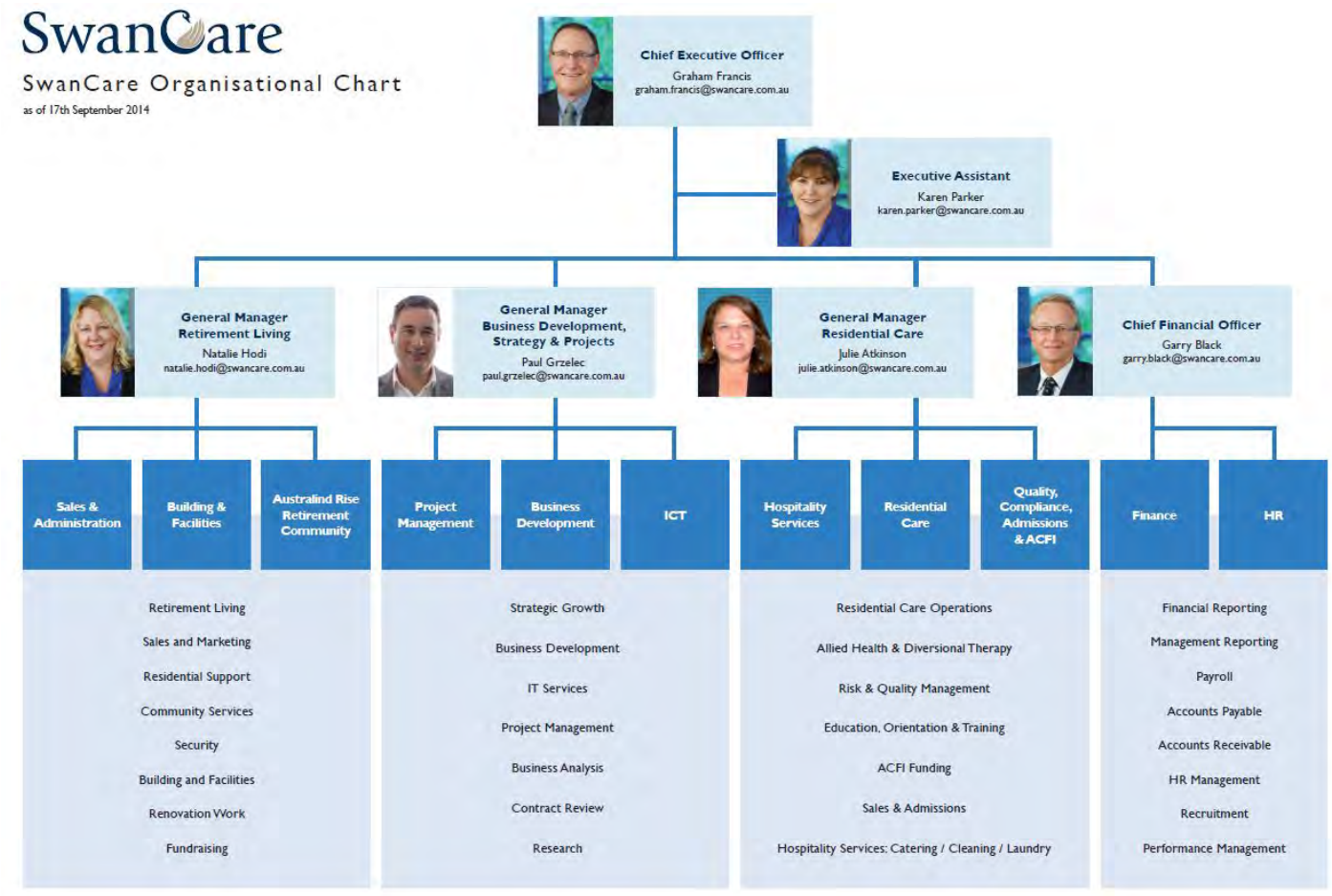
ABOUT SWAN CARE

To bring to life the breadth of career opportunities available within aged care, let's consider SwanCare.

SwanCare is a Perth based organisation offering residential aged care facilities to 280 residents, in addition to in-home care facilities for many others. Founded in the early 1960's SwanCare has grown to employ over 300 staff in a variety of roles to support the following services; Community Care, Residential Care and Retirement Living.

'Community Care' is support provided to people in their own homes who are still living independently, but need some level of nursing support or other forms of health care. They may also need help with services such as laundry, cleaning, meals, gardening, transport, social interaction or personal care. 'Residential Care' is care provided within High Care Facilities which provide 24-hour nursing care and assistance to people who have chronic physical or mental health conditions which require a high level of care. 'Retirement Living' is independent living provided in a secure environment with a range of support services provided on site.

A sample of roles is depicted on the following organisational chart:



As illustrated the career opportunities at SwanCare are far broader than those individuals physically providing care, and include; Activity Assistants, Administration Assistants, Admissions, Allied Health (Physiotherapists, Diversional Therapists), Carers, Electricians, Enrolled Nurses, Finance Professionals, Food Services, Chefs, Cooks, Food Service Attendants, Kitchen Hands, Housekeeping & Laundry Services, Housekeeping Attendants, Laundry Attendants, Human Resources, Information Technology (IT), Maintenance Officers, Management, Physiotherapy Assistants, Receptionists and Registered Nurses.[5]

[5] SwanCare, Employment Opportunities, http://www.swancare.com.au/careers/employee-opportunities/, (accessed 25 March 2016).

SwanCare believe that the key to successful care lies with the staff they employ, which is a key part of their strategic plan.

EMPLOYEE PROFILES

A selection of roles, profiled below, help to demonstrate the diversity of careers available within aged care.

Administration:

The type of administrative support required in aged care is broad, and the nature of work depends on the size of the organisation and its capacity to have specialist roles. These roles can include reception work, computer and other office equipment operation, maintaining records and filing, mail and managing correspondence, clerical and secretarial duties.

Corporate Services:

Corporate Services plays a critical role in service delivery across aged care, and in many ways is responsible for the health and vitality of the industry. While many roles are concerned with management of human resources and infrastructure, others have a more direct impact on services.

Registered Nurse:

Nurses in aged care are required to do clinical practice, clinical management, quality assurance/ continuous improvement, occupational health & safety, provide mental health management, care planning and evaluation, record keeping, reporting, and infection control. Many specialise in specific fields such as pain relief, palliative care or continence management. They have a key role in First Aid and emergency situations, and many are likely to be involved in supervising other staff.

NATALIE HODI

GENERAL RETIREMENT LIVING MANAGER

Natalie worked in the UK as a live in carer for two years, and when she came back to Australia she went back to working in government. Natalie has been working in her current role for 5 years and has been with SwanCare for 15 years in total. Natalie started off as an Executive Assistant where she was involved in major redevelopment projects before working her way up to her current role. “Working in SwanCare provides a variety of roles with lots happening in the industry and particularly at SwanCare. Working with people means every day is not the same.”

“I loved the experience of working as a carer and hadn’t thought of working in the industry prior to the exposure.”

Natalie is responsible for delivering the strategic direction of the retirement business and oversees both the Bentley and Australind sites (21 units). In addition she is a village manager for the Bentley site.

Natalie completed high school and had practical experience in being a carer as well as significant administration experience prior to working for SwanCare.

“SwanCare is a very supportive work place”. “Aged care is a growth industry, the work is varied and it is great working with people and the elderly. There are lots of opportunities working in the not for profit sector as they provide investment into staff to help them progress within the organisation.”

JEANETTE HALFORD

MANAGER ACCOUNTS

Jeanette wanted part time work when she applied for a role at SwanCare in Accounts. Jeanette has been working at SwanCare since November 2012. She enjoys the benefits of flexibility in working hours, the opportunities for advancement and personal development, and the support provided for training and further qualifications. “It is also a great team to work with.”

Jeanette’s does the financial reporting for actuals and the budget, and reports directly to the Chief Financial Officer (CFO).

Jeanette had a degree in Accounting and work experience in accounting roles prior to gaining her role at SwanCare.

“Swancare has great flexibility around working hours and as I was returning to work after having kids this suited my needs.”

“Aged care is a growing industry which provides stability to my job. SwanCare is very diverse organisation which keeps the roles interesting.”

SYRINA PERESE

HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICER

Syrina applied for a role at SwanCare when she saw an advert on Seek for a Human Resources Officer and thought the role sounded interesting. Syrina has been with SwanCare for several months, and currently oversees recruitment processes as well as administrative duties relating to employee matters. Her role incorporates delivery of training for new projects, contributes to SwanCare's Work Health and Safety Committee, compliance and auditing, assists with Corporate Induction training, and many other duties.

Her position ensures the recruitment of suitable people who reflect SwanCare values and will support SwanCare's vision and mission, helping to shape organisational culture.

Syrina has an academic qualification and certification in Human Resources, as well as work and life experience relating to people.

ARNEL BRAULIO

CLINICAL NURSE COORDINATOR

Arnel has been in his current role at SwanCare since January 2013 and has been working as a nurse since 1994.

Arnel has a Bachelor of Nursing which he gained in 1993. His first job was working in a hospital where he gained experience in the emergency department. From there he spent 10 years working in elderly rehabilitation before moving into work in aged care nursing homes.

"I love taking care of the age group Baby Boomers." Arnel enjoys getting to help people and imparting his knowledge to the younger generation who he works with. "We have a good team environment with happy staff."

Arnel coordinates and plans with other nurses around clinical issues, and organises training as needed. He is a support person for his staff and also meets with the families of residents when needed.

"Nurses straight out of university need to be mentored to developed and consolidate what they have learnt to ensure young staff stay on". "Nurses perform assessments every hour to ensure issues are picked up straight away and a GP can be contacted. Nurses in aged care need to learn to be quick in their judgement when assessing residents." "We look after body, mind and spirit. There are no doctors on site so our clinical skills have to be very high as it is live or die. The doctors have a very good relationship with the nurses at SwanCare, trust their judgement and listen to their assessment." "Students should consider working in aged care while at university, and there should be more training as part of their studies to ensure young people are not scared off."

SECTION 4 - MISCONCEPTIONS AND EMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

Aged care is a large multi-faceted sector which provides opportunities to move between a variety of roles according to interest, and for promotion into areas with higher levels of responsibility.

INDUSTRY MISCONCEPTIONS – A FACT CHECK

Aged Care Doesn't Pay Very Well

One of the biggest aged care misconceptions relates to low rates of pay.

In reality pay rates vary between positions, providers and sectors, and are influenced by a number of factors including experience level, qualifications, geographic location, organisation size, and general market forces such as service demand vs available expertise.[6]

When considering employment in aged care, in addition to looking at the base rate for pay it is important to consider additional factors such as penalty rates, shift allowances, car allowances, professional memberships, insurance, bonuses, study assistance/professional development opportunities, superannuation contributions, opportunities for salary sacrificing and packaging, as well as fringe benefit tax items such as meals and accommodation - all of which can make a big difference to overall employee remuneration/benefits.

While still not considered to be a high paid industry overall, wage growth in aged care has improved in recent years, experiencing larger than average growth in 2015 at 3.22%, which is predicted to rise to 3.27% in 2016 and 3.35% in 2017.[7]

Pro Bono Australia's Not For Profit Salary Survey 2015 found aged and community care organisations actually performed quite strongly in relation to various management roles in comparison with other not for profit sectors such as disability, human rights and the arts. For example CEO total remuneration excluding incentives for aged and community organisations rated second highest with a median of $168,497, as did Fundraising/Marketing Managers at $108,966, while Operations and Administration Managers in aged and community care also rated at the highest end of the scale at a median of $128,783 per annum.

Negative Environment for Residents and Workers

A number of interviewees commented on negative media publicity in recent years resulting from isolated incidents of duty of care breaches involving a minority of providers, which may have tarnished public perceptions of the aged care industry overall; affecting consumer choices, student training and placement choices, as well as industry employment and recruitment choices more broadly. For instance, Samantha Bowen from the Acorn Network noted that young people engaging in tertiary studies often receive advice against pursuing a career in aged care from teachers and lecturers while studying due to perceptions around negative work environments, few opportunities for career development, low remuneration and personal liability. This may indicate a need for the sector to engage more closely with training providers on these areas. Jeanette Halford also made references in her interview to aged care not being considered a "sexy industry", which was also attributed to negative media coverage.

To illustrate, media headlines such as: *'They should have done more: Claims poor care at nursing home caused woman's death'*, *'Outrage over nursing home treatment'* and *'Aged care under strain'*.

In dispelling this misconception it is important to note that aged care providers in Australia must comply with a strict set of governance requirements, service regulations and quality of care standards as set out in the Aged Care Act of 1997, which in residential facilities is also accredited and monitored by the Australian Aged Care Quality Agency.

It was observed by the project team that SwanCare staff interviewed reported a high level of satisfaction with their workplace overall, and training providers interviewed noted that while some students have initially displayed reluctance to undertake placements within aged care organisations - those who have done so have also reported a high level of enjoyment, satisfaction, and a new interest in working in this space in future.

[6] Pro Bono Salary Survey, 2105, http://probonoaustralia.com.au/salary-survey/

[7] Stephanie Rocca, Average wage increase of 3.22% in the aged care sector in 2015, http://www.hallandwilcox.com.au/

Risk of Losing Clinical and/or Allied Health Skills

Aged care organisations provide considerable opportunities to develop and practice a wide range of clinical skills due to the vast range of medical issues older people face. For example Arnel Braulio from SwanCare noted that because doctors do not work on site (unlike in hospitals) nurses working in aged care typically have greater levels of responsibility for identifying medical issues. Allied Health professionals working in aged care also experience diverse opportunities for utilising their skills. For example the Australian Association of Social Workers, and two social work educators interviewed outlined how social workers in aged care enjoy being able to provide wide ranging support to their organisations, colleagues, clients and their families in relation to research, grief and loss, coping and resilience, relationship changes, decision making, elder abuse identification and education, policy development, advocacy, navigating the complexities of the healthcare system, and facilitating connections to community.[8]

Working in Aged Care Is Boring and/or Depressing

Aged care is a large multi-faceted sector which provides opportunities to move between a variety of roles according to interest, and for promotion into areas with higher levels of responsibility. Aged care also provides opportunities to work with people from diverse ages, cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds, and professions. For example Natalie and Arnel from SwanCare both mentioned that they enjoy working with people, and that this type of working environment means that every work day is unique.

While it might be perceived that working with people towards the final, and in some ways least attractive, stage of the lifecycle could be disheartening, people engaged in the industry who were interviewed advised they found their work stimulating, diverse, empowering, and that the relationships they form with clients and colleagues are often close and fulfilling.

I Will Have to Work Alone

People working in aged care are more often than not members of large multidisciplinary teams providing support across a broad spectrum of physical and social areas of need. All members of the SwanCare team interviewed talked about the great team and team environment that they work in, noting that support is also provided through Human Resources and other members of staff. SwanCare for example prides itself on being an organisation which provides a supportive work place. While some community support workers may spend the bulk of their time working one on one in the community, they are still part of a team and interact with those members on a daily basis at the commencement and end of shifts, and often throughout the day via mobile technologies.

Poor Facilities

Facility quality varies between providers and locations, however in an increasingly competitive and market driven environment strong incentives exist for providers to deliver high quality facilities for customers and employees. For example, SwanCare prides itself on having state of the art facilities and technologies. Due to aged care services selling their products and services to potential customers, and being required to meet legislative requirements, they need to maintain amenities and keep up with current technologies.

There is No Place for Young People in Aged Care

There are many misconceptions around young people and aged care which may act as barriers to people under 35 years old looking to explore or develop a career in the sector, and only 1 in 5 carers is under the age of 35 in Australia presently.[9] Samantha Bowen, founder of the Acorn Network discussed how these encompass employer misconceptions around stereotype Gen Y traits in relation to areas such as emotional maturity and organisational

[8] Social Work in Aged Care, AASW (NSW) Newsletter, Being Resilient in a Challenging and Rewarding Field, 2013
Interview: Meisha Chalk, 2016, Field Work Placement Coordinator School of Arts and Humanities - Edith Cowan University
Interview: with Dr Susan Bailey, 2016, Field Education Coordinator Social Work and Social Policy – University of Western Australia

[9] Acorn Network, 2016, http://www.acorn-network.com.au/

commitment, as well as misconceptions held by young people themselves about limited career prospects, narrow views of the types of work available, fears around personal liability and poorly understood remuneration.

Young people have a tremendous amount of potential to contribute to a diverse, dynamic and expanding aged care sector, particularly in view of the fact the median employee age within the sector at present is 48 and rising.[8] Young people can help drive innovation and reduce group think, and most importantly represent an opportunity for the sector to engage in much needed knowledge transfers, workforce and leadership succession planning. Moreover intergenerational interaction has well documented mental health benefits for all parties involved.[10]

BENEFITS OF WORKING IN AGED CARE

Meaningful Work

Many people working in aged care love the opportunity to work towards improving the wellbeing of vulnerable community members through the provision of physical, mental, social and/or emotional support. Not for profit organisations such as SwanCare have clearly defined values based missions or objectives, which appeal to employees wishing to earn an income while contributing to a higher purpose/greater social good.

Diversity of Professional and Vocational Roles Available

Aged care organisations require staff with an increasingly broad range of skill sets, personal attributes and qualifications to deliver their core services. While nursing and caring roles are critical to the sector there are other roles which are equally essential. These include but are not limited to the following;

Activity Assistants, Administration Assistants, Admissions, Allied Health (Physiotherapists, Diversional Therapists), Carers, Electricians, Enrolled Nurses, Finance Professionals, Food Services, Chefs, Cooks, Food Service Attendants, Dieticians, Kitchen Hands, Community Transport Officers, Geriatricians, Hairdressers, Housekeeping & Laundry Services, Housekeeping Attendants, Laundry Attendants, Human Resources, IT Professionals, Maintenance Officers, Management, Physiotherapy Assistants, Community Development Professionals, Receptionists, Social Workers and Registered Nurses.

Organisations like SwanCare even provide opportunities to enter the workforce without any formal pre-existing qualifications. Therefore, you don't have to be an academic to work in the sector, and are likely to be given regular opportunities to engage in on the job training, which if you're more of a hands on sort of person may strongly appeal. Due to the wide range of work roles available within aged care there is also the ability to move into other jobs that capture your interest, as well as to move upwards and take on more responsibility.

Strong Employment Prospects

According to the Productivity Commission 2011 Report into 'Caring for Older Australians' aged care services and staff need to considerably expand in order to meet the growing needs of the ageing population, a social trend exacerbated by an overall increase in life expectancy and decline in available family support.[11] Over the past 5 years health care and social assistance, driven by population growth and shifting demographics, has seen some of the largest areas of employment growth in Australia.[10] In fact an estimated 400% increase in employees is required to meet the care needs of Australia's ageing population by 2050.[12]

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[10] Carrie Andreolettia, Jessica L. Howarda, Bridging the Generation Gap: Intergenerational Service-Learning Benefits Young and Old, 2016

[11] CSIRO,Megatrends and scenarios for jobs and employment in Australia over the coming twenty years Stefan Hajkowicz et al, 2016

[12] Australian Productivity Commission Inquiry Report: Caring for Older Australians http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/aged-care/report/aged-care-overview-booklet.pdf 2011, (accessed 25 April 2016).

The future workforce needed to support the ageing population will operate across a broad spectrum of employment areas including; care workers, allied, clinical and medical graduates, hairdressers, travel consultants, interior designers, architects, business improvement specialists, IT specialists, education enablers, gardeners and landscapers, builders, maintenance providers, handymen, pet therapists, pet services, nutritionists, chefs, hospitality workers, tour guides, and any other service that any other person utilises to enhance their lives and enjoyment of life![11]

Transferable Skills:

Working within aged care fosters skills that are transferrable and in demand within Australia and overseas due to ageing populations worldwide, as well as the shift in the type of skill sets considered critical for Australia's future workforce - as the country continues its general transition towards a service and knowledge economy.[10] It is predicted that Australian employers will increasingly require potential employees to demonstrate "soft skills" such as strong interpersonal and communication abilities, critical thinking and problem solving skills, an ongoing willingness to learn, cross cultural competency, self management, creativity and persuasion, the ability to work in a collaborative environment, and other non routine tasks difficult to computerise. [10]

Access to Training and Up Skilling

Many aged care providers, like SwanCare, provide training to increase employee skills either through on the job opportunities or through support in acquiring external qualifications. In some cases, qualifications are also paid in full or are subsidised by employers with paid time for study leave. This provides opportunities to maintain a job and an income while improving skill sets, and increasing general employability long term.

Flexible Working Hours

Aged care facilities have different times where there is demand for services, therefore flexible work arrangements to allow for family and study commitments can be provided for with full-time work, part-time work, casual shifts and short shifts all possible. Such flexible work arrangements are also well suited to people transitioning towards retirement, and the increasing number of independent contractors and entrepreneurs wishing to pursue multiple interests.

INNOVATIVE WORKFORCE PLANNING: MOTIVATION AND PERFORMANCE

All organisations, regardless of their business model or industry will inevitably face the issue of employee turnover. Research from Insync Surveys suggests Employee Turnover alone costs Australian businesses around $83 billion each year.[13] The national average turnover rate is around 13 per cent, compared to 18.5 per cent five years ago, according to The Australian Human Resources Institute.[14] To put this in perspective, a reduction of 5 per cent could save a business around $280,000 per year for every 100 employees.[12] In other words, for every 100 staff you employ, there will be five less people leaving, reducing the costs associated with recruitment, training and lost productivity. One of the key findings from the survey reveals that Community Service workers often leave because of stress and little work life balance.

There have been many attempts by researchers to understand the causes behind employee turnover. Generally, the research indicates motivation as the major underlying factor. Such research has produced a number of frameworks, designed to give management a simple way to tackle the issue. However, finding the right solution is far from straightforward. One well-known solution is the financial reward system in which financial bonuses correlate with performance. In practice, this system often encourages counter productive work practices[15], such as stealing clients from other salespeople or driving dangerously to meet time quotas.

If a reward system is going to be successful, it has to focus on intrinsic rewards as much as the extrinsic. SwanCare appears to have perfected the balance between the two with its Feathers program, which won the National Better

[13] Genevieve Boyd, InsyncSurveys, Research reveals 80% of staff turnover is in the employer's control, 2012

[14] Fiona Smith, Australian Financial Review, 2013, Staff turnover rates drop as employers get retention right

[15] McShane, Mara Olekalns, Tony Travaglione, Organisational Behaviour, 4e, 2013

Practice Award in 2014. The Feathers program works like a frequent flyer scheme, where employees accumulate reward points for doing good. The unique aspect is that employees can nominate points to anyone, which gives a sense of personal involvement in the rewards process, rather than waiting for management to notice good work. The scheme is also designed around the core values of SwanCare, providing a natural affinity with their employees. Rewards range from shopping vouchers to volunteer days, covering both extrinsic and intrinsic aspects.

The successful implementation of a rewards scheme can have a positive impact on employee motivation, which translates into numerous benefits for both employees and employers such as productivity, customer service and above all, retention. Evaluation of the Feathers scheme in April 2014 indicated that the aforementioned benefits were found to be prevalent.[16]

SwanCare's Feathers program clearly works. However, it is important to ask why this is the case. Of the numerous frameworks that have arisen from research on motivation, the Job Characteristics Model[17] stands as one of the most widely accepted (Figure 1).

Figure 1 - Job Characteristics Model[18]

The Job Characteristics Model suggests that job design characteristics influence the psychological states (wellbeing) of an employee, which in turn influence outcomes such as employee motivation, performance, satisfaction and retention.

In relation to SwanCare, it is evident that the reason for the success of the Feathers program is related to the *Feedback* characteristic being addressed. This gives employees *Meaningfulness* and *Knowledge of results* from their hard work, which results in positive outcomes, as identified by the evaluation of the program.

Whilst some organisations would be satisfied with the success of a program like Feathers, leadership at SwanCare are keenly aware of the need to innovate in the area of workforce development. Three major strategies exist for addressing the remaining elements of *Core Job Characteristics* in the model:[19]

1. **Job Rotation** - the practice of moving employees from one job type to another, either in a related or unrelated field, broadening their skills sets and responsibility.
2. **Job Enlargement** - the practice of adding more tasks to a job, giving a greater sense of independence.
3. **Job Enrichment** - the practice of allowing employees to schedule their own work, providing greater autonomy and a sense of ownership from the outcome.

SwanCare has implemented these strategies in certain areas of its business. For example, nurses can have the option to be rotated from home care to high care, each bringing their own set of tasks and responsibilities. Employees are

[16] Fiona Millar, SwanCare, Feathers program - put a feather in your cap!, AACQA, 2014

[17] Hackman & Oldham, Job Characteristics Theory, 1980

[18] Flat World Knowledge, Job Characteristics Model, https://new.edu/resources/job-characteristics-model

[19] McShane, Mara Olekalns, Tony Travaglione, Organisational Behaviour, 4e, 2013, pp. 182

also encouraged to set their own schedules and work more autonomously. This regular but measured fluidity of the *Core Job Characteristics* appears to be key to a successful workforce development strategy.

Many other organisations are following suit and training organisations are ensuring graduates have options to be multi-skilled in various disciplines. Peak bodies such as ACSA[20] and the Australian Government are also recommending an increased focus on workforce development planning, in order to address issues with recruitment and retention.[21] Recommendations include clear pathways between various levels of care, such as community services and residential services.

With the progress made by SwanCare as one of the industry leaders, as well as Governing bodies, it is clear that the misconceptions around being stuck in a static, unskilled workforce are rapidly eroding.

[20] ACSA - Aged and Community Services Australia

[21] ACSA, The Aged Care Workforce in Australia, 2015

SECTION 5- CONCLUSION

Stereotypes and public perceptions of aged care employees are slowly shifting.

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

The aged care sector is a dynamic growth industry with the ageing population generating increased service demand, developing new areas of employment, and creating new opportunities for career progression.

Due to the range of services now provided by aged care organisations, as showcased by SwanCare, there is a diverse range of employment roles available within the sector with enviable future job prospects.

Upon investigation the project team found many of the stereotypical assumptions associated with aged care employment to be unfounded, and that employment within aged care has many benefits; from meaningful work, to opportunities for flexible working hours, salary packaging, ongoing training and professional development.

It was clear to us that the aged care workforce in Australia is undergoing a rapid, challenging and exciting period of change, and that public perceptions of the aged care sector and its numerous opportunities is slowly shifting.

Overall, sector growth and a changing landscape has led organisations to recruit new staff, and develop existing ones. This demonstrates a need for highly skilled senior managers who can monitor trends, respond to industry and workforce development changes, and act to ensure this vital sector can prosper and deliver on its primary purpose.

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