

One Organization's Journey to Redeployment of their Staff during COVID-19

As many day program/employment agencies prepare to deploy their staff into residential settings during the COVID-19 outbreak, we thought it might be helpful to hear about the experiences and process undertaken by ImagineAbility. Audra Penner, CEO of ImagineAbility is willing to answer any questions that you might have on what worked, what they learned and what they might do differently. You can reach Audra at apenner@imagineability.ca.

Step #1:

Communication with staff: We sent out communication to all staff (see Communication #1 & 2 at the end of the document. (both sent on March 25th) Then arranged multiple zoom meetings (with no more than 8 staff per meeting) to field calls and answer any questions. They then reached out to their respective managers to let them know their decision.

Step #2:

Information: IAI sorted individuals we support by residential agency (note: one category included individuals who live with families) Managers and staff worked to identify initial potential matches.

Step #3:

Executive Director exchange: Audra contacted (continues too) agency Executive Directors to have initial discussion around if they needed staff and if not, were they interested in training shifts/job shadowing. Audra sent initial lists of who IAI and receiving agency served in common. ED of receiving agency had discussions with their team.

Step #4:

Memorandum of understanding: Determination made to move forward. Memorandum of Understanding signed (or agreed to in principle). Audra and ED identify next steps of who in respective agencies should work to operationalize. Ideally, Manager deploying staff at IAI to be matched with receiving agency manager/staff that could best coordinate and operationalize (examples so far HR director, facility manager, house managers).

Step #5:

Be in touch with residential agency

Identify who you should be in contact to set up deployment of IAI staff. Audra may be the bridge to connect you with appropriate person from the agency. Introduce yourself and lay out

of what you need, what hours/days IAI staff is looking for, and how we can help each other. It is easier to communicate what information you need rather than waiting for them to initiate the conversation. Of course, the goal is to place a staff where the agency identifies the needs

Step #6:

Come up with solid schedules

Once you have the information from the agency including the hours/days/locations/number of staff required, start the puzzle piece of matching your staff. Keep in mind that not everyone will be matched to what they wished for, and the agency may be open to altering hours. Start negotiating for exceptions such as conflict in hours, days, etc. At this point, ask for specific information about the house and people living in the house (if they are new people to IAI staff). This should include who they are, behavior risks, specific needs (i.e. a hooyer lift, male only house, etc.), other health risks that IAI staff may encounter while working (i.e. transmitted disease), house contact number, key staff phone number & work hours, and house manager cell number & work hours.

Step #7:

Communicate back to the agency It's helpful to make a spread sheet of house assignment for clarity. Once all the shift is confirmed by the agency, start communicating to IAI staff. Send the info package you received from the agency, and ask them to fill the necessary forms. Communicate to the agency when IAI staff needs a hardcopy of the forms and have them available on the first shift at the house. Ask IAI staff to read all documents the agency provides prior to their first shift.

Step #8:

Follow up with the agency contact

Make sure that they have all the necessary information of IAI staff. For example, one organization asked for personal information of who the staff is. Manager wrote a short description of who they are and shared it with VOI. Also, follow up with the agency how this redeployment is communicated to people living in the house and all staff members. Express that we appreciate them knowing IAI staff is coming to work, and ask for feedback/concerns/comments they may have.

Step #9:

Make clear expectations to IAI staff

This should include the expectation from IAI, how to communicate day to day, what they should do in case of illness or absence/who to contact, etc. Also include any messages from the agency if they want to share prior to their first shift.

Step #10:

Track the deployment

This includes staff with permanent placement as well. We should be keep tracking, updating and sharing it with necessary people. Daily debriefing with staff that are deployed (whether full time through the pandemic) or in training shifts. Keep track of this information. Share with other managers during management meetings.

Orientation of Staff:

One receiving organization asked IAI staff to read all manuals and procedures prior to the first shift. There are 3 documents IAI staff need to sign – the confidentiality pledge, dignity at work statement, and orientation to protect acknowledgement. IAI staff need to sign and bring the originals to the house, or they have a hardcopy ready for them to sign if unable to print at home. Other than that, all the above.

Another receiving organization asked IAI to read over their house rules and descriptions of people living in the house as well as their manual and procedure on COVID-19. Regular manual and procedures were given to IAI staff on their first shift and they spent an hour reading it at the house.

Thoughts and considerations from Audra:

As of this April 1st of the 50 staff that said yes, 32 are redeployed to training shifts and of those 32, 12 have been asked by receiving agency to be deployed to end of pandemic. Six days later, ImagineAbility reports that 29 staff are fully deployed!

The experience so far has been pretty positive. Following this process we think has worked as the staff in respective agencies know its being supported from the top and all the way through the organization. Making sure the right people are operationalizing it also key.

Also tracking the feedback of staff is really important. We've had some great anecdotal feedback from the receiving agencies. We are getting information right now from the orientation shifts in writing and can share with the receiving agency and as agencies share to figure out how to make this work well going forward.

As an aside, many of the front line staff are really happy we are there, even if their managers might have initially been resistant but were encouraged by directors/ED to welcome us. The front line staff were concerned about what was going to happen when receiving agency didn't show up to shifts or stop coming, and quite a few asked, are you going to keep coming? We've heard this pretty consistently between our front line staffs.

We are also having IAI managers be available to talk to their staff and are figuring out how we can have rotating zoom meetings so that our staff can check in with each other and talk, ask questions, share stories.

Some of the stories of where we are able to connect people who were jointly supported by our agencies, having their 'day program' staff being there now has lessened anxieties and people are really happy to see people they usually see during the day and hang out in different ways. It's what we were already exploring before this pandemic, how to meet people where they live, not have them come into 'day agency'.

Examples of Communication to staff:

Communication #1 (redeployment or going on EI) – March 25

Key points included:

- Temporary layoff (Shortage of Work) is not an option to go on EI, as there is work available.
- Employee's who cannot work due to daycare, family member's compromised immune system or don't want to work out of fear can request to take a leave of absence and go on EI.
- Keep in mind Employment Standards makes the decision who is entitled to receive EI benefits.
- Payroll will issue an ROE based on your request to your manager. Payroll will submit your ROE directly to Service Canada. Employee can apply for their EI benefits on line.
- In regular circumstance require 700 hours in last 52 weeks, Employment Standards calculates the EI benefit of 55% based on insurable earnings.
- If employee's earnings were consistent and continuous for past 27 bi weekly earnings your benefit could be:
- Note for employees that choose to go on EI, the waiting period is one week, however receiving the benefit payment is unknown can take 1- 3 months due to one million people applying.

- Employees may apply for Emergency Financial Benefits. Applications will be available on line, processing time unknown.
- Benefits and details.
- If you have are sick due to COVID-19 virus you can apply for Short term Disability.
- There is no waiting period to back on benefits when you return full time after this pandemic.
- You have a job.
- Pay and benefits information if re-deployed.

Communication #2 (Redeployment process)- March 25

Our funder, Community Living Disability Sector has requested that day services re-deploy all staff who are no longer involved in supporting people in their program. This is being requested so that vulnerable adults continue to receive services they need from qualified and competent workers.

What does **redeployment** look like?

You continue to work for this organization and receive all benefits. Your pay cheque will continue to come from the same organization. You are **employed**. You will continue to report to your manager and we will support you to make the transition to providing services in a residential agency as easy as possible.

Next week we have arranged for ‘training shifts/job shadowing shifts’ with a few residential agencies. At the moment, many of these ‘training shift’s are during the day with the option of evening and overnight with one agency so far. Note the training shifts don’t mean that you will be working in this house going forward. It is just so you can see what it is like to work in a residential setting

During the next few days we will also be asking you about what you think your availability will be going forward (days, evenings, overnights, weekends) but for next week you will be training. We recognize that you may not work a full 39.5 hours but you will be paid for 39.5 hours (next week). As a paid staff you will continue to be on call.

You will not be left alone in the home. You will have the residential staff or manager available. They will provide the orientation. You will also have access to your manager at your organization. We will be giving you more specific information in the next two days. We will

need your feedback and need you to help the sector figure out how to do this well. Let us know what is working and what is not working.

Wherever possible residential and day agencies will work together support people you already know but also know you will be redeployed where there is need. No one yet knows what that looks like but we will be here to support you through it.

We can do this. Thank you! The people we support in this sector thank you. We can get through this together. Stay tuned for further updates.