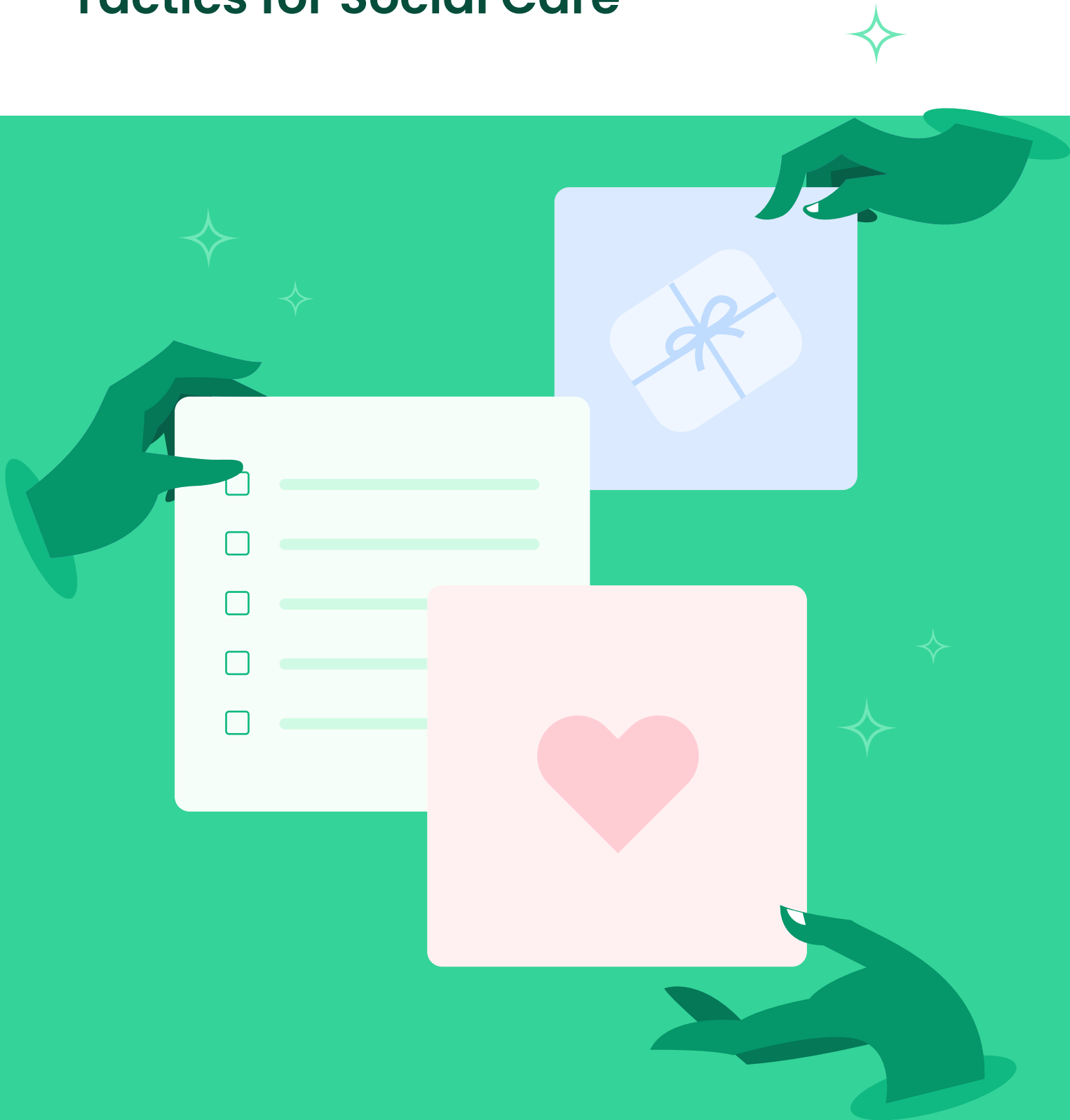


Sona.

Appreciation Matters: The Top 15 Employee Retention Tactics for Social Care



About this guide

In this guide, we've combined our research with actionable tips and practical examples to help you implement a data-driven employee recognition strategy in your Social Care organisation.

Advances in healthcare and declining fertility rates mean we're living in an ageing world: in fact, the number of people over 65 is expected to rise by 40% by 2035. This is driving up the demand for Health and Social Care services, which are starting to feel the pressure. At the heart of this crisis are low staff retention rates, caused primarily by low pay and stressful working conditions.

Playing a key role in the future of the sector, employee recognition should be at the top of every Social Care employer's list of priorities. With benefits across the board, there's a very high potential return on investment: now's the time to get started.

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Why recognition is so vital in Social Care

Faced with an endemic staffing crisis, the Social Care sector must strive to find ways to not only hire new recruits, but hire sustainably, and increase staff retention. Lack of staff appreciation is a leading cause of preventable turnover, pointing to the need for an improved culture of employee recognition in Social Care.

Just 20% of the respondents in our recent Appreciation Matters report said they (rarely) feel that their work is appreciated.



Over 60% have left a job because they didn't feel valued. Each resignation worsens the negative impacts of this crisis: burnout, compromised patient care, declining mental health, and reduced productivity are just a few of the detrimental repercussions.



A common misconception is that implementing a culture of appreciation costs significant time and money—which the Social Care sector does not have to spare. In fact, it's one of the highest impact, lowest cost retention strategies available. Many means of recognition are completely free. Remember, a smile costs nothing!

Staff who feel recognised are capable of great things. If they feel consistently recognised, they can boost their organisation's culture and performance, increasing factors from workplace morale to quality of patient care.

15 practical employee recognition strategies for Social Care

+ Words of Affirmation

01 Employee awards



Employee awards are a powerful motivator, encouraging employees to strive for excellence. Whether internal or external to your organisation, awards ceremonies offer a sense of gratification, ensuring that high-achieving employees are given the recognition they deserve. They are a chance to show both the general public and other employees that you're aware of and appreciate hard work and dedication.

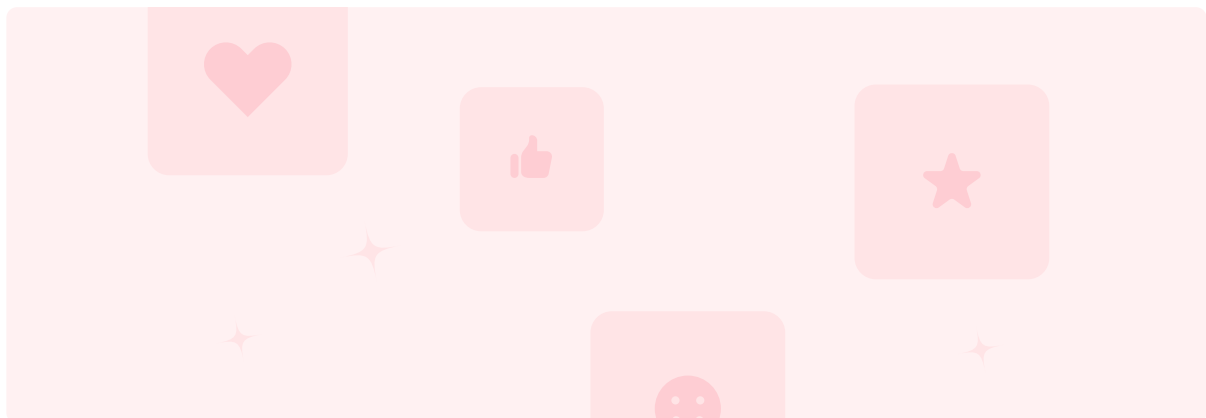
For example, with their annual **Majesticare Star Awards**, the luxury care home provider lets employees nominate a person or team that has consistently stood out for their exceptional work. There are different categories, from the **Legend Leader Award** which recognises outstanding leadership qualities to the **Rising Star Award**, aimed at promising newcomers, to the **Unsung Hero Award**, acknowledging those dependable employees who often slip under the radar.

02 Internal thank you cards

One of the most (cost) effective ways of embedding a culture of appreciation in your Social Care organisation is **thank you cards**. With their simple, personal motivation, they demonstrate that an employee's work has made a real, tangible difference to someone else. A little thank you can speak volumes.

In addition to their Voyage Excellence Awards (VEAs) celebrating their employees, [Voyage Care](#) encourages thank you cards as a quick and easy way for employees to show appreciation for their colleagues. They have five pre-designed cards available, each reflecting a core value. Encouraging teamwork and collaboration, these values spell out **ETHOS**: empowering, together, honest, outstanding, and supportive. Cards are handed out during team meetings so that employees can celebrate their successes together.

03 Digital peer-to-peer recognition



Peer-to-peer recognition is a way for employees to demonstrate their gratitude for each other. Incorporating this model both helps employees feel valued and encourages them to build deep, personal connections with their team members.

Boosting work relationships, self-esteem, and team morale, it's an excellent way to bring your team together. The best bit: it doesn't have to cost a penny. When one employee recognises their colleague for outstanding work or a good contribution to a team task, that staff member is much more likely to go and show their appreciation to someone else, and the recognition cycle continues.

Apps are easy, accessible, and quickly updated. With digital scheduling apps such as [Songa](#), staff are checking the app on a daily basis, meaning that recognition tactics are particularly effective. An all-in-one, comprehensive app can be a real game changer when it comes to ensuring employees are on the same page. From building a sense of community to filling available shifts, an app for employees can be instrumental in boosting employee engagement and satisfaction.

04 Social Media shout-outs

Social media is a highly effective tool for Social Care organisations to celebrate milestone resident birthdays, share pictures of activities and events, raise money for charity fundraisers—but also to show employee appreciation. It's always a good idea to get written consent from employees if you're going to implement this strategy. Consider sending out an opt-in/opt-out form so you have written confirmation that staff are happy to appear in your company's social media posts.



Sanctuary Care is a shining example of how Social Care companies can leverage their social media channels to recognise their employees. Their Instagram account features all sorts of celebrations, of employees raising money for related charities (for example 'Daring Dave' and his skydive in support of Alzheimer's Dementia Support), outstanding work, and significant work anniversaries.

It's often the most simple gestures which make the biggest differences. Social media is a great way to express appreciation on a public platform, contributing to a rich culture of mutual recognition, appreciation, and celebration. It's somewhere to share stories of heroism, grit, and determination—but also the everyday work that keeps the show on the road.

05 Wall of Fame



Everyone wants to be on the Wall of Fame—it's a dedicated space to share appreciation of employees who consistently go beyond the call of duty, and make a real difference to the lives of everyone in your Social Care organisation.

There are many ways to create a successful Wall of Fame. Here are some tips:

- **Choose a good location** to ensure that it's noticeable to staff, residents, and visitors
- Include names and photos of employees, whether they're candid shots at work, beaming smiles, or even baby photos.
- **Create a brief bio**, including fun facts and any other achievements
- **Post-it gratitude notes**, your Wall of Fame can also be interactive, with employees adding their own notes and stickers to celebrate their peers
- **Mention company highs**, in a way that boosts camaraderie and recognises team successes
- **Use bright colours** to draw attention to your wall

If you're looking for inspiration, Staffordshire Social Care Workforce has a brilliant Wall of Fame, recognising employees based on the different themes **innovation**, **digital**, **recruitment**, **resilience**, and **retention**. This system ensures that no employee falls under the radar, and everyone has an opportunity to appear on the Wall.


+ Tangible Gifts

06 Inspection achievement bonus

Most Social Care organisations in the UK will be familiar with inspections, either by the CQC (Care Quality Commission) in England, the HIW (Healthcare Inspectorate Wales) or the CI (Care Inspectorate) in Scotland. Inspections can be a stressful time, and so it stands that if a care home receives a good review, employees should be rewarded.

Many Social Care organisations, such as Sanctuary Care, offer a CQC achievement bonus, distributed to every member of the team after a successful inspection. This system is highly valuable to building a culture of recognition, as there's no discrimination between roles or any hierarchies: every member of the team is entitled to a reward.

It's not about the amount but about the thought behind it. Employees who have pulled out the stops for an inspection deserve to be recognised for going the extra mile: even a small recompense can go a long way.



07 Micro bonuses

A micro bonus programme is ideal for those organisations that don't have extra cash to splash, but still want to demonstrate their appreciation with monetary rewards. It's similar to a regular bonus you might receive at work, just smaller.

An effective way to bring micro bonuses into your workplace might be to allocate each employee a number of credits, which they can use to send colleagues either a small amount of cash or the equivalent amount on a gift card (on company expenses), including a line or two explaining why they're grateful to that co-worker. A great platform to do this is Bonusly.

You could also distribute micro bonuses once a month, to employees who have consistently worked hard. It might be a small amount, but several micro bonuses add up over time, rewarding hardworking employees and building a functional system of recognition. Micro bonuses can also take the form of an **enhanced rate of pay**, which Advinia Healthcare found particularly helpful in its staff retention strategy.

Additionally, Praxis Care offers a refer-a-friend bonus scheme, where employees can nominate each other for small financial bonuses. They also offer earned wage access (early access to a portion of their monthly salary), long service awards, and a group pension plan. Praxis goes to show that financial incentives don't have to cost the earth, but can nonetheless make a significant impact on employees' lives.

08 Micro gifting

Micro gifting follows the same logic as micro bonuses: it's the thought that counts. It's the practice of giving small, meaningful gifts or tokens of appreciation to employees. It's an inexpensive way to add a personal touch to the recognition process, reinforcing a culture of recognition with a tangible reminder of appreciation.

Whether it's self-care items, such as scented candles, bath bombs, massage vouchers, or gift cards, it's often the small things that can make someone's day. With platforms like [Huggg](#), it's easy for managers or co-workers to give employees special gifts for different occasions and reasons.

For example, [Megan's restaurant](#) chain uses Huggg to celebrate important events like birthdays and work anniversaries, but also for employee recognition. Saying 'thank you' goes a long way, but backing it up with a small gift makes the recipient know they are truly valued and appreciated.

09 Dream holiday draw



While rewarding specific employees for specific work is an important part of an employee recognition strategy, random rewards also contribute to a culture of appreciation. It's a way for an organisation to demonstrate how they value the whole team and to reward effective teamwork.

For example, Peverel Court Care employees have the [yearly opportunity to win a dream holiday](#) up to the value of £1,000. Hard-working employees recognised by their colleagues are entered into a prize draw and picked out at random. This idea also puts emphasis on the importance of rest and relaxation for Social Care workers who are often faced with demanding and emotionally challenging situations.



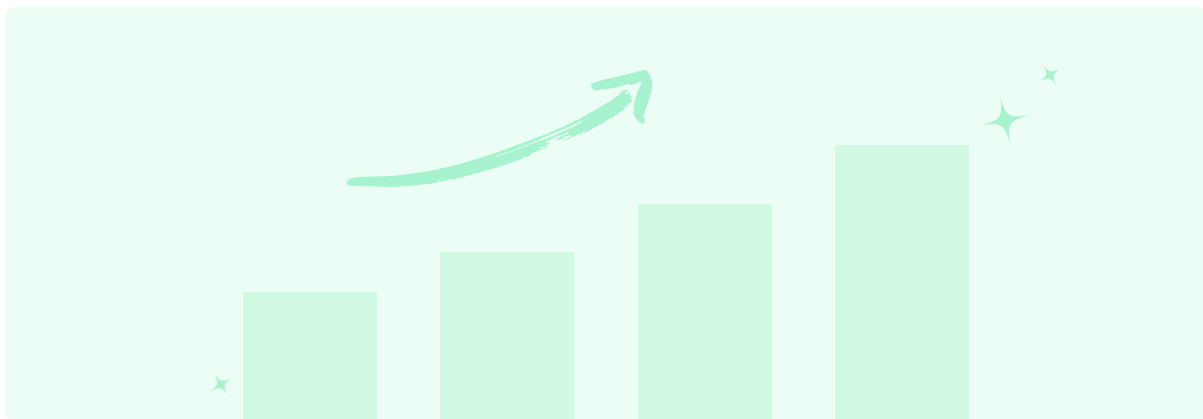
+ Acts of Service

10 Clear career growth opportunities

Career development is a brilliant way to boost staff retention, as it helps motivate employees while improving their skill set. It also increases staff engagement—58% of employees feel that professional development contributes to their job satisfaction, which is a major factor in retention.

For example, Active Prospects support their employees' career paths with sector-leading training and apprenticeship programmes designed to help workers learn and move up the ranks. They focus on internal promotions—in 2022, 17 of 28 managers were promoted internally. With specialist training programmes on offer, and a Leadership Programme for aspiring managers, employees can visualise a trajectory for their careers.

Another great example is Praxis Care, where training and development programmes are embedded into their workplace culture. The organisation supports employee career progression with specifically designed, bespoke training packages, and a strong partnership with Queen's University Belfast which helps shape their innovative approach. With this strategy in place, Support Workers can move up to Senior Management, creating a dynamic workplace where career development is both accessible and encouraged.



11 Preventing Understaffing


It's often helpful to address the problem at the root. Understaffing has been consistently linked with higher levels of staff stress and burnout (and lower quality of patient care) and must therefore be avoided in order to boost employee satisfaction.

Overstaffing, however, can be costly. Sona's Shift Filler feature helps ensure you're adequately staffed. This tool automates the manual process of filling last-minute shift shortages. It saves HR hours of work while making the need to collaborate with costly staffing agencies redundant.

What's more, Social Care organisations such as Greensleeves Care feel a strong responsibility to their workers to maintain high staffing levels, with more carers on each shift. This ensures that workers have the support they need, and contributes towards a healthier and more positive work environment.

+ Quality Time

12 Get to know your staff

Humanity is at the core of staff appreciation. Recognising each member of staff as a human, with their own interests, hobbies, and experiences, can be instrumental in boosting staff retention. 

Stephen Forster, the founder of The Care Social Network, emphasises the importance of the personal touch in company communications—from asking about an employee's new grandchild to knowing which football club they support, recognising individuality is key.

13 Extra holiday allowance for loyal employees

Flexible holidays can be hugely helpful when boosting staff satisfaction and showing employees how much you value them. It's a great way to increase team morale, and to reward long-standing employees.

Companies such as Housing 21 offer a 'salary sacrifice scheme' which lets employees sell up to five days' holiday, or buy up to 10 days of extra leave each year. They also offer extra days' holiday for the length of service, to say thank you to loyal workers. Employees receive an extra day of annual leave after three years of service, and a second extra day after five years.

14 The Friday phone call: choose your hours

As Neil Eastwood explains in the Sona webinar 'Does Social Care need a new culture of employee recognition?' care workers tend to be exceptionally giving people—in fact, a recent study in New Zealand showed that 52% of all Social Care employees have alternative family caring responsibilities, whether parents, children or helping friends out.

The Sona Way: with this in mind, increasing flexibility and autonomy over shifts can be an incredibly effective way of retaining staff. With digital scheduling apps like Sona, frontline workers can use an accessible system to build a staff roster that suits everyone, meaning they don't have to make constant sacrifices at the expense of their loved ones: no more Friday phone calls putting a stop to long-anticipated weekend plans.

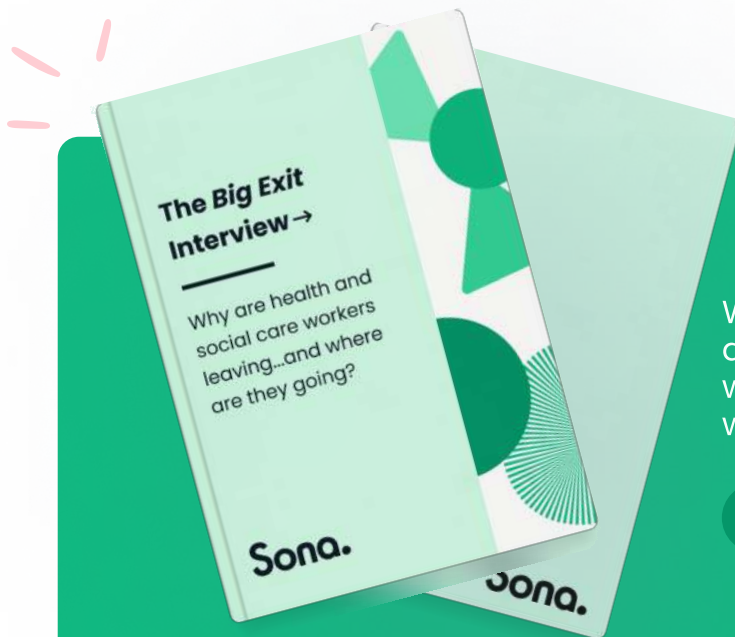
Social Care organisations such as Advinia have used Sona's shift filler feature to adapt their rota to staff's personal lives, meaning that employees no longer have to cancel at the last minute. With benefits including a 40% reduction in temp agency usage, and nearly half of available shifts filled automatically using the Sona software, Advinia observed a significant improvement in staff retention, higher team morale, and stronger employee engagement.

15 One-on-one meetings

Holding regular one-on-one meetings can help managers and team leaders get to know individual employees better, building the foundation for a successful working relationship. Weekly or monthly catch-up sessions provide a useful feedback loop, give an employee a chance to share any concerns, and deepen staff connections.

Meetings like these also help managers intercept any potential problem areas before they deteriorate. For example, if an employee is concerned about a scheduling error, they can feel comfortable discussing this in person with their manager and resolving it quickly.

Communication is key to understanding employees. Another top tip: if you have to say a sad goodbye to an employee, sitting down with them before they leave and asking some key questions can help you improve your workplace culture for remaining employees. It can be a tough process, so [we've put together some helpful, free templates](#) to ensure you get the most out of your final chat with a leaving employee.



Want to find out more about why Social Care workers are leaving—and where they're going?

[CHECK OUT OUR REPORT](#)

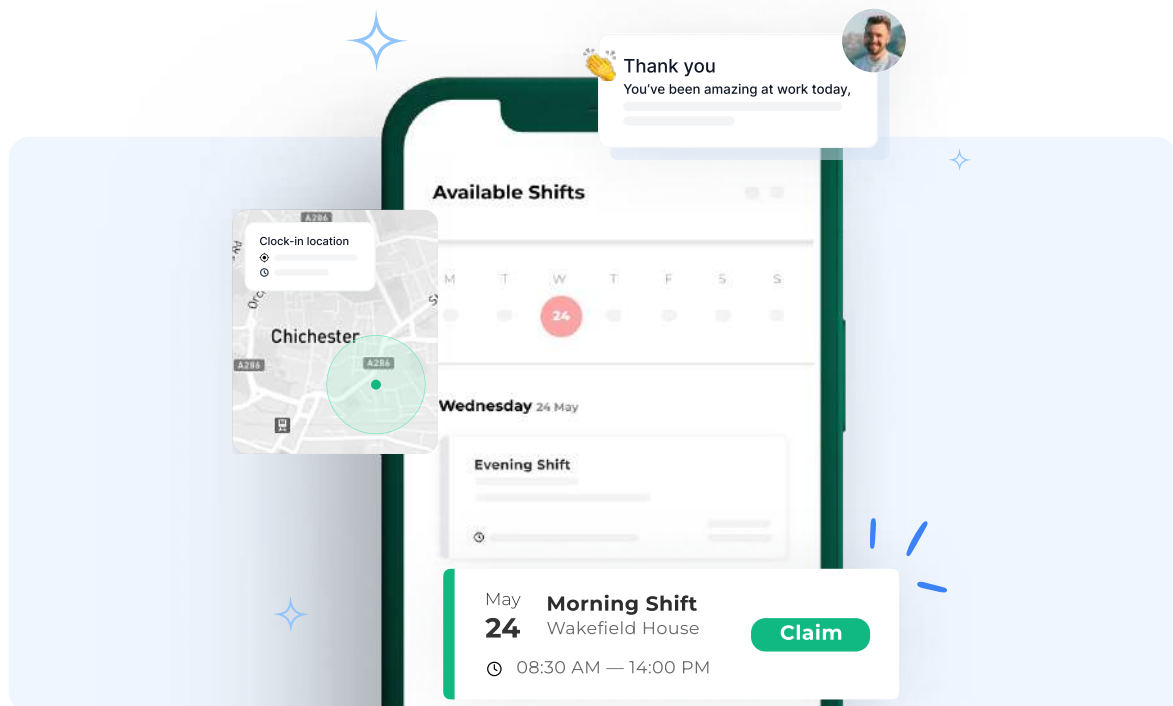
Recognition the Sona way

Backed by Google, Sona has been custom-built to help Social Care organisations solve their biggest workforce challenges. That includes recognition, which we have embedded into our software – literally.

Managers can send personalised messages of praise or appreciation to staff whenever they're logged in to the system. Staff receive an instant Sona app notification with that message of thanks or praise.

That's just one of our suite of communication and retention features designed to help providers improve the well-being and happiness of their teams and reduce preventable staff churn:

- Enable staff to give instant feedback with well-being check-ins
- Monitor individual and team morale in real-time
- Share and celebrate success together on the all-company newsfeed
- Open shift for extra revenue
- Direct messaging features



Check out our full Appreciation Matters report

Employee recognition programs are no longer a 'nice-to-have' – they are a must. Appreciation truly matters in care.

Our survey of 500 UK Health & Social Care employees highlights both the pivotal role of recognition in improving retention rates and the urgent need to address a perceived lack of appreciation in the sector:

Appreciation Matters features:

- Exclusive data on the current state of employee recognition in Social Care
- Three critical steps organisations can take to foster a culture of recognition in the workplace
- How to make the business case for recognition programmes

It's free to access, and full of practical advice. Keen to find out more? [Get in touch today](#), discover our features in action, and let us explain what we can do for staff retention in your organisation.



Interesting in finding out more?

We surveyed 500 UK Health and Social Care employees to find out why the industry needs more of a culture of employee recognition.

[DOWNLOAD OUR APPRECIATION MATTERS GUIDE HERE](#)

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