

Job coaches help staff with disabilities settle into roles



Ms Cha San San, a service manager in Shangri-La Singapore's human resources (training) department, is among those trained under SG Enable's pilot in-house job coach programme for the hotel sector that began in July last year. ST PHOTO: GIN TAY

SG Enable pilot for hotel industry has trained over 25 staff selected in-house

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When four interns with intellectual disabilities joined the team at Shangri-La Singapore in June last year, Ms Cha San San wanted to know how to better communicate with them and assist them in settling into their roles.

She was sent for training to learn how to support them in their job roles, such as in career planning, managing conflicts between them and their co-workers, and making modifications or accommodations in the job scope and environment.

This was part of Shangri-La's efforts to support more inclusive hiring through its participation in SG Enable's pilot in-house job coach programme for the hotel industry that began in July last year.

Under the programme, SG Enable works with organisations which identify staff suited to be in-house job coaches and provides them with training.

SG Enable, an agency that provides services for people with disabilities, plans to expand the programme to growth sectors such as healthcare and eldercare, cleaning services and food manufacturing, said its director of employment and employability Tan Eng Tat.

He added that 11 organisations are currently part of this pilot, and more than 25 in-house job coaches have been trained. Over 60 people with disabilities have benefited from the help of these job coaches.

Ms Cha, 32, a service manager in Shangri-La's human resources (training) department, was among those identified and sent for training to be an in-house job coach.

She attended the Advanced Certificate in Supported Employment training programme, designed by SG Enable and the Social Service

SUPPORTIVE WORKPLACE

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MRTAN ENG TAT, director of employment and employability at SG Enable, an agency that provides services for people with disabilities.

Institute, from August last year to January this year.

Mr Tan said that unlike job coaches who are typically staff from social sector agencies, in-house job coaches are identified from within the organisations that hire people with disabilities and bring with them strong industry knowledge.

These coaches provide support in the beneficiaries' transition

and integration into the work environment, and help them to develop interpersonal skills and assist them in career planning.

Ms Cha said that through the training programme, she learnt that the key was to better understand the capabilities of people with disabilities and match them to suitable tasks, instead of grouping them together. This is because they each have their own talents.

For example, when the four trainees came on board, one of them had trouble coping with work and was progressing slower and making more mistakes, she said. After a change to always put him on the same shift, "he progressed really well and could perform tasks well and on time".

Due to his intellectual disability, a regular routine suited him better, said Ms Cha.

There was some trial and error at the start when determining where best to deploy the four trainees, she said. Initially, they were assigned to landscaping and house-keeping roles, but these turned out to be unsuitable. For example, landscaping duties involve tools that are dangerous or not easy to use.

They were then assigned to the staff canteen, which had a steady pace and fixed timings, with tasks

such as shelving dishes, cleaning tables and replacing condiments, said Ms Cha.

She also put in effort to ensure the other workers adapted to and embraced having people with disabilities as their co-workers.

A briefing was conducted for all workers in the canteen to teach them how to communicate and work with people with disabilities. Such training is now included in the orientation programme for new hires, said Ms Cha.

There are now nine people with disabilities working at Shangri-La Singapore – seven are full-timers and two are trainees from the original group of four. The two had decided to extend their internships.

Ms Cha said: "We want to groom them into full-time staff and encourage more inclusive hiring practices. With these two trainees, they are great examples to encourage the industry to be more inclusive."

Mr Tan said: "The human touch by the job coaches in fostering a supportive work environment is just the first step. What ultimately sustains it is the efforts of empathetic co-workers and supervisors, and the organisation's culture."

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