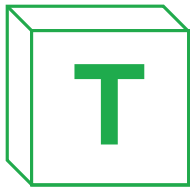




THINK  
AHEAD

**An invitation to  
partner with us to  
strengthen your mental  
health workforce**

◀ **Sonya**, trained with Think Ahead after studying Psychology and Neuroscience at Manchester. Now in a permanent role in the service where she trained.



**he future of mental health services is holistic care that integrates social interventions alongside**

**medical and psychological treatment.**

Helping people to manage their lives, and build their own support networks, enables them to live more safely and happily in the community. This maximises their chances of reaching sustainable recovery, and reduces pressure on inpatient services.

**Achieving this approach requires a flexible workforce with the right talents and training.** Mental health teams need professionals who can understand and influence the social factors affecting service users, working across the community and providing joined-up care.

**Think Ahead is a charity that partners with NHS Trusts and Local Authorities to strengthen their mental health teams.**

Our free programme, funded by the Department of Health and Social Care, supplies a service provider with talented recruits, gives them and existing staff advanced training in social interventions, and supports the organisation to integrate these approaches across their services.

**Trained as mental health social workers, our recruits can take on a wide range of roles within teams.** As professionally regulated staff, they can fill practitioner roles alongside nurses and occupational therapists, including acting as Care Coordinators. They also bring special expertise in social interventions, working with service users' families and communities, supporting people in crisis, and the application of mental health legislation.

**Our programme supports your workforce to develop and spread their skills.** Our recruits, and the existing staff who supervise them, receive training in catalysing and leading change within services. We choose recruits and supervisors who are able to make a wider impact right away, spreading best practice across teams, and have the potential to become leaders – in practice, research, and service management.

**We have worked successfully with more than 50% of England's NHS Mental Health Trusts, and 30% of Local Authorities.** In a recent survey of our first set of partners, every respondent recommended working with us.

**We want to further expand our network of partners, and we hope you will consider working with us.**

**“It is vitally important that we have professionals in mental health services who can help people make a sustainable recovery, working from an understanding of the individual, family and community aspects of mental health. I believe that the Think Ahead programme supports exactly this capability, bridging the gaps in the current health and social care workforce.**

**John Short**, Chief Executive of Birmingham and Solihull NHS Mental Health Trust.

► **Aisha**, trained with Think Ahead in Hackney after leaving the private sector to “do something meaningful”. Now in a permanent role in the same service.

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## **This document explains:**

**How the programme works** 02

### **The benefits of partnering:**

- Receive talented new staff 04
- Upskill your workforce 06
- Support service improvements 08

**What partners have to provide** 10

**How to start a partnership** 12

# How the programme works



**We** recruit as many talented new entrants (“participants”) as you want, in “units” of four.



**You** select an experienced social worker to lead each unit as their full-time Consultant Social Worker.

**Summer Institute**  
July / August

Six weeks’ learning covering mental health, social interventions, law, and leadership.

**Consultant Social Worker training**

Around six days’ training in social interventions, leadership, and practice education.

Units form  
September



**Training year**

- Unit is embedded in your community mental health service, full-time except for a maximum of 24 teaching days.
- Unit takes a caseload: participants do direct work with service users, with cases held by Consultant Social Workers.
- Unit’s caseload grows during the year, averaging **21 cases** half-way through the year, and **35 cases** during the second half of the year.

**February**

We pay you **£4k per unit** to cover costs.

**September**

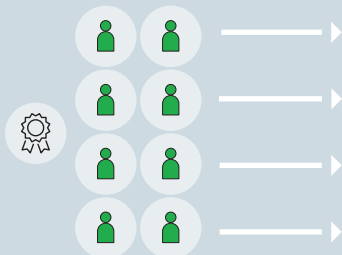
We pay you **£14k per unit (£18k in London)** to cover costs.

**March**

We pay you **£14k per unit (£16k in London)** to cover costs.

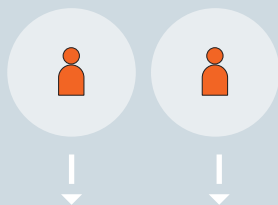
## Participants qualify and units disperse

**September (the following year)**



- Participants gain Postgraduate Diploma and register as social workers.

- They become your employees.



- Consultant Social Workers can pick up another unit from the next cohort, or move to another role.

## Qualified year

- You place participants individually into any role in adult services that requires a qualified mental health practitioner.

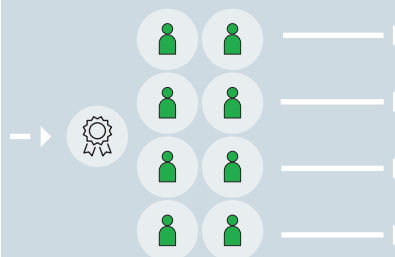
- They work full-time except for a maximum of eight teaching days.

- You employ them on a minimum 12-month contract. You can offer longer / permanent contracts if you wish.

- They undergo the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment programme for newly qualified social workers.

## Participants get an MA, and complete the Think Ahead programme

**September (the following year)**



- Participants get an MA in social work practice.

## Participants continue their career with you

- If they've had a positive experience they are likely to want to stay with your organisation.

- They will be well-placed in time to become practice leaders (including as Approved Mental Health Professionals) or move into service management.

- You are under no obligation to employ any participant beyond the contract period you chose at the start of the qualified year.

**Qualifications are awarded by Middlesex University.**

The benefits of partnering:

# Receive talented new staff

The Think Ahead programme is one of the most competitive graduate schemes in the country, attracting high-potential individuals who are committed to supporting vulnerable people.



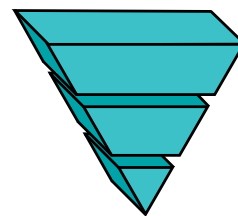
Think Ahead is one of the **Times Top 100** Graduate Employers.



**23 candidates** apply for each place on the programme.



Minimum eligibility criteria include a **2:1 undergraduate degree.**



**Three-stage selection process** involving social workers and service users – tests seven attributes including adaptability, relationship-building, and self-awareness.



*The calibre of Think Ahead participants is very good and we're really excited about next year's cohort: they're bringing a combination of academic and life skills to the role.*

**Simon Owens**, Consultant Social Worker leading a Think Ahead training unit in Durham.





**“ I worked in the City as a head hunter for banks but I didn’t find this fulfilling. My second job was working with young people with learning difficulties, which I really enjoyed. While I was there, I met a social worker who I found really inspiring. What makes this programme stand out is that you are training with like-minded people who all want to achieve the same goals.**

**Jan**, Think Ahead participant. Studied Ancient History at King’s College London.



**“ My interest in mental health partly comes from my personal family experience. My mother had severe mental health problems and, by supporting her through that, I saw first-hand how positive relationships can help. I am definitely planning to stay in this sector in future.**

**Eleanor**, Think Ahead participant. Studied Psychology at Durham.



**“ After almost two years practising law, I realised that it wasn’t the right career for me. I wanted to find a job where I could build relationships with individuals and make a real difference to their lives on a daily basis. In my opinion, mental health social work is like the missing piece of the treatment puzzle.**

**Suzanne**, Think Ahead participant. Studied Law at Cambridge.

The benefits of partnering:

# Upskill your workforce

Both the new recruits and the existing staff who become their Consultant Social Workers get advanced training to improve service effectiveness.

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## Both the participants and the Consultant Social Workers get:

- **Tools to improve outcomes:** The curriculum draws on international best practice, focusing on social interventions known to improve outcomes for mental health service users.
- **Focus on long-term recovery:** We teach interventions at the individual, family, and community levels, that can enable service users to build their own support systems.
- **Training in social interventions such as:**
  - Motivational Interviewing.
  - Systemic Family Approaches.
  - The Connecting People intervention.

### Participants also get:

- A **Postgraduate Diploma and a Master's degree** in Social Work from Middlesex University.
- **Preparation for AMHP training:** the curriculum gives the new recruits a full understanding of mental health policy and legislation, in theory and practice.

### Consultant Social Workers also get:

- A **Postgraduate Certificate** in Advanced Social Work from Middlesex University.
- **Practice Educator** Stages 1 and 2.
- **A unique career development opportunity within your organisation**, giving experience in management and supervision while maintaining involvement in frontline work.





When I took up the role as a Think Ahead Consultant Social Worker, I had been qualified for about four years and had just done my AMHP training. I was working as a care coordinator in a community mental health team.

The opportunity was perfect for me because I wanted to get involved in educating new social workers, and I really wanted to do it within this Trust – I entered the profession here, and I feel like this is where I've grown up professionally. Without Think Ahead, it would have taken me much longer to qualify as a Practice Educator and there would have been no guarantee that I'd get my first student quickly.

It's been a steep learning curve, but it's a great role. There is a good balance of mentoring the participants and doing direct work with the cases we share, so I haven't lost touch with the frontline – plus I'm still on the AMHP rota.

The training in modern social interventions is excellent and has made me aware of the latest techniques. When you're "firefighting" it can be easy to get into a state where you're just monitoring service users and

reacting, but this role has reminded me of the value of planning and implementing structured interventions – which can be more effective and actually save time overall. That's an approach I'll definitely take with me into future roles.

As part of the role I've got involved with discussions about social work across the Trust, and it's an exciting time as Think Ahead is part of a move to promote social interventions more widely within the organisation. I want to continue contributing to that, so I'm keen to do another year as a Think Ahead Consultant Social Worker and then find another social-work-focused role here.

I would recommend being a Consultant Social Worker to anyone. It's been a great chance to develop my skills and influence a whole new bunch of social workers who will go on within the Trust and help to take forward the improvements we've started together.

**“It's been a great chance to develop my skills and influence a whole new bunch of social workers.”**

**Kate Johnson**, Consultant Social Worker who led two Think Ahead training units in Hertfordshire.

The benefits of partnering:

# Support service improvement

The Think Ahead units act as catalysts for maximising the contribution of social work to your services, and being part of the Think Ahead network puts you at the forefront of best practice.

## Profile raising

Bringing Think Ahead units into your organisation emphasises the importance of social work and community-based, preventative approaches.



***Think Ahead has completely reaffirmed the positive impact social work can have on the delivery of specialist mental health services. The participant unit has been like a breath of fresh air arriving into a very busy multi-disciplinary team. They have been embraced by professionals who have commented that the enthusiasm and talent of the participants has raised the profile of social work across the organisation.***

**Dr Lynn Prendergast**, Associate Director for Social Care, Essex Partnership NHS Trust.

## Knowledge sharing

The participants and Consultant Social Workers can share the new techniques they are learning with their colleagues.



***After each training day, our participants will come back with new ideas, and share these with other team members in forums and clinical case discussions. They're bringing a whole new perspective through social interventions.***

**Malgosia Eaden**, Consultant Social Worker in Hackney.

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## Networking

Partners are invited to regular Think Ahead network events, providing opportunities to keep abreast of new developments and share best practice.

“*Being part of Think Ahead has helped us to incorporate great ideas from across the country into how we train and support our social workers to deliver best practice.*”

**Dr Jane Shears**, Former Head of Social Work,  
St Andrew's Healthcare.

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## Leadership

The participants and social workers get training in leadership skills, delivered in partnership with NHS Horizons, so that they can spread best practice right away and in time take on leadership positions.

“*Having met the Think Ahead students, I believe we'll create a number of future leaders in mental health, who can help give the profession a bright future. I say this as a chief executive who still uses his social work skills every day.*”

**John Short**, Chief Executive of Birmingham  
and Solihull NHS Mental Health Trust.

# What partners have to provide

We will ask you to sign a delivery agreement ensuring that you will:

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## Across the programme:

- **Commit to the full duration of the programme** (as laid out on pages 2 and 3).
- **Designate an “Operational Lead” to oversee delivery.** This will be a senior member of staff, who is responsible for ensuring that the Consultant Social Workers and the participants have the support they need to enable a first-rate learning experience.
- **Support the participants to study alongside their work.** They need to attend some teaching days away from your service, and have regular meetings with their Academic Tutor.
- **Manage local partnerships to ensure the programme succeeds.** For example, where services are delivered in partnership between NHS Trusts and Local Authorities.

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## In Year One (the training year):

- **Recruit and release staff to be Consultant Social Workers.** Each unit requires a full-time Consultant Social Worker throughout the year. You are responsible for appointing your Consultant Social Workers, with support from us, usually by seconding existing staff into the role (typically with a salary enhancement in line with the standard Practice Educator honorarium). They need to be released from their previous role for around six days’ training beforehand, then move to the new role full-time from September. While in the Consultant Social Worker role, they can do AMHP duty for a maximum of one day per week. You also need to appoint at least one reserve to step in if a Consultant Social Worker has to step away from the role for a significant period; the reserve undergoes the training but remains in their current role unless needed.
- **Place the participant units in the right setting.** Each unit must sit within an adult community mental health service, with involvement in multi-disciplinary working. A unit’s participants must be in the same team and location as their Consultant Social Worker.
- **Give the participants the support they need.** The participants will be with the organisation full-time and doing useful work. They will need the usual working facilities – such as desks, phones, computers, and access to IT systems – and practical support such as inductions and expenses. They will also need to feel supported within the organisation, surrounded by colleagues who understand and welcome their role.
- **Give the participants the opportunities they need to learn.** Participants need to work on more and more complex cases through the year, building up to working on 7-12 cases each. These cases need to give them opportunities to practise the social interventions in the curriculum. To ensure this, Consultant Social Workers must have some control over which cases are allocated to their units, and must personally hold the majority of these cases.
- **Arrange the Contrasting Learning Experience.** To broaden their experience, during the year each participant must leave their unit for 30 days to do direct work with children and families. You are responsible for arranging this with your local partners.

## In Year Two (the qualified year):

- **Employ the participants in an appropriate role, with an appropriate salary.** You can use the participants to fill any role, in adult services, that requires a qualified mental health practitioner – including roles previously filled by other professionals such as mental health nurses or occupational therapists. Their contract with you should be full-time, and for at least 12 months (although you may wish to offer longer, or permanent, contracts), with the usual salary for a newly qualified social worker.
- **Manage the participants' Assessed and Support Year in Employment.** If you have an existing ASYE programme, they will join it. If you do not, we can advise you on how to approach this. As for any newly qualified social worker, you will need to ensure that their caseload is appropriately sized.
- **Allow three to five days' study leave,** for them to complete their master's degree work. (This is in addition to a small number of teaching days and tutor visits.)

# Frequently-asked questions

**What does it cost to be a partner?** There's no fee, and we pay you £32k (£38k in London) to cover your costs. You will need to meet the usual on-costs of bringing in new staff e.g. desks, phones, travel expenses etc.

**Who pays the participants?** During Year One, when they are training, we pay them a bursary. During Year Two, once they are qualified, they become your employees and you pay them a standard salary for a new entrant.

**Does the Consultant Social Worker have to leave their previous role behind?** Yes, the Consultant Social Worker role is full-time. They will still take a caseload, shared with their unit, which will be small at first and grow to, on average, around 35 cases in the second half of the year. These could include some cases they managed in their previous role, but they won't be able to take their full caseload with them. Some organisations absorb this temporary reduction in capacity across other staff; some use part of the payment we provide towards backfilling the role that the Consultant Social Worker leaves behind.

**Where can I place the participants once they're qualified?** They are a flexible resource: you can put them into any role in adult services that requires a qualified mental health practitioner, whether existing or newly created. They can take up roles previously filled by other professionals, e.g. mental health nurses or occupational therapists.

**How do I arrange the Contrasting Learning Experience?** You need to work with a partner agency that can facilitate direct work with children and families. The best option is usually a local children and family social work team. Alternatively, you can use a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, or an appropriate third sector provider. The participants will need a local supervisor for the 30 days they spend in this service, but their Consultant Social Worker will retain overall oversight.

**How do I know the participants will stay on after the programme?** All of our participants are selected for their strong commitment to the profession. But like any staff member, how long they stay with your particular organisation will depend on their experience of working with you. We provide guidance on the actions that you can take to ensure they have a positive experience and are likely to become long-term employees.

## Support from Think Ahead

We assign one of our Practice Specialists, all highly experienced social workers, to support you with every aspect of the partnership. They can give you advice and practical support throughout the partnership, from recruiting your Consultant Social Worker(s) to retaining your participants after the programme ends.

# How to start a partnership

If you think you might be interested, do get in touch. The earlier we start to talk, the more likely it is that we can make the programme work for you.

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1

**Get in touch to let us know you're interested** – you can email us on [partners@thinkahead.org](mailto:partners@thinkahead.org).

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2

**We'll be keen to talk**, so that we can learn about your organisation and your priorities, and discuss with you how the Think Ahead programme would work in your services.

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3

**You make an application to partner with us.** This is easy – it just means filling in a short form specifying things like what service the participants will be based in. We can help you think it through.

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4

**We let you know whether your application has been accepted.** We'll get back to you after we've reviewed all the applications from organisations who want to receive participants from the next cohort. You can find the latest application deadlines, and when you can expect to hear back, on our website.

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5

**If you've been accepted, we begin working with you to prepare for the programme.** (If you haven't, we will explain why and begin discussing how we might be able to work with you for future cohorts.)



# Our partners

Think Ahead participants have trained and worked in services provided by:

- Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health Trust
- Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust
- Birmingham City Council
- Black Country Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
- Bradford District Care Trust
- Bradford Metropolitan District Council
- Brighton and Hove City Council
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust
- Cambridgeshire County Council
- Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust
- Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust
- Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust
- East London NHS Foundation Trust
- Enfield Council
- Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust
- Gateshead Council
- Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust
- Hartlepool Borough Council
- Hertfordshire County Council
- Hertfordshire Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust
- Kent County Council
- Kent and Medway Social Care Partnership Trust
- Leicestershire County Council
- Leicestershire Partnership Trust
- Liverpool City Council
- London Borough of Barnet
- London Borough of Bexley
- London Borough of Brent
- London Borough of Camden
- London Borough of Croydon
- London Borough of Hackney
- London Borough of Harrow
- London Borough of Hillingdon
- London Borough of Merton
- London Borough of Newham
- London Borough of Redbridge
- London Borough of Richmond
- London Borough of Southwark
- London Borough of Waltham Forest
- Luton Borough Council
- Manchester City Council
- Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust
- North East London NHS Foundation Trust
- North Somerset Council
- North Tyneside Council
- North Yorkshire County Council
- Northamptonshire County Council
- Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust
- Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust
- Portsmouth City Council
- Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
- Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council
- Solent NHS Trust
- Solihull City Council
- South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust
- South West London and St George's Mental Health NHS Trust
- South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
- St Andrew's Healthcare
- Stockton on Tees Borough Council
- Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
- Surrey County Council
- Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
- Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust
- The Council of the County of Durham
- Wakefield Council
- Warwickshire County Council
- Westminster City Council
- Wolverhampton City Council
- Worcestershire County Council
- Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust

“ ***We’re proud partners of Think Ahead. All my years of NHS experience have underlined the importance of social workers to mental health; you cannot get by without them. This scheme can make a lasting difference to creating strength and pride in this great profession.*** ”

**Claire Murdoch**, NHS England National Mental Health Director and Chief Executive of Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust.

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**Trustees:**

Professor Dame Carol Black (Chair)  
Dr Ruth Allen  
Professor David Croisdale-Appleby OBE  
James Darley  
Professor Sir Julian le Grand  
Rt Hon Norman Lamb MP  
Donald Peck  
Sharon Rice-Oxley  
Lord Dennis Stevenson  
Nicholas Timmins

Academic teaching on the Think Ahead programme is provided by Middlesex University.



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