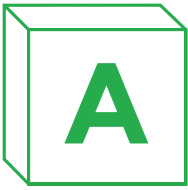




**THINK  
AHEAD**

**Work with us to  
strengthen your  
mental health  
workforce**

◀ **Suzanne**, trained with Think Ahead in 2017. Now in a permanent role in the service where she trained.



**t Think Ahead, we want to see a society where everyone with mental health problems can flourish.** That won't

happen unless people can improve their social circumstances – because life issues like relationships, living arrangements, and employment have profound effects on mental wellbeing.

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

Our programme, funded by the Department of Health and Social Care, is one of the UK's most competitive graduate schemes, offering graduates and career-changers a new route into mental health social work. We supply service providers with trainee Mental Health

Social Workers, deliver advanced training in social interventions and leadership to both trainees and existing staff, and support the organisation to integrate these approaches across their services.

**Our programme supports your workforce to develop and spread their skills.** Social work is vital to meet the mental health challenge. Through talking therapy, support, and advocacy, mental health social workers can empower people to manage the social factors in their lives—like relationships, housing, and employment—that enable them to get well and stay well. Our participants, and the existing staff who supervise them, are trained from the start to support and lead change within services and strengthen social approaches.

**We have worked successfully with more than 50% of England's NHS Mental Health Trusts, and 30% of Local Authorities.** In a survey of our first set of partners, every respondent recommended working with us. We work with our partners to recruit participants locally which helps to improve retention beyond the programme.



***Social workers bring a unique skill set to our teams, supporting individuals with the social factors that enable them to achieve and sustain recovery from mental health problems. This is essential if we are to meet the mental, physical and social needs of people.***

***The Think Ahead programme has been a great way of bringing talented mental health social workers into our service, and they've come equipped with the right skills to make an impact straight away.***

**Rob Webster**, Chief Executive of South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust.

▶ **Matthew**, trained with Think Ahead in 2017. Now in a permanent role in the same service and an Associate Consultant Social Worker for the Think Ahead programme in the 2021 Cohort.

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## This document explains:

**How the programme works** 02

### The benefits of partnering:

- Grow 04
- Upskill 06
- Influence 08

**What partners have to provide** 10

**How to start a partnership** 12

# How the programme works

In the first year “participants” placed on the programme will work with your organisation to become NQSW’s. In their second year they will become your employees and undertake their MA and ASYE year.



**Summer Institute  
July / August**

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



**Consultant Social Worker training**

CPD Training: Relationship Based Practice and Practice Educator Professional Standards (PEPS) 1 and 2.

**Units start from  
August**



## Training year

- Unit is embedded in your adult mental health service full-time except for a maximum of 22 teaching days.
- Unit takes a caseload: participants do direct work with service users, with cases held by Consultant Social Workers.
- Participants’ caseload grows in volume and complexity during the year, up to **7 cases** each half-way through the year, and up to **12 cases** each during the second half of the year.

## Additional Consultant Social Worker training

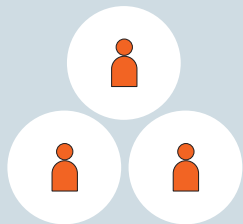
- Up to 19 training days, depending upon whether the Consultant Social Worker(s) are already qualified Practice Educators, to be undertaken via a combination of face-to-face and distance learning.
- This includes four Consultant Social Worker Development Days with leadership training.

We will pay you a base fee of **£29k (£32k in London) for a unit of four participants**. You will receive an additional **£3k for five participants or £6k for six participants**. This payment can be used to support setup costs. You will receive this fee in three installments during the first year.

**Participants qualify and units disperse August (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 9.5 teaching days and 5 days' study leave.
- 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 NQSWs.

**Participants get an MA and complete the Think Ahead programme August (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 and Practice Educators) 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.**

Middlesex University is a leading provider of mental health and social work training and education in the UK. They are highly experienced in running CPD courses, undergraduate and postgraduate social work programmes.

## The benefits of partnering:

# Grow

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.

**Workforce Development:** We work with you to attraction local participants ensuring that they reflect your workforce, the communities they work in and supporting improved staff retention.

“*Being a CSW has been a privilege! The benefits for the participants has been the development of an openness to explore varied hypothesis, theories and rationale for behaviour or intervention, which fosters their learning and identity as reflective, reflexive practitioners and a confidence to apply transferable skills.*”

**Subrena Joseph**, Consultant Social Worker, Richmond and Wandsworth Councils, between 2021 and 2024.

“*I have supported participants on the Think Ahead unit in 2017-2020. The participants have a good reputation throughout our organisation, and we now have lots of our teams requesting to have Think Ahead participants placed. They are hardworking, creative and a high standard all round. We have been impressed with how keen they are to take on and successfully implement projects. One of the benefits for us has been developing social work roles within the Trust.*”

**Julie Wardell**, Consultant Social Worker, TEWV, between 2017 and 2021.



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

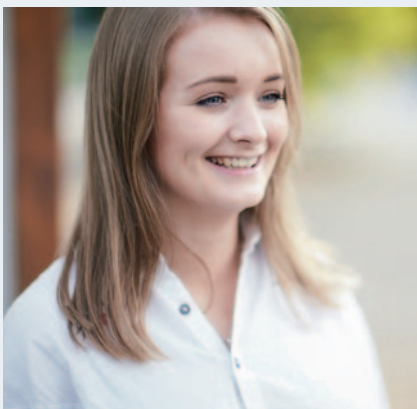


Minimum eligibility criteria include a **2:2 undergraduate degree.**



**“ 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

Both the new recruits and the existing staff who become their Consultant Social Workers receive 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.
- **Leadership tools:** We deliver workshops to develop skills in relationship-building and influencing.

### Participants also get:

- A **Postgraduate Diploma and a master's degree** in Social Work Practice 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:

- **Practice Educator** Stages 1 and 2 qualification if they do not already have this qualification.
- **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.

**Kate Johnson**, Consultant Social Worker who led two Think Ahead training units in Hertfordshire between 2016 and 2018.



of Consultant Social Workers said being a CSW **improved their own social work practice**.\*

\*Based on a survey of our 2023 Cohort's Consultant Social Workers

The benefits of partnering:

# Influence

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.

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## Profile raising

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

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## Knowledge sharing

The participants and Consultant Social Workers can share the new techniques they are learning with their colleagues, and have a positive impact on the culture of the teams.

“*The Think Ahead programme has been an excellent means of recruiting high caliber staff. It has provided a perfect opportunity for very practice learning oriented staff to excel and gain additional training as Consultant Social Workers, and for the organisation it has aligned with a wider programme to develop practice educators and student placements with our local universities.*”

**Rachael Willis**, Director of Social Work, Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust.

“*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, East London NHS Foundation Trust.

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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.

“*Partnering with Think Ahead isn't just about hosting a unit; it's being part of a national network of practitioners, participants, academics, service users and managers. As an Operations Manager it's been a wonderful opportunity to meet with people and organisations across the whole country, and it's a valuable way of learning from each other about how to meet the challenges facing social workers in mental health settings.*”

**Patrick Finnegan**, Operations Manager (Mental Health), Warwickshire County Council.

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## Leadership

The participants and Consultant Social Workers receive training in leadership skills, delivered in collaboration with leadership experts and social work practitioners. We enable them to apply leadership to practice from the start and prepare them to influence change in the sector in time.

“*Our participants bring great leadership potential to their roles, which is further developed by the training they receive as part of the programme. They have already led service improvement in their team and have been recognised at the Trust awards for their leadership and contribution.*”

**Kate Linhart**, Deputy Director, Integration and Partnerships, Hertfordshire Partnership University Foundation Trust.

# What partners have to provide

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

## 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.
- **Contribute to the Think Ahead network.** To support continual improvement of the programme and sector development.

## In Year One (the training year):

- **Recruit and release staff to be Consultant Social Workers.** Each unit requires full-time support from Consultant Social Workers. 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 five days’ training beforehand, then move to the new role full-time from early-August. While in the Consultant Social Worker role, they can do AMHP duty for a maximum of two days per month and will need to undertake up to 19 days’ training via a combination of face-to-face teaching and distance-learning throughout the year. If it is not a job share, you need to appoint at least one Associate CSW to step in if a Consultant Social Worker must step away from the role for a significant period; the Associate receives the same training but remains in their current role unless needed. You will need to ensure that the Consultant Social Worker(s) and Associate are allowed 3 days’ study leave per module.
- **Place the participant units in the right setting.** Each unit must sit within an adult team with a focus on mental health. A unit’s participants must be in the same team and location as their Consultant Social Worker.
- **Give the participants the support they need.** They will need the usual working facilities –such as laptops, phones, 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 must be provided opportunities to shadow different members of the team. Participants also need to work on more and more complex cases through the year. These cases need to give them opportunities to practice the social interventions in the curriculum. To ensure this, Consultant Social Workers must be involved in allocation of 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.

# Frequently-asked questions

## In Year Two (the qualified year):

- **Employ the participants in an appropriate role, with an appropriate salary.** Participants should be placed in an adult team, with a focus on mental health, in a role that requires a qualified mental health social worker, whether existing or newly created. The role should be confirmed by April and 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 NQSW undertaking their ASYE you will need to ensure that the size and complexity of their caseload is appropriate.
- **Allow five days' study leave,** for them to complete their master's degree work. This is in addition to teaching days and tutorials.

## What does it cost to be a partner?

We will pay you a base fee of **£29k (£32k in London) for a unit of four participants.** You will receive an additional **£3k for five participants or £6k for six participants.** This payment can be used to support setup costs. You will receive this fee in three installments during the first year.

## 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 employees and you pay them in line with the standard salary for newly qualified social workers.

## Does the Consultant Social Worker have to leave their previous role behind?

Yes, the Consultant Social Worker role is full time unless it is a job share. They can still take a caseload, shared with their unit. 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 for workforce development towards backfilling the role that the Consultant Social Worker leaves behind.

## 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.

## What support will I get from Think Ahead?

We assign one of our Practice Specialists, all highly experienced social workers and practice educators, to support you with every aspect of Year One and Year Two of the programme. In addition to this, you will have contact with the Partnership Manager and become part of our wider network with regular meetings and updates.

# 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 Roxanne Timmis, Head of Partnerships and Development on [r.timmis@thinkahead.org](mailto:r.timmis@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 online 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 from us, 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:

- Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust
- Barnet, Enfield & Haringey Mental Health Trust
- Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust
- Birmingham City Council
- Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
- Bolton Council
- Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust
- Bradford Metropolitan District Council
- Brighton & 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
- Central Bedfordshire Council
- Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
- Cheshire West and Chester Council
- Cornwall Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
- Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust
- Croydon Council
- Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne & Wear NHS Foundation Trust
- Dudley Council
- Durham County Council
- East London NHS Foundation Trust
- Enfield Council
- Essex County Council
- Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust
- Gateshead Council
- Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust
- Halton Council
- Hartlepool Borough Council
- Hertfordshire County Council
- Hertfordshire Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust
- Kent County Council
- Knowsley Council
- Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust
- Lancashire County Council
- Leeds and York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
- Leicestershire County Council
- Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust
- Lincolnshire County Council
- Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
- Liverpool City Council
- Livewell Southwest
- London Borough of Barnet
- London Borough of Bexley
- London Borough of Camden
- London Borough of Ealing
- London Borough of Hackney
- London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham
- London Borough of Harrow
- London Borough of Havering
- London Borough of Hillingdon
- London Borough of Islington
- London Borough of Merton
- London Borough of Newham
- London Borough of Redbridge
- London Borough of Tower Hamlets
- London Borough of Waltham Forest
- Luton Borough Council
- Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust
- Midlands Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
- Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust
- North East London NHS Foundation Trust
- North Somerset Council
- North Tyneside Council
- North Yorkshire County Council
- Northamptonshire County Council
- Northumberland County Council
- Nottinghamshire County Council
- Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust
- Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust
- Peterborough City Council
- Portsmouth City Council
- Richmond and Wandsworth Councils
- Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
- Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council
- Solent NHS Trust
- Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
- Somerset County Council
- Somerset Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
- South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust
- South Tyneside Council
- South West London & St George's Mental Health NHS Trust
- South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
- Southend-on-Sea Borough Council
- Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust
- St Andrew's Healthcare
- Staffordshire County Council
- Stockton Council
- Suffolk County Council
- Surrey & Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
- Surrey County Council
- Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
- Tees Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust
- Thurrock Council
- Wandsworth Council
- Warrington Borough Council
- Warwickshire County Council
- West London NHS Trust
- Westminster City Council
- Wirral Council
- Wolverhampton City Council
- Worcestershire County Council
- Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust



***We have been 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:**

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Aparajita 'Aps' Ajit

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