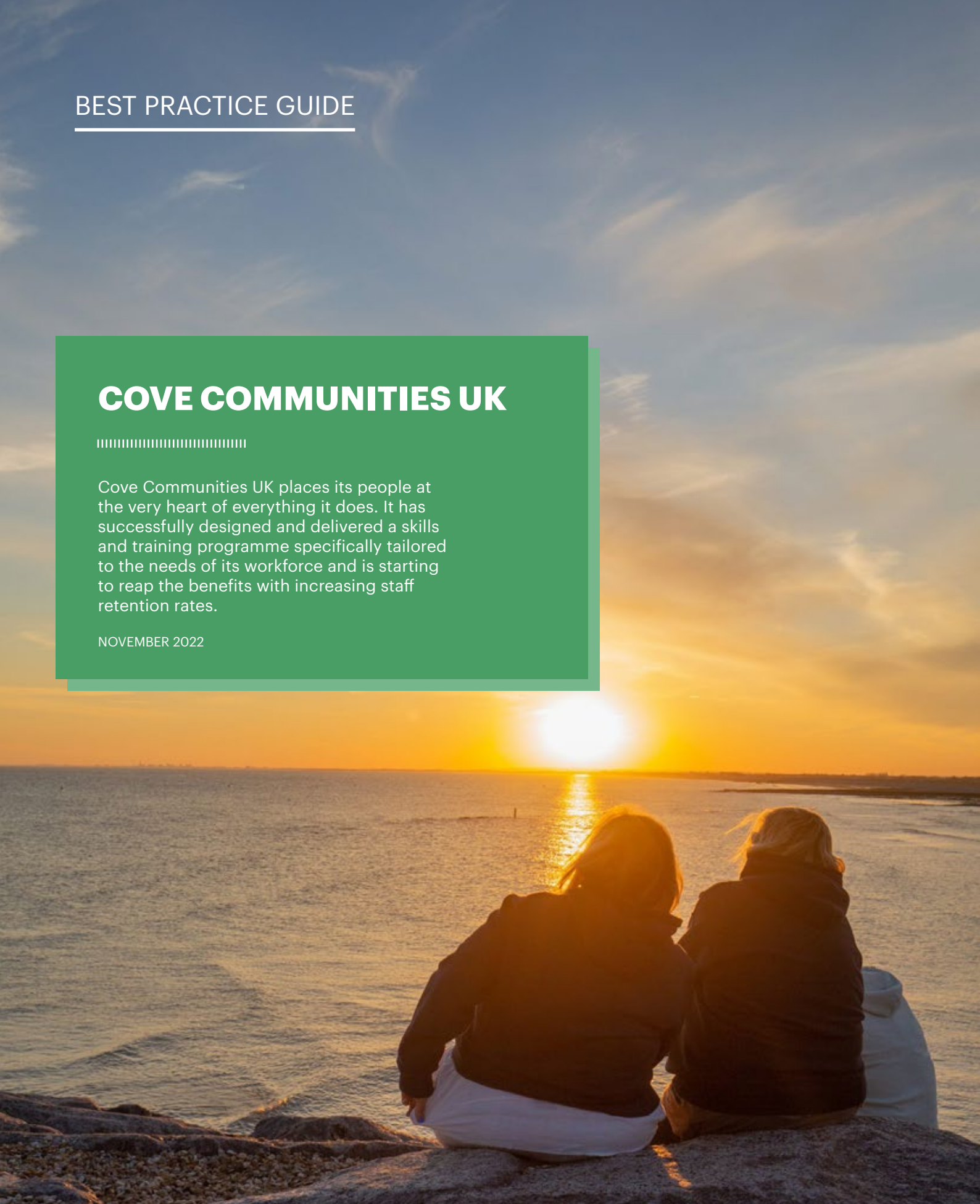


## COVE COMMUNITIES UK



Cove Communities UK places its people at the very heart of everything it does. It has successfully designed and delivered a skills and training programme specifically tailored to the needs of its workforce and is starting to reap the benefits with increasing staff retention rates.

NOVEMBER 2022





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**Cove Communities UK** is a multi-award-winning hospitality business with industry-leading parks and resorts in some of the UK's most sought-after destinations. The company recognises that its people is what sets it apart.

As a result, the company is dedicated to hiring, retaining, and rewarding talented team members, aligned with its culture and values.

This best practice guide has been commissioned as a series as part of the "Coastal Sustainability through careers and business skills in Greater Lincolnshire" Coastal Communities Fund project.





# SETTING THE SCENE

An established company in the US, Cove Communities operates more than 30 parks across North America, largely residential and RV or touring parks. In 2019, Cove Communities UK launched as a new company in the UK and adopted a slightly different business model, incorporating holiday parks, holiday villages and residential parks. It began by acquiring Bunn Leisure in Selsey, West Sussex, which it subsequently re-named to Seal Bay Resort in early 2022. Shortly afterwards, the company purchased Kings Park Village, a residential park in Essex, and now owns a total of 17 parks across the UK, with more planned over the coming months.

Its flagship, Seal Bay Resort, exemplifies the company's holiday park offering, with a mixture of caravans and lodges, either owned by individuals or by Cove Communities UK itself and rented to holidaymakers. Incorporating 2,500 pitches, along with swimming pools, entertainment venues, restaurants, and retail outlets, it is one of the biggest holiday parks in Europe.

Cove Communities UK understands that for visitors, as well as for team members, its parks represent more than just a holiday home, a holiday, or a career, it's about a lifestyle. As a result, the company has invested £20 million in Seal Bay Resort alone, upgrading infrastructure and investing in its team. The benefit of this commitment and subsequent business progression is clear, with a Net Promoter Score (NPS) of 52% so far for 2022.

# APPROACH

## CREATING A LIFESTYLE BY PLACING PEOPLE AT THE HEART OF EVERYTHING

Cove Communities UK works hard to create a friendly, welcoming and relaxed atmosphere using permissive language on its signage to encourage visitors to take part and enjoy their stay.

*"Holiday homeowners and holidaymakers are in search of old-fashioned community values, seaside life and a safe place for their children to play."*

For its team members, Cove Communities UK is very much a family. Acknowledging that other industries may be able to offer a more attractive salary, the company is proud to provide additional opportunities and benefits, including discounts on holidays across the UK and on food and beverages.

**Long service awards have been honoured from the previous ownership and those who have worked more than 20 years now receive 50% off all food and beverages on the park, as well as extra days off and bonuses.** Every year the company organises a team party with headline acts to celebrate success and help ensure everyone feels appreciated.

## EMBEDDING COMPANY VALUES

In recognition that traditionally a holiday park was seen by many as a seasonal job, Cove Communities UK works hard to understand the aspirations of its team members and puts in place a learning plan to help them achieve their goals. **Leading by example, all its senior**

**leadership in the UK started their working life in front line customer service roles**, this has created buy-in for learning programmes, as individuals see the potential to forge a career within the business.

*"There is no such thing as a back-office role, even if you don't speak to owners and holidaymakers directly, you are dealing with someone that does, we are all frontline in that respect."*

## ESTABLISHING TRAINING NEEDS

One of the first tasks for Cove Communities UK was to establish its training needs. The learning and development department started by talking to everyone. They had conversations with team members, both individually and in small groups, around what they love about working at the park.

**From an internal perspective, it was acknowledged that most managers had not had any form of leadership training and that there was a requirement for a proper cultural induction** including Service Excellence (now part of Welcome to Excellence), leadership training and more specialist training including dealing with conflict, diversity and inclusion and written communications.

*"Ensure your learning is targeted and there is a need for it, start by establishing what that need is."*





### DECIDING ON THE BEST COURSE OF ACTION

With input from managers and team members, the company's learning and development specialists began to formulate ideas for a training and skills programme.

With the knowledge that around 80% of its workforce is aged 30 years and under, the business now engages employees online using Instagram, Facebook and videos to communicate its messages. With an understanding that 70% of what someone learns is experiential and only 10-20% is classroom based, it has stopped using traditional workbooks in favour of delivering all its learning in an experiential way.

*"70% of what someone learns is experiential and only 10-20% is classroom based."*

### LISTENING TO AND ACTING UPON FEEDBACK

Applying the Gallup 12 methodology, the learning and development department have been able to identify areas for improvement – with the statements 'in the last 6 months I have had opportunities to learn and progress' and 'in the last 7 days I have received praise and recognition for good work,' initially scoring less favourably amongst team members.

Coaching and mentoring modules have been introduced to enable managers to carry out effective 1-2-1 appraisals. A monthly competition allows team members to nominate colleagues for doing a good job. The winner receives a certificate, trophy, and tax-free shopping vouchers, in a monthly celebration which is broadcast to the company via its internal Facebook group.

*"Feeling listened to is really important, we are transparent about what we can do better and what has been put in place as a result."*



### ENGAGING TEAM MEMBERS

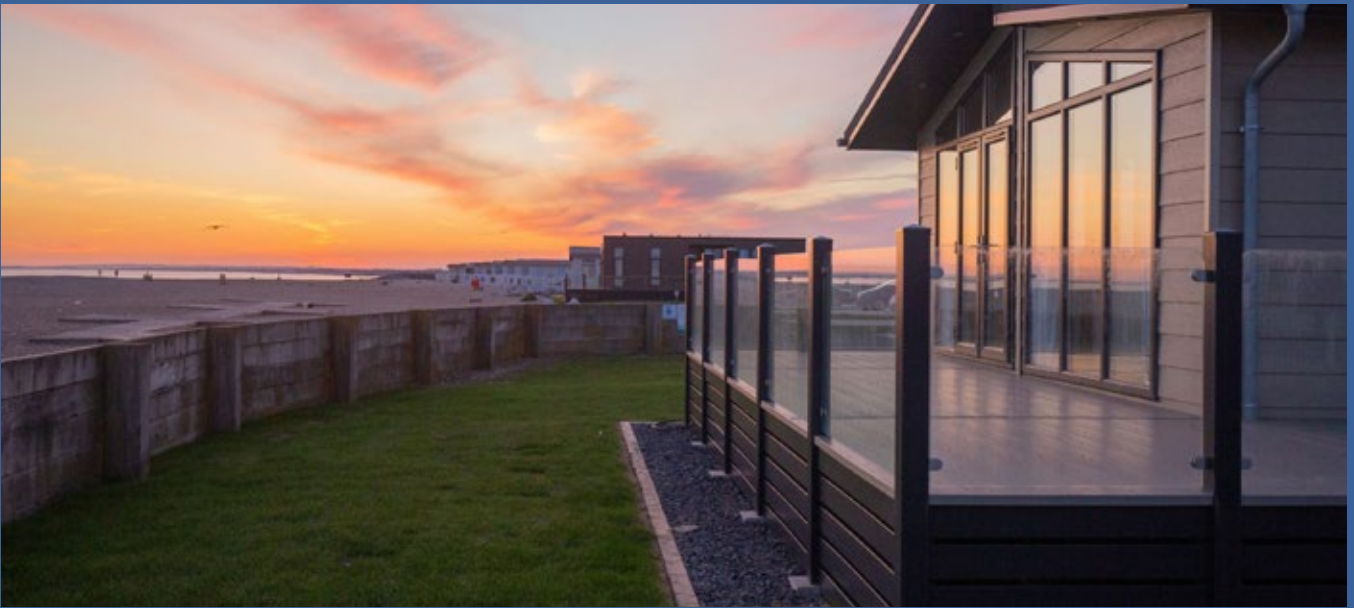
The company is proud to have created a group of volunteer trainers who work on its parks and, after completing a two-day-programme, are willing to deliver part of the induction for new team members. This initiative not only gives new employees a point of contact within the business with whom they have an affinity, but also increased confidence within the existing team.

### ENGAGING THE WIDER COMMUNITY

Working with JobCentre Plus and charities such as Aldingbourne Trust, which supports people with learning disabilities and/or autism to reach their potential, and Fedcap Employment, has proved successful at attracting loyal team members. To offer support, Cove Communities UK has developed a strong employee assistance programme and is working on extending its mental health first aid programme.

The company also collaborates with Chichester College to provide apprenticeships and engages with local schools.

*"Parents are surprised to learn that we offer a range of different career opportunities across the UK."*



# RESULTS

- During the school summer holidays, many of the 2,100 owned holiday homes at Seal Bay Resort are sublet back to Cove Communities UK and used for holidaymakers, resulting in occupancy of up to 14,000 people
- Compared to 2021, visitor numbers are largely on a par. Seal Bay Resort figures during peak season 2022, matched those of last year, quite an achievement given that in 2021 not many people went on a foreign holiday
- Post departure, there have so far been 1,500 more holidaymaker bookings for summer 2023 compared to summer 2022
- Seal Bay Resort currently employs around 400 permanent team members, increasing by a further 350-400 during the summer period
- In the last 2 years alone, the business has created 40 new jobs in the head office at Seal Bay and there are more planned
- Net Promotor Score (NPS) from guests and holiday makers is up to 52% this year, based on the question 'how likely are you to recommend Seal Bay or Medmerry Park as a place for a holiday or holiday home ownership'
- In September 2022, the Food and Beverage team scored 4.6 out of 5 in the monthly homeowner and holidaymaker survey, a fantastic achievement given how busy the parks were during the summer
- Last year Employee Net Promotor Score (ENPS) based on the question 'how likely are you to recommend Seal Bay or Medmerry Park as a place to work' increased by about 30%, with ambitions to take this much further in the future
- Retention has increased by 15% in the last year with a strong focus on looking after team members
- 2021/22 winner of the 'Future of Hospitality Award' at the Beautiful South Tourism Awards
- Runner-up in the category of 'Learning and Development Team of the Year' at the Employee Engagement Awards



# CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNT

## LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Most employees must travel to parks, which are often in more remote locations. This means that although the local population may well have the required skills, **recruitment proves difficult if individuals are unable to travel.**

## AVAILABILITY OF SKILLS

The company has invested a lot of time into working with the West Sussex community, attending job fairs, engaging with Chichester college and local schools, linking up with Sussex University to provide student incentives, attending its freshers' fair and involving lecturers in delivering parts of its leadership training.

## CHANGING MINDSETS

**The company recognises the importance of how it pitches its training and skills programmes to a largely non-academic workforce.** When talking about learning and development, Cove Communities UK found it vital to communicate to team members what they will not be asked to do - such as role plays, presentations and written tests. Instead placing emphasis on freedom of choice.

## COMMUNICATING VALUES

Although when it launched, the business was new to the UK, in the US, Cove Communities had an already well-established set of values. This posed a challenge for Cove Communities UK, which inherited the same values, because, its guests could access the US website, see its values, and judge the company against them.

## CHANGING CULTURES

**The learning and development team identified a core group of employees with which they had a good relationship and who were more willing to be involved and ran the training with them first.** This group then took the message out to the wider business and recruited others using internal social media channels.

## RECRUITMENT POST BREXIT

The United Kingdom's exit from the European Union in January 2020 is an external factor that has impacted on the company's ability to recruit and retain staff, some staff have been unable to secure work visas to remain in the UK.



# TOP TIPS

- 1. Consult your customers and your team. For any culture change or training programme to be a success, you need to understand what you are aiming to achieve.**
- 2. Be clear about what you stand for. Regardless of your business size, if you are not clear about your values, your customers won't be either.**
- 3. Don't be proud, listen to other people's ideas and be willing to be criticised. Never think you have all the answers, take inspiration from everywhere.**
- 4. Be absolutely determined, be tenacious and don't get disheartened. Don't be afraid of failure, learn from it and move on, don't dwell on it.**
- 5. Celebrate your achievements and ensure everyone gets to share in that success.**

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