



A Life in the Day of a Community Carer

It's 6am, pitch dark and freezing. I'm flapping at a wailing alarm clock wanting it to shut up. I open one eye and one brain cell and wonder why I ever chose to be a Home Care Support worker. Ahead of me stretches a day of call after call, few breaks, a struggle to keep to schedule, and no doubt some unpredictable challenges.

Then a few more braincells kick-in, and I begin to think about the people I will meet, the help and support my job brings to people, the colleagues I will join up with, and the satisfaction and reward the day will bring. I head for the shower and soon I'm on my way.

I never cease to be amazed by what I discover from day to day as I as I make beds, wash bodies, do battle with continence and mobility aids, pour out gallons of Lactulose, conquer the microwaves and washing machines of the Wirral, and do my own version of "Supermarket Sweep".

I love the conversations. Last week brought 'Will Tranmere be promoted this year?' I heard about life as professional singer, and (I promise this is true), discussed the medieval carvings on the underside of the choir stalls in Chester Cathedral.

I also appreciate those moving moments when you see something inside somebody: the man who seems sad and lonely, who is so much happier when he buys a dog. It tells you something more that he calls the dog 'Cariad' – the Welsh word for love.

Its great to see how many of my colleagues have a genuine concern and affection for the people we visit. I might see it in the gentle handling of someone in pain, in friendly, comfortable banter, in 'going the extra mile' such as spending extra time when someone is struggling, or a simple task such as nipping out for Steredent so a woman can soak her teeth tonight.

Yesterday I visited George, a former merchant seaman sailing regularly to Australia and New Zealand. I had met him twice before, but it was almost 4 months ago. I remembered that his wife would be out, and she would leave his lunch for me to serve after I had supported George to wash, apply creams to his legs and change his pyjamas. I also knew that George would be sitting in the living room.

I let myself in using the key from the keysafe. Called 'Hello' as I opened the living room door, and set off an almighty clattering and banging because since I was there last George had a new bed and it's behind the living room door. I couldn't get in that way, so I headed into the kitchen and frightened the life out George's wife Barbara, who doesn't go out at lunchtime now, and lets the carers in herself. I had only been in the house 10 seconds and had caused chaos! Still it gave us all a good laugh and the rest of the visit went according to plan.

I was surprised that after so long Barbara had remembered my name. As I was leaving she told me how delighted she had been after my last visit when she came home and the dishes had been washed, dried and put away. "I even told the social worker about it" she said.

On the way home I began to wonder how something as simple as washing a few dishes can be of such value to somebody and be so appreciated. I don't think it's about dishwashing really, it's that people see it as a moment's thoughtfulness and a touch of kindness. It reminds me that the short time we spend with each person, and the mundane tasks we complete on their behalf, have value and make a positive difference. This is not just a difference to how people manage practically, but also to how people are feeling. We can be a bright spot in a person's difficult day.

It's worth getting out of bed for.