

Elderly Care – Claudia Vincent

This week is elderly care week, and so I'm here to share my experiences as a care worker. I've been working in a care home as a carer for around 2 years now. It's a dementia home, where we have 30 residents that we look after and support on a day-to-day basis. And I can honestly say it's the most rewarding thing I've done. I spend pretty much every moment that I'm not at school, at work. I just love it. And I wanted to talk a bit about why.

So, care work. When I was writing this, I was honestly thinking where do I even begin. But in the end I just thought I will start with the unglamourised truth.

I was watching a programme about the care crisis on BBC player, and one of the carers being interviewed on there summed up the job quite nicely.

They said: 'in care, you spend 75% of your time with your head up someone's bottom, and 25% of your time on everything else'.

And much as I would love to say this isn't true, it is. Every day, you support residents with all the daily activities they are no longer able to do independently. You support them very intimately with all their personal care, to wash, to dress, to use the toilet. You help them to mobilise, with walking frames and hoists to transfer them out of bed for the day. You will assist them to eat their food, keep up their fluid intake.

However, and this is a big however. What I have just talked about is not the heart of the job...it's just the foundations. Now, heart of care is what really matters. And that is what I'm going to talk about now. To do so, I chose 3 words that I feel sum up what elderly care means to me, and I am going to talk through each one. These

three words are: rewarding, tough and heart-warming. Pretty basic words, but with a lot of meaning behind them.

So, the first word I chose is **rewarding**. There are some special occasions where you come away feeling you have made a difference. As an example, elderly people can go through phases when they are struggling to eat, and in that situation you can try to find techniques that help them. This can be something as simple as continual encouragement, spending a bit of extra time and extra patience whilst you support someone to eat. Or it could be trying different categories of food like puree diets or thickened fluids to see if something clicks. And if or when you are able to find something specific that helps a certain person eat better, you have made a big impact on them.

So we are in the middle of the pandemic, and the beginning of the pandemic hit all elderly people hard. Most of the elderly across the country were completely isolated from friends and family and as a result really, really struggled. Within our home we saw a range of emotional responses to this situation. There were some that understood the situation and became stressed, unsettled and angry at times. Others that suffer with conditions like dementia, whereby they were not able to understand the situation, and couldn't really register that they weren't seeing family members - however you could see a definite change in their wellbeing, with them having lots of periods of low moods and less elevation. In this moment, no-one could change the situation, the pandemic or the rules. So in our care home, the carers became family to our residents. The only familiar faces they were able to see on a regular basis. We have one lady who is from Iran and speaks the language Fhaasi. When her family was no longer able to visit, she really changed. She became really depressed, retreated from us, and as a coping mechanism, her dementia took her back to her younger days when she was living in Iran. So she began to only speak

Fhaasi to us. We really struggled to communicate with her and understand her needs as obviously it's a language none of us knew. It was heart-breaking to see someone crying and shouting what they are feeling and what they are needing in a different language that you are not able to understand . So, we created a book full of the most common things she said. Each time our lady said something, we would quickly write it down then find a translation as to what they meant. Then we learnt how to ask basic things in her language like 'are you hungry, do you need the toilet'...and learnt little ways to communicate with her. Slowly she began to thrive more and more each day. Her cries out to see her family members were slowly comforted by the presence of a carer. Slowly, a family was built between carers and residents, and seeing it form was the biggest fulfilment to everyone.

My second word is **tough**. Caring for the elderly can be very, very tough.

It can be stressful, sad, overwhelming. And to be able to control these emotions is very difficult sometimes.

The first thing I think is tough, is to always remember that the things elderly people do, the actions they make and the things that they say may be completely out of their control. Almost 20% of people over 80 years old have dementia. And this is a disease that isn't visible, but can have big impacts. There can be hurtful situations when elderly people might make comments about your appearance, attitude, or become angry at something you do. We have one lovely lady, and when you first go into her bedroom to offer her support with her care, the first thing she will do is shout at you, tell you your useless, bad at your job and to go away. You know, this can be very demoralising. You feel you are trying hard to help someone and each time you are knocked down. It's so easy to take it personally and in the moment, not

remember that this isn't the truth, it is the dementia talking. You must always take a step back and tell yourself this, reset yourself and then continue with a positive attitude.

There can also be stressful situations. You know... there will be mornings where you come into work and the whole ceiling of two rooms has collapsed because our lovely resident in the room above had put their pad in their sink, blocked the sink, turned the taps on full blast and then got back into bed and to sleep. This then flooded the whole home. Honestly, if you are faced in a situation like this where you just want to absolutely despair, all I have to say is just laugh. If you can...then laugh. These are things that are just part and parcel of working with the elderly, and if you are aware of some of them, it makes it easier if you end up experiencing them.

The last word I'm using to describe caring for the elderly is **heart-warming**. Being a carer is the most utterly heart-warming thing. There is not a day that goes by where there is not a special moment that I go home and smile about. I'm going to share a couple of these moments that have touched me. We have one gorgeous lady, and whenever I take her to bed, I assist her with all her care, and then help her to lie in the bed. As soon as she's in bed, she always asks if we can have a sleepover and tells me 'Don't worry dear ill shuffle over so we can share' and tells me she's worried I don't have anywhere to stay the night So some nights I jump in beside her and she just laughs and begs me to stay. She's brilliant, and just always makes me smile. No matter what else I have gone through that day I will always leave her room with a smile on my face.

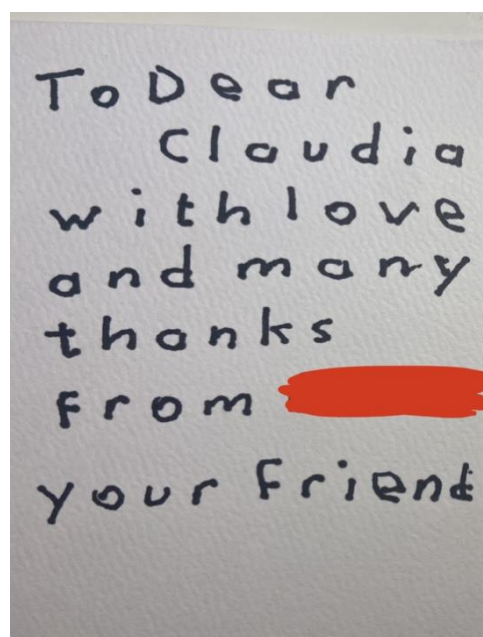
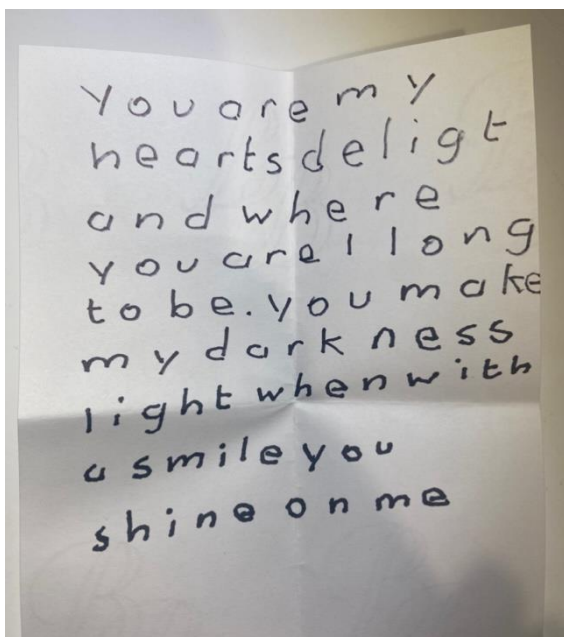
Another thing that makes my day is the appreciation you get from residents. One lovely lady is someone who had a very hard childhood, which she struggled in and didn't enjoy. At 19 years old, she said to herself she would make it her mission to

spend the rest of her time making others happy so that they wouldn't have to feel how she did. She now spends her days writing to others, letters, poems, songs. Beautiful pieces that are so special. Whenever I get a letter, it just warms my heart with the things she writes. Here is one of the poems she wrote for me.

You are my hearts delight

And where you are I long to be

You make my darkness light, when with a smile you shine on me



Now, when I say I love working in care, I mean it. This job truly changed and made my life. Every day I am grateful for the job I'm able to do, and for the love I get out of it. Elderly care is such a special thing to be involved in, and I hope you all come away feeling the same thing too.