

'A Day in the Life of a Carer'

A compilation of first hand experiences from the staff of Bluebird Care (Mid & West Cornwall)



Introduction

The life of a Bluebird Care Assistant, enabling a fellow human being to remain living in their home and wherever possible continue to enjoy social inclusion, is both hard work and immensely rewarding.

We asked our Carers if they would like to write a piece about their working day as many of them have stories to tell and no day is ever the same. For those who have never worked in Care and may be considering it we think there can be no better way to find out more about it than from those who really know.

To make it fun we ran a competition and this little booklet contains our winning entries.

We hope you find them both enjoyable and informative.

Emma's Story

As a new carer you don't know what to expect. All manner of things come to mind. Vomit, poo. Lots of poo! Luckily I'm the kind of person who can stomach almost anything, armed with that and the passion to help other people I decided to go for it!

I have a background in administration, from sales admin to health and safety admin but a regular 9-5 job. Anyone who has met me knows I talk far too much and should probably have been working in Care sooner!! I decided to leave the 9-5 behind and find something that actually made a difference and left me with the feeling of achieving something and having done good at the end of every day. Now I'm not saying every day is a dream. That's just ludicrous as we are all human and have 'off days... so as we work with people you can expect sometimes to be on the receiving end from time to time. Saying that, as I do this job I can say first hand, you will be tired, you will be moody but it's worth it! The morning you wake up in a mood and then your colleague falls flat on her face into the wall... the laugh you have together can cheer you up quickly! The smile you get from someone who can't speak much.. well that can brighten anyone's day. Being your own boss, to get your weekly Rota and your supervisor just trusting you to turn up. Care is full of surprises, good and erm.. Messy!

So it was my first day and I was ready! With my uniform pressed and my numerous pairs of gloves and aprons I was prepared... The first shift is the scariest.. after that you feel you can handle anything. All the people you work with will help and guide you and trust me, from experience there are no stupid questions... I've asked pretty much all of them :) the important part of Bluebird is the quality of care and the team work. I could tell you all the ins and outs but I wouldn't like to bore you.. I'll just highlight things for you. Expect everything, caring is more than just wiping bums, making tea, housework... It's about walking into a customer's home and feeling welcome, it's about being jealous of the size of a particular customer's bowel movements, it's about being called 5 different names before they remember yours!

Most of all it's about being part of a team and making a difference to someone's life and helping them keep their independence, dignity and keeping them safe. Care is flexible so it fits all types of people, but remember that care is a 365 day a year job. So if you want to make a difference and help like I did, change your life and the people you meet each day- be a carer.

Emma Logan – 1st Place

Gloria's Story

I wake up at 5.30am and I jump in the shower, brush my teeth, put my uniform on, check I've got my ID, Roster and I have my aprons and gloves. After a 30 min drive, I arrive at my first customer.

In the mornings I assist my customers with their personal care and breakfast, then I tidy their surroundings and ensure they have their medications. Before I leave my customer I have to fill in a Care Plan and Record of Care and also the Medication Charts. It's a lot of responsibility being a carer but I do enjoy it. I enjoy having chats with my customers about their lives. It's very interesting to know what they have done and especially what they were up to in the past. There are so many stories and they can teach me a thing or two. Mornings are very busy and I have to run around a lot to ensure that I make it to all my customers on time. I feel it's very important to be on time in the mornings as otherwise their whole day may be disrupted. I have done various jobs in the past including catering roles and working on a holiday park, but I have never really felt satisfied. Now I feel I have finally found a job that leaves me very satisfied every day.

My job is very challenging as I look after a varied customer base. A lot of my customers are frustrated and in pain and can sometimes take it out on the carer. I never take it personally because I know it's not towards me, it's towards their situation and conditions. I try every day to help them to forget about their situation and make them laugh. I always listen to them when they want to get something off their chest. What I enjoy most about my job is meeting different people and everyday can bring on a challenge and you are constantly learning. There is no such thing as a typical day at work, every day brings a new need. Someone may require palliative care, or are living with a disability or a dementia.

It's not every ones cup of tea, but I would recommend becoming a carer and you can also learn so much about aging and conditions that may arise as we grow older. I have experience working in care homes and in the community. Whilst working in a care home, it provides great comfort for family members knowing that their love ones are safe, but I think most people want to be cared for at home. While it may appear that a person in a care home is receiving around the clock care, in reality this only works out to three hours of one-on-one care a day. With home care, the individuals receives constant attention. At the end of the day, home is where we want to be, with our memories and every room in a home has special significance and every piece of furniture tells a story.

Gloria Merrifield – 2nd Place

Lauren's Story

Being a carer isn't easy, but we know the rewards are worth much more than money can buy.

Early starts.... Late finishes... sacrificing your breakfast, lunch, tea, postponing your toilet break for as humanly possible all in the name of caring for our customers is second nature for a care worker, because we put our customers before ourselves.

So when Mrs S took the trouble to write and leave me a Christmas Card I didn't mind that I had been awake since 6am and was still tired.

When Mrs P remembered a conversation about the Cornish language that we had had over two months ago and had took it upon herself to write out all the Cornish words she knew for when I next came to visit I didn't mind that lunch was two hours ago and I was starving.

When Mrs G opened up to me and told me all about her childhood and what her life was like growing up in her family home I didn't mind that I had given up my evening off to cover a poorly colleague.

When Miss M told me how much she enjoyed the meal I had cooked for her I didn't mind that she had forgotten my name and got me confused with another carer.

And when Mr K gripped my hand when he was upset due to events beyond his power, and I supported him and made him smile I didn't mind that I was working my weekend off.

We may have to visit our customers on a bad day, we may have to do the tasks we dislike doing in our own homes like taking the bins out, we may have to battle rain, cold, gale force winds and traffic to get to our customers, but when we get there we know that Mrs M will offer us a cup of tea, that we will have a lovely chat with Mr C and that at the end of it all we are enabling our customers to do what they perhaps couldn't do alone, and we forget about the negatives. Because to a carer it is the littlest things that matter. It's the smallest things that brighten up our entire 12 hour day. It's the tiniest of things that lift our spirits, that make us feel proud and that make our job worthwhile. The numerous sacrifices that we make during our working week mean so much to our customers, but the small rewards are what mean so much to us.

Lauren Duck – 3rd Place

Debbie's Story

Barbara was a trim 73 year old woman whose mother had dementia and sadly she got it too. She had been enjoying her retirement when slowly her life changed. As a young child, Barbara's mother would encourage Barb in her love of dancing and she regularly was part of a cast putting on performances and also at home for her beloved and close family.

Dementia had taken hold when I joined Barbara as a live-in carer. I played her favourite 1940's and 50's music on her CD player and we would dance around the kitchen, Barb light-footed, me with two left feet. Her favourite song was 'Love Letters' by Ketty Lester, later sung by Alison Moyet in 1987.

She would reminisce about her mum and dad's love and how he would place her on his shoulders so she could see the world. I would take her to local groups weekly or more where they had singers that sang songs from the group's youth, ranging from Vera Lynn to Elvis. I would always encourage Barbara to be the first up to dance, she would act casual for about five seconds and then she was away. I remember one of the audience, a permed haired lady in her 80's, saying "Oh how I wish I could do that again".

Other days we would wander the shops and possibly a café. One time, months before my daughter wed, I made a day of looking for a mother of the bride dress. Barb was in the three-mirrored cubicle with me, sitting on a chair. I tried the dress on and, whilst staring at my reflection in one of the mirrors, she was nodding and talking quietly. I put my ear nearer and she said, "You look better in it than her".

Barb walked sedately and liked to link arms with me wherever we were walking, this way she felt safe knowing where I was and to avoid tripping. Some afternoons or evenings we would watch a musical video where we would sit under a blanket, arms linked and sing along (I can't sing or dance!). In the night sometimes she would wake asking for her mum who, by the time I met her, had died. I would tell her we'll see her tomorrow and she would be ok with this – forgotten by the morning. Or ask if her daughter was back from school (her daughter now in her 40s). I said she'd be back soon or she was staying at her friends, this would settle her.

And tomorrow was another day.

Debbie Smith – Highly commended

Sandra's Story

The alarm goes off, it's all go. Wash, dress, check rota, eat on the way. Go out the door, both get in our cars - husband goes left at the end of the road, and I go right. Keeping on time as customers are waiting for you to get them out of bed, shower, dress and feed them is so important. I've got five customers waiting.

Fighting with the traffic on the way, I arrive at the first house. Pressing in the key code to let myself in, I get a big grin when I enter from the lady lying in bed; 'so glad to see you, it's been a long night.' I Hoist our customer out of the bed with the other carer that's just arrived. After showering, dressing and giving her breakfast, I fill in the daily record sheet and ask if everything is okay before leaving and moving onto the second house.

There's been a crash on my route so I need to find another way as the person is waiting, ringing the office at the same time for them to tell them I could be late. Arriving at the second house my lady is not feeling so well so I need to wait for a doctor or nurse to check all is okay before doing personal care. All okay, green light, so I wash and leave her in bed for the day, giving her breakfast and wait for her to finish, doing paperwork while I'm waiting.

I get in my car to move to the next customer, luckily still running on time. I arrive at the third house, the lady is out of bed, washed and has had her breakfast. We have a lovely chat and I give meds, do dishes and Hoover and tidy kitchen, paperwork done. I ask if everything is okay and leave.

Getting in my car for the next customer my tummy is rumbling! I need food so I go to the drive through for breakfast bap and coffee.

Arriving at the fourth house, there is no answer and no key code. To get in, I ring the office, looking in windows and the letterbox at the same time; I can see someone on the floor. I ring the police and paramedics. The Police arrive and enter the house by breaking the lock. Paramedics check the customer who has to be admitted to hospital. I call the office to contact relatives and to take evening visits off if they need to.

I move onto the next house which is only down the road, only an hours sit to have a chat and make sure all is okay. By this time it's time to start my afternoon shift to take a gentleman out shopping. After that I visit my morning run again, but this time putting them to bed, checking with the office that the lady that went to hospital is not back home and still in hospital. It's soon 10pm and time for home after a long day.

Coming along the road I see my husband behind me who has also just finished his day as a carer.

We talk about our day having something to eat at the same time. Looking at the clock we realise it's tomorrow already! I have a quick shower and then bed, still thinking about my day as I fall asleep only to wake to an alarm to start all over again – and I wake wondering what this new day will bring.

Sandra Gandy – Highly Commended

Sarah's Story

No day in my job is ever the same and that is the reason I love it!!

On this particular day, the first morning of the job, it was New Year's day, it was the winter that we all remember as being the winter of storms, gale force winds and torrential rain for days on end. I was sitting in my car, it was dark, and I was waiting for a member of staff to greet me for my first visit. If I am completely honest I wondered what on earth I had let myself in for!! I was met by a carer and we were ushered into a small home, out of the wind and rain, to be met by a lady in her bed all tucked up warm and dry, with a smile on her face, and a sparkle in her eye. I was hooked!!! That was all that it took for me to know I would be happy, to meet new people caring for their loved ones, waiting for us to arrive to take over to give them the break and support that they needed.

The day continued with visits from one home to another, for me finishing at lunch time where I went home to a cooked roast to see the New Year's Day in and to sit in front of an open fire. But I realised that the day never ends for these people, the same day in and out if they are confined to the bed or the home. For me every day is different. I have the choice to get out of the home, go shopping, out for a meal and see friends? These people that are confined don't have a choice, people have to go to them, have meals within the home, shop on line and wait to see our tired but happy faces at set times of the day.

Each day rolls by, meeting and talking to people, but at the same time building on relationships with carers and the families as well as the customer's themselves. You soon begin to learn how to cheer someone up when they are down, and offer friendly advice when needed.

On my first day it was rain, but as the season progressed, the sun would be up on leaving home, it's easier to get up when the sun is high in the sky. Every day on my way to Falmouth, I would be greeted with the morning sunrise, and on leaving work in the evening I would say goodbye to a beautiful sunset.

The daily travelling would be tiresome, but if on days carers can car share, we would drive the country lanes singing to the radio and go into a customer's home, with a tune in our heads and a jiggle in our footsteps. These are the kind of things to cheer a person up, and if on days there is time, to sit and talk and put the world to rights, with a cup of tea.

Don't get me wrong there are days when its dark and you don't want to get out of a warm bed, but the feeling passes when someone just says 'thank you my dear 'and it makes the early mornings and late nights worth it. There are also days when someone is sick and just to hold their hand and say 'it will be ok' makes the job satisfying.

Sarah Jones – Highly Commended

Steph's Story

It was my turn to work Christmas Day, and to be honest I wasn't too thrilled at the thought of it. The warmth of home, the busy noise of the house as vegetables are peeled, dishes crashing about, the carols on the CD player, are happy festive family traditions I love, and getting out of bed wasn't top of my list of things I wanted to do.

It was cold and raining as I got in the car, turning on the radio I hummed along to the music as I sped down the road to my first visit on my rota. Mrs Jones was in bed, the house dark, and no lights on as I drew up. I shouted up the stairs 'morning, Merry Christmas Joyce'. There was no reply. As I went upstairs I wondered if she was still asleep or ill? Joyce was awake, and appeared lost in her own thoughts. 'Morning Steph, how's the family?' 'spect you've got a busy house what with you having the family at yours this year'. 'Yes Joyce it was all kicking off as I left, is your daughter coming over, as usual, to get you at lunchtime?' Joyce hesitated, and said she was sure her daughter would call her later on. I finished my visit with Joyce, got her washed and dressed, made her breakfast, and left.

As I continued my visits, I was struck by the absence of family in the homes of my customers, and how grateful they all were to see me, and I imagined what life would have been like for them when they were younger, busy kitchens, shared extra beds, kids racing about over excited, and it made me think how humbling their gratitude and appreciation for us made me feel. The morning visits flew by, and I have to admit I thoroughly enjoyed seeing each and every one of them. Unknowingly, they had all made my Christmas special. So if you think this is the job for you , expect a rollercoaster of a ride , the highs and the lows , accept the lows but take the highs with expectations and embrace it with open arms.

Stephanie Osgerby-Bishop – Highly Commended.

Bluebird Care: Passionately

We believe in a person centered approach both for our customers and our colleagues and that is why we are able to deliver the best care and support possible.

Bluebird Care offer a range of bespoke personal care and support services throughout Mid & West Cornwall, from pop-in to 24 hours and Live-in.

Our Carers are encouraged in their personal development and we offer first class training, enabling them to provide the highest standard of Care to our customers.

If you are interested in a career in Care, we will be very happy to hear from you. If you would like a chat for more information call us today

