

## **POLLY SMITH SIZE 4**

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My name is Polly Smith I work in home care. I've done this for almost thirty years.

What we do, is we go to people to re-enable them. Re-enable means to be independent. People come out of hospital, mainly elderly people, maybe in their late fifties, sixties and beyond. We just try to re-enable them to get back into the community. There's all different levels of need. For example people might have gone into hospital because they've broken their arm, so they can't do like washing, dressing. If they're still in bed, help them get up. They might be dirty, messy, soiled so you've got to wash them, change the bed, make up something to eat. Now, after a few weeks they are slightly better. So they can do things for themselves, they don't need us.

We are a county council in-house service, free for the first six weeks. So, in effect, anybody can access our service. We have a team of about ten people in my area where I work, and so the customer will see several people during their stay with us. It is difficult to have a one-to-one call, but you get to meet loads of different people. I mean, just because they're old doesn't mean that when they were young they didn't climb Mt Everest or whatever. They've got interesting stories to tell. One lady I went to, she loved murder books and I love murder books. One lady we used to visit has three dogs, all round her room she had pictures of all the dogs she'd bred, and she had stories for every single one of them. And I don't like dogs but I sat there and listened to them. One lady, she was 105. She could do everything for herself except put her stockings on. She did have a house, two up two down, she'd been living there since she was a child, she was wonderful, a character. Another instance, there was one man, he wrote music and played on a very famous TV comedy show of the sixties. Saddest thing, he was catheterised and couldn't move his hands now. He couldn't play the instruments. Every time I see that show, I think of him going, oompah oompah, and I think, well that's sad now. Yeah, you can be sad.

A working day, well you have to be available for fifteen hours a day. We have to work every other weekend plus four days during the week. It means that we got to be on call from seven in the morning till about eleven at night. It's actually about three different shifts - morning shift seven to ten to get people up then lunch shift, then a tea shift, then a shift from seven o'clock at night to help people go to bed.

My friends, I don't think they understand that we're full up all this time - they say, 'Why can't you come out and meet us in the evenings?' - 'Actually I'm working or I'm on call,' and they don't really get it. I'm a walker, I can't drive. The other day I had a three mile round trip, and when I got there, the person didn't want anything. It's very exhausting. I've had a hard day's night. Nice cup of tea, custard creams, dunking them. It takes your mind away from everything, you know. Other people I know have baths, I can't even be bothered to do that. Get home, get a cup of tea and sit down and go to sleep. Sometimes you can't get to sleep, so I'll put the TV on and watch *Big Brother*. During the day, when I've got days off, I go on holidays like murder weekends, it's role play - team of actors, there are about three or four deaths during that weekend and you got to guess who did it. Been doing it for about twenty, thirty years. And of course it's the complete opposite to what I do in my daily work. Day is about keeping people alive, this is actually killing people.

I do enjoy my work. Yes I do yes. One time, we went out to the same people, year after year, but our job now is, which I think is much more rewarding, because now we have to encourage them to

get to do things for themselves. I think the majority of people want to be independent. They want to do things for themselves, they think, 'Well, I've always done it.' They don't want to rely on care all the time. Quite frankly, if you're in bed, you know, eighties. Would you want some to come and wash you every day, or would you want to be able to wash yourself? The majority of people don't think about that, they just think about a carer going in year after year after year. That's not always the case. Quite a few sons and daughters now think that their parents have got to be put into a residential home straightaway, but, hang on a moment. Do they really need to go into a nursing home? With just a few tweaks to their normal life, they'd be able to live by themselves. OK. I don't think as a society, we should say, 'Oh well, you're old now. You can't do anything.' I mean, think of yourself being eighty. I wouldn't like people looking after me if I felt I could do things for myself.

I have to be truthful, that some of the people we go and see are temperamental. Sometimes customers are not nice. Sometimes they have big horrible dogs that bite you. The next person punches you, because she's got dementia, and the next minute she comes up and kisses you and says, 'Oh, how did you fall down? Are you okay, are you okay?' She doesn't know what she's doing, but yeah, she's a lovely lady you know! Some homes you go into are not very hygienic. And I won't go into details about that. Better to say, the bigger the person is the more manure they give out. If you see a floral carpet - it's not always a pattern on the carpet, the floor, if you get my drift! Other people are challenging in the sense that they don't want you there. Sometimes they don't let you in the house, and if they do let you in the house they stand arms folded, like 'What you doing here? Go away.'

Fifteen plus years ago in Suffolk, home care was at 800 - we're now down to 300. Now why is that? The answer is, young people don't want to do the job - or they stay there for a few weeks or months and just go. They say we didn't realise it was like this. Yeah, it's like this. But the majority of younger people just don't want to do the job. The majority of people I know who work in home care are in their fifties or sixties, and this one friend, she was still doing it in her early seventies. Sometime we've got to stop doing it, and if there's no one else to follow us, it'll mean that people will no longer be able to live in their own homes. I mean, the consequence of not having care workers in the community is going to be very, very sad.

Why do we do it? That's a good point that - why do we do it? - it's helping people get people back to what they want to do. The best sort of satisfaction I get from the job is when you see somebody who has very much depended on you, who, after a few weeks, you get them back to becoming independent. That's the most satisfying thing, and you see people actually doing things or you see people in shops, who three months previously, you're in there looking after them, caring for them, and now they're OK - they're shopping or posting a letter. Things like that. It's rewarding, it's great, yeah.