

Covid-19 – a colleague perspective

20th May 2020

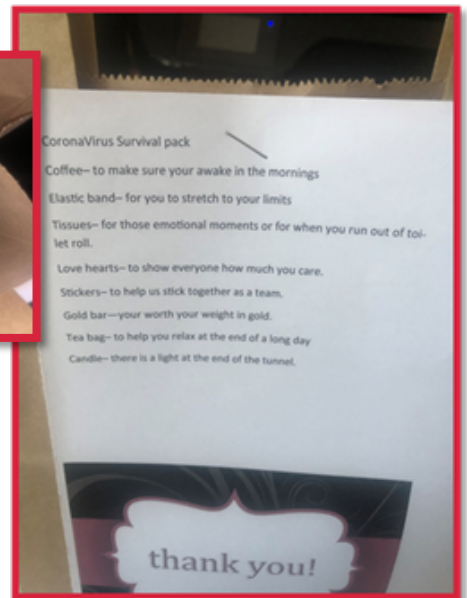


On 23rd March 2020 the United Kingdom went into lockdown, two of our colleagues share their experiences of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Janice White, Manager in Supported Living, describes her feeling that *'fear spread across the UK at the announcement of the pandemic and the resulting Lockdown measures, not just for our own health, but also of our families and the customers we support'*.

However, a lot of us know that this is what the job entails, we all knew from that moment there was going to be a significant impact from Coronavirus'.

Janice acknowledged the morale of her staff team was affected as a result of the mix of both professional and personal anxieties; *'I decided that we needed to stick together as a hub and ensure everyone was supported both physically and mentally, so I made "survival packs" for staff to show appreciation of their hard work and to reinforce that no matter what the impacts were within the community and supported living services and our own families that we would stick together and fight this virus.'*



Janice explains the personal impact on her family due to her father-in-law being unwell for quite some time, back and forth to hospital and not managing his own care and support needs, so Janice and her husband decided to move him into their family home.

Following the day of the move whilst Janice was at work she recalls that she received a call from her husband to say an ambulance had been called for her father-in-law as he'd fallen, *'he needed medical treatment and when I arrived home the ambulance crew told us to say our goodbyes as it was suspected covid-19.'*

After 24 hours in hospital his result came back positive for Covid-19, immediately thoughts ran through my head for our 7yr old daughter and I knew we had all been in contact with my father-in-law- I knew I could not return to work and needed to self-isolate.

The next day my father-in-law sadly passed away and shockingly two days following his death my uncle also passed away due to covid-19.

My husband and I both work for SCAS and were able to fast-track for testing as we had both developed symptoms of the virus; some of which are not always conveyed in the advice and guidance issued by NHS and Government, for both of us these included diarrhoea, fatigue, breathlessness, no sense of taste or smell, headache and cough.

I think I already knew that we would test positive, I was so worried I had passed the virus onto customers and my colleagues; I feared for my family and my little girl especially, as the outcome could have left her without her parent.

During this time, I felt the only way I could remain positive was to take every day as it came; to have telephone contact with the rest of my family and friends.

I also found that carrying out my work from home kept me focused. I wanted to ensure staff morale was bolstered and staff anxiety reduced, so I decided not to tell anyone until I returned to work, which was after my 14 days of isolation. I was still feeling weak and breathless, but I discussed this

with my manager and was supported fully throughout my return. We are thankful we are here to be able to share this experience.'

Catherine Dinning

Catherine Dinning, Registered Manager, Grindon Mews Short Break service, began to feel unwell on 4th April 2020. Catherine says, *'I'm a robust person and don't usually succumb to bugs and viruses, but I knew when the symptoms began that this was nothing I'd ever experienced before'*.

The short break services had closed temporarily earlier that same week, so Catherine was immediately concerned for her customers; fortunately, the service had seen fewer admissions as some families were taking Government advice and had begun shielding at home just before the service closed.

Catherine described how over the coming days her symptoms worsened, *'I was really struggling to breathe and it was terrifying'*. Catherine has two teenage daughters and was reliant on them to leave drinks outside her bedroom as her husband works away from home. *'In some ways it was a blessing I was unable to get out of bed as it meant that I was isolating myself from the girls'*.

Catherine tested positive for Covid-19 and her symptoms continued over the coming days; rather than easing they became worse, with fluctuating temperature, laboured breathing, diarrhoea and loss of taste and smell. Catherine also showed symptoms that have not been widely publicised including a chillblain rash on her hands and feet (known as **Covid toe**) and another rash over her body (known as **Livedo**), soreness and redness to her eyes, severe headaches, chronic fatigue, confusion and disorientation.

Catherine had not improved in any way by the second week of her illness and had to contact NHS 111 as there were days her breathing was so difficult she was worried she was going to pass out, she was advised to go to the Covid clinic in Houghton-le-Spring and reassured, following tests, that she had a severe case of the virus but was able to return home and to maintain contact with NHS should she worsen further.

On the day her symptoms peaked, Catherine received a call informing her that one of her colleagues had sadly passed away in her home, quite likely from Coronavirus.

It has been 6 weeks since Catherine's symptoms began and she says, *'I'm still taking each day as it comes, with many of the symptoms still present, I'm just so grateful that I feel better each day and that thankfully my family don't seem to have contracted the virus, it just goes to show how serious this virus is and how it affects everyone differently'*.