

# Life in care during a pandemic; Etheldred House

In March 2020, 'normal' life changed internationally as the COVID-19 pandemic developed and lockdown measures were introduced. This meant many were left limited to their homes, out of work, or furloughed, except for people who work on the frontline and play a key role in caring for the most vulnerable in society.

Although disruptions were felt across the world, the care sector was hugely affected, especially care homes who support people who live with dementia. Regular visits from entertainers, outings into the community and family meetings were all limited for everyone's safety, but helping everyone to understand this was a challenge requiring innovative and adaptive solutions.

Working in line with government regulations and advice from leading regulatory bodies in the sector, life in Excelcare homes introduced additional wellbeing schemes, engaging activities and called for remote support from surrounding communities, which helped to keep up morale and feelings of togetherness.

To find out more about the impact this had on day-to-day life and how those living and working in a care home felt, the team and residents from Etheldred House in Cambridge shared some insights about life during the pandemic.



Residents of Etheldred House were asked a series of questions about life during the pandemic and how this had an impact on their usual schedule.

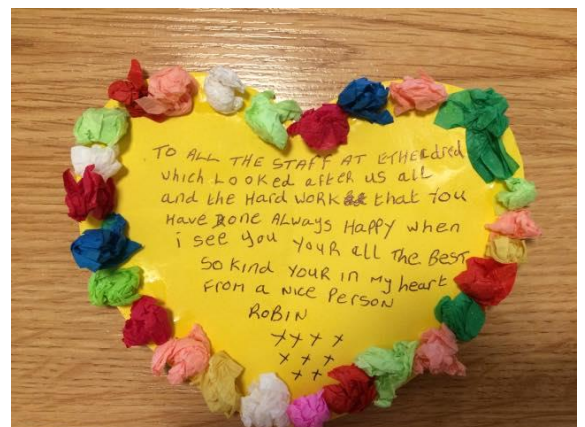
'The biggest change', described a resident of the home, 'was the increased use of technology and the way we communicate with loved ones.' Another said, "I don't feel anything has really changed – I was looked after before and I am looked after now!"

The experience was new to everyone living at Etheldred, but the fact that some didn't feel a change in life is a credit to the team for keeping disruption to the schedule minimised.

People were also asked to share any concerns or worries they had during the lockdown period. Some had direct concerns about the team wearing face masks all day during the hot weather, while for others, family members at risk in the outside world were at the forefront of their thoughts.

Positive moments of the lockdown period were also highlighted during the session. One person who lives at Etheldred said their favourite aspect of being in lockdown was, "The feeling of camaraderie amongst us all. I haven't felt this strength of human spirit since the war! I love the daily conversations with the office staff because I was unable to go and see them daily before!"

Another resident mentioned how "spoilt" they have been, with teams going above and beyond their usual roles.



Now that the restrictions are beginning to ease, the residents were asked how they feel about this. Some were concerned about the continued spread of COVID-19 in the outside world, while others said they are looking forward to regaining their freedom and heading out on day trips when it's possible.

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To wrap up the discussion, residents in the group shared the things that have helped them to get through the lockdown period with a smile on their face.

*“Knowing we were safe in ‘our bubble”*

*“Being able to speak to my family on the phone as often as I wanted.”*

*“Seeing how brave everyone has been and how the laughter never stopped!”*

*“Being able to use the garden – I have never really made the most of the garden until now.”*

*“The high spirits of the team who look after us.”*

*“The different activities we are trying out and having the lifestyle co-ordinators with us all day.”*



For another perspective on how the pandemic impacted daily life and in some cases, the benefits this brought – team members were also encouraged to share their perspectives about life during the pandemic.

They first discussed some of the prominent changes to life and some of the challenges they faced.

“Work has become my life” and “taking nothing for granted” were some of the initial comments from team members at the home. One lady who works at Etheldred said it made her “feel prouder than ever to be a key and frontline worker” though, as the responsibility and important role they do daily was being seen and appreciated across the country.

Overcoming these challenges came in different forms, with some saying, “The use of technology helped to see my friends and family. We did a group zoom call every Friday so we could stay connected.” However, some highlighted how a change of mind-set during lockdown was

beneficial, “As I struggled in the heat wearing PPE, I remembered I have been a part of saving and protecting lives”.

When looking at some of the positive feelings and outtakes of lockdown, the team highlighted:

“It was an opportunity to get to know my colleagues better”.

“The support, reassurance, unexpected treats and the support we have received from the management team at Etheldred helped to make sure we were ok.”

“Having each other and working with other people who were all going through the same thing. On days I was upset people were strong for me and on days my colleagues felt down, I was strong for them.”



The team spirit and togetherness seemed to be a very useful tool for the team at Etheldred – supporting each other and helping out where they could had a positive impact on all. Spirits were also maintained by “being proud of what we accomplished” and “laughing together”, said members of the team.

General Manager, Santall Horn, saw all of this from a management level and was a key part of working to maintain safety, wellbeing and support for the team throughout the COVID-19 lockdown.

She reflected on a special moment when restrictions were beginning to ease and the home introduced ‘window visits’. This is where families and friends could stop by at the home on an appointment basis and share a conversation with their loves through the window. She remembers how each individual’s face lit up as they were reunited.



## Santall’s top tips for maintaining morale and supporting people during the lockdown include:

1. **Now more than ever ... making the team feel appreciated.** We have done this by making sure we say thank you, purchasing ongoing treats, providing ice-creams and cold drinks during the warm weather, by making sure the management team are here each Thursday clapping for our carers, passing on all positive feedback to the team from residents and families.
2. **Communicate .. communicate ...communicate!** We have made sure we are providing current and up to date information to the team to allay any concerns or worries.
3. **Appreciating and respecting EVERYONE’S anxiety levels.** We have ensured the wellbeing first aiders are visible and approachable and are looking out for signs of team stress or upset. We validate everyone’s feelings, admit to our own anxieties and say ‘we are in this together’.
4. **Offered flexible working where possible.**
5. **Increased supervisions/1-2-1’s** so everyone feels respected and listened to.
6. **Inclusion** – we aim to include everyone in the decision making of the home.

