

Charity Nomination

Charity	Understanding Dementia
Charity Number	238331
Nominating Member(s)	Liz Atkinson, Fiona Ross, Cecilia Csemiczky
Charity Representative	Shirley Pearce

Nomination from Liz:

I would like to nominate a local charity called Understanding Dementia. Charity number 238331.

I came across this charity a few years ago and I was impressed with the work that Shirley Pearce does to help carers understand dementia. Dementia is, as we are hearing on the news, a growing problem. Carers are often at a loss who to turn to.

This year Shirley ran a quiz to raise money for the charity, which Cecilia and I attended. We both agreed it would be great if Road Runners could adopt them as this year's Charity. Fiona Ross also knows the charity and she alongside Cecilia has agreed to support me.

Shirley Pearce writes: –

I set up Understanding Dementia as a charitable project in 2017, but the seeds were sown a long time ago. I am the great-niece and granddaughter of some formidable Victorians. I was taught to treat them, and my other 'elders and betters', with great respect, and never to contradict or interrupt them.

My first job on leaving school was as a care assistant in a care home. My upbringing was the only preparation I had for the role, and I was shocked at some staff attitudes to the people in our care. They told me the residents had already had their life and didn't matter any more. When a resident was chatting to me one day, a senior care worker called out: 'You don't want to listen to her, she's gaga'. I was also appalled to see a new resident's dignity effectively stripped away, leaving her institutionalised and unrecognisable within days of moving in.

That experience haunted me. I wanted to do something to improve the care of people with dementia. I wasn't sure how to go about it, but the nursing career I was about to start seemed the most obvious route. That was not to be, but some years later, with an Honours degree in Occupational Therapy, I worked with older people, many of whom had dementia. A family carer introduced me to the innovative SPECAL method developed by the Contented Dementia Trust, and I subsequently trained with the Trust at Burford and worked as a SPECAL Practitioner for five years.

At Burford I learned how to reduce the impact of dementia on our clients' well-being. The team worked with dementia instead of fighting against it, focusing on well-being rather than any memory loss, thus enabling individuals to function at their best. I co-taught courses for both family carers and professionals, and prepared training materials for an evaluation by King's College London.

Having transformed my own practice, I studied acknowledged experts in dementia including Tom Kitwood, Naomi Feil and Teepa Snow. I went on to develop a very simple approach to dementia care that anyone can use. My aim is to make this approach widely known so that dementia, and those who live with it, are much better understood. In March 2018 Understanding Dementia became a charity in its own right, and now provides training for care workers, health professionals and anyone else who cares.

Shirley Pearce July 2021