



LOCKDOWN AS A SUPPORT WORKER

BY SIONED EVANS

I have been a support worker in the Llyn Peninsula for years, but I have never experienced my role during a worldwide pandemic before. Lockdown has presented challenges for everyone in one way or another – have you considered how these difficulties present themselves to someone living with Autism or a learning disability?

The world changed overnight, there's no longer routines, there's no opportunity for daily day service, and going home to see family is forbidden. There are strange people on the television telling us we must wash our hands several times during the day, everybody is wearing face masks, and nobody recognises anybody. The radio and television is repeatedly telling us to keep our distance. The rules are changing so often, it's hard to know what's right and what's wrong.

As support workers it was our job to explain the ever-changing rules to people with learning disabilities and autism. We got asked so many questions, which you would expect when you tell someone their life is being put on hold. Some questions didn't have answers. The people we support, and us, as support workers who were living through the trauma too, experienced times of heightened anxiety. Regardless of our feelings, we had a duty of care to protect these vulnerable adults.

To turn up to their home daily with a smile on my face was important, more so than normal. It was essential I provided reassurance to the people in my care, so that they knew everything was going to be fine, despite not knowing this myself.

Due to the imposed social distancing measures, when I was working in the service I had to wear some protective equipment – this meant wearing a mask and a shield in someone’s home for long hours. This was intimidating for those receiving support and hard for people with a learning disability and autism to understand.

“Why did I have to wash my hands and sing happy birthday?” It’s not my birthday. “What is wrong with Sioned today?” I had to find an alternative fun way to wash our hands – on occasions we sang a Manchester United football song, although I support Liverpool.

It has been so important to keep spirits up in the house – it’s so easy to sit and do nothing and that’s not good for anyone’s mental health.

We arranged activities in the house to keep everyone occupied, and distracted from the pandemic around us.

We had afternoon tea with an old fashioned style teapot on the table, no ‘mod cons’ as one of the tenants would tell me.

One tenant is fascinated by farm machinery, so we studied lots of magazines – I think I could probably recognise every part of a tractor by now.

I have mastered ‘bullseye’ on the dartboard, this was a bit of a joke by one tenant as I would usually get “no score – oh Sions you’re no good, ha ha ha”

We had pamper evenings on cold winter nights, and did lots of arts and crafts too. During lockdown I got to know tenants more than I already did!

There is a lot more to being a support worker than people realize, at times I feel people don't understand our role, what it entails and what we do. This can be frustrating when we work hard, long hours and often under pressure.

Just like us, the people we support have difficult days too – sometimes this is hard to manage but I know there are always bright, happy days to follow.

Without support workers, people would be less independent, and their quality of life would decline.



Remember, even even if a person has Autism or a Learning Disability, they are people just like you and me, and they also have a right and status in this world.