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Care Stars

Find out about our initiative to recognise the care workers who made a truly positive difference to people's lives during the pandemic

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What is Care Stars?

Care Stars is an initiative that was created to shine a light on the social care and early years workers who made a truly positive difference to people's lives while the country struggled with the challenges of the pandemic.

In June 2021, employers, colleagues and members of the public were invited to nominate the paid care workers they felt deserved to be recognised for their work over the last 15 months or so.

As a result, 120 care workers from across Wales were nominated. A panel of judges, made up of our Board members and representatives from partner organisations, then whittled them down to the 12 Care Stars they thought deserved recognition for the inspirational work they had done.

Who are the Care Stars?

Childcare, play and early years services

Jane Carter, early years practitioner at Flying Start in the Vale of Glamorgan

Nominated by Sue Davies, Jane's line manager, who said:

Jane has worked tirelessly to maintain relationships with families and to make sure the service remained visible to those it supports. This has required a creative and flexible approach, and we have had to adapt our usual processes. Jane has been central to these changes, and her skills and care have made a tangible difference to children and families.

During the pandemic Jane worked with more than 30 families, providing virtual 'pop in and play' sessions and working with families who were most in need on a one-to-one basis in

the home. More recently, she engaged more than 15 families in outdoor 'pop out and play' sessions.

Jane made sure there were visits to families to drop off toys and activities. She also worked closely with our partner agencies to deliver Christmas presents to the most vulnerable families in the community. Families have appreciated the visibility of the service and being able to see the workers that support them. They have felt supported by their presence and safeguarded by the Covid-safe approach.

Jane has also worked in the childcare hub, undertaking her own shifts and covering others when needed. She can also be relied upon to step into our childcare settings. Jane made activity packs for the children and often used her own resources to do this. She was really concerned about how families were managing during the pandemic, so she dropped off food vouchers and signposted families to other agencies when needed.

Jane has always been a hands-on person and is naturally suited to being in the community using her practical skills. She has also embraced virtual working to further her ability to work with families. Jane is always happy to help others and really cares about our children and families. She has never wavered about carrying out face-to-face visits and has completed risk assessments to allow her to do this safely. Jane has been invaluable in providing our service and has continued to be motivated throughout the pandemic.

Joanne Jones, Senior Healthy Living Officer (Play) at the Vale of Glamorgan Council

Nominated by Karen Davies, whose team Joanne works in, who said:

Joanne has been passionate about ensuring children have been able to access some form of 'play' activity during lockdown and when Covid restrictions have been in place. Her impact has included:

- facilitating 497 participations over 24 days of provision in the Families First Holiday Club for disabled children aged four to 11 years (a number of whom were from families in crisis)
- working with the council's parks department and a local volunteer to create new willow structures in the local park where children and families can play
- Online Healthy, Active & At Home programme – a partnership between sports and play development to provide ideas for play and physical activity that families could do at home or in the local area. Lockdown meant that families had more time to fill at home, so families were encouraged to do no-cost play activities, such as junk modelling and more traditional games, as opposed to spending all their time on technology

- distributing ‘Lockdown Champions’ packs to identified vulnerable families. The packs included activity suggestions, a time capsule activity and a lockdown certificate
- remotely delivering an app that aims to help people get back into work to eight volunteers identified through the Youth Service Inspire to Work project
- facilitating 12 staff to attend mental health training to support children with their well-being
- co-ordinating the summer play programme including: Play Ranger projects (with the local housing association and local community council) – 16 sessions, 104 participants, 476 participations; Vale Play Pavilion – 60 participants, 458 participations; and the Families First Holiday Club.

Julia Sky, Community Play Development Worker at the Vale of Glamorgan Council

Nominated by Karen Davies, whose team Julia works in, who said:

In May 2020, it was identified that children from a number of families linked to social services would need support over the school holidays due to the pressures associated with the challenges of lockdown. In response, the Vale Play Pavilion was created, with Julia leading on the project. There was a quick turnaround to complete the relevant CIW registration so that full day provision could be provided.

Working alongside her manager, Julia progressed the successful CIW application, planned the project elements, linked in the children, developed a programme of activities to engage the children and managed the actual provision. All this was done within an extremely tight timescale and with the many challenges faced during Covid.

Julia’s determination to make sure the children had an enjoyable time was rewarded with the positive impact achieved:

- 60 children were supported, 43 per cent of whom had additional needs
- 27 days of provision was provided over four school holiday periods, leading to 458 participations
- 540 packed lunches were provided.

Social care support for adults

Amanda Davies, lead nurse at Brocastle Manor in Bridgend

Nominated by Alison Copus, whose parents Amanda cares for, who said:

Amanda has been the principal carer for my parents since they arrived at Brocastle in March. They both have dementia, at different stages. Amanda has been wonderful to my parents, but especially my father who reacted very badly to the move. Others may have chosen to remove him to a specialist unit, but Amanda went above and beyond.

She involved the local psychiatric team and showed great patience and understanding while they adjusted his medication. She went as far as encouraging him to participate in meetings in her office, which appealed to his instincts to work. She has truly befriended him and stuck with him while he got through the transition. Now he is relaxed and contented.

If Amanda hadn't been so caring, moving my father to another home and separating him from his wife would have been a trauma for both my parents, as well as our family. We are extremely grateful for Amanda's professionalism and the exceptional care she is providing for them.

She also provided photos and updates via email and WhatsApp, so we could keep in touch through the long weeks when visits were not allowed. This kindness has been very comforting and informative, and is well beyond the call of duty.

Amanda is also dealing with a serious health issue with her own mother, following an extremely stressful 15-plus months managing the pandemic. Amanda's resilience, professionalism and positivity are exceptional.

Louise Hook, adult carers' support worker at Torfaen Social Services

Nominated by Mark Goodfellow, who works with Louise to get information, advice and assistance to carers, who said:

Louise says, "Shoot for the stars", and this is what she does when she supports the unseen carers in our area. During the last 15 months, Louise has kept the support going for adult carers, which has included regular phone calls, emails and, more recently, home visits.

We want to nominate Louise because she regularly works on her days off and never complains about it. Louise puts 100 per cent into her projects and likes to make sure that they are done to the highest standard.

During this last year, Louise arranged the celebrations of Torfaen Carers, as well as the important, and often emotional, day-to-day phone calls. This year, Louise read through and

responded to more than 300 applications to make creative carers' respite possible.

Louise designed, planned and planted a wildflower garden in a local park celebrating our carers and is now planning her next challenge – to create a new carer's hub at the Ty Glas Y Dorlan complex, which Louise recognised needs to be inclusive. Many carers want to include the person they're caring for when they take a break, but not hold so much responsibility, just for a moment. Louise also got the ball rolling on working out how to connect carers digitally if they can't physically get to the hub.

Most of Louise's planning goes unseen outside work hours and we think she is a trail blazer!

Susan Williams, care support worker for Carers Trust South East Wales in the Vale of Glamorgan

Nominated by Tina Tipples, Susan's employer, who said:

During Covid we had to close our day centre, which we ran for clients with dementia. So we developed an outreach service for our clients, which saw our staff adapt their way of working by taking activities that a client would have done in the day centre into the home.

Susan really shone in this role – she hadn't done anything with arts and crafts before, so she had to adapt her whole way of working. Susan embraced the outreach calls and made a difference to our clients' lives with the activities she did with them during the calls.

Susan spent her own money buying arts and crafts items, and really enjoyed her new way of working. The artwork that Susan made with the clients was displayed in the windows of our day centre. And we had great feedback from a family where Susan managed to get their mum to take part in knitting again.

Susan really improved our clients' mental health and well-being by providing this service, and their carers and relatives managed to have a respite break while Susan was with our clients. Susan has a heart of gold and really gives 100 per cent in her role as a care worker and puts our clients' best interests at the forefront of everything she does.

Social care services for children

Alex Preece, therapeutic care worker at Marlowe St David's in Pembrokeshire

Nominated by Jenny Berrigan, Alex's line manager, who said:

Alex is young to be taking on the role of therapeutic care worker with children who have had such traumatic pasts. She has shown determination and enthusiasm about developing her skills and knowledge to help support the children in our care. Alex is a bubbly and dynamic staff member, who loves to include all the children in all aspects of their care. She also acts as an advocate for the children, making sure their voices are heard and that the professionals involved hear what they are actually saying.

Alex's imagination is amazing, she can put a positive spin on things the children are finding difficult, making it a fun and enjoyable experience. Alex is caring and empathetic, which shows in her day-to-day care and interaction with the children. I cannot praise her enough for her commitment and dedication to our children. Alex is motivated, and she is one of the happiest people I have met and brings a positive atmosphere to our home.

Alex has common sense and can think on her feet when de-escalating situations the children may find challenging. She will stay positive and never makes the children feel guilty or shamed for their behaviour. Alex supports the children with the difficulties they may be experiencing, always talking at a level they understand and listening clearly to how they are feeling. During the last 15 months, Alex has made the lockdown periods fun and full of excitement. She has used her imagination and come up with fantastic ideas to entertain the children and the staff.

Conor O’Leary, residential child care practitioner at Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council

Nominated by Mandy Meredith, Conor’s line manager, who said:

When it was announced that people had to shield because of the pandemic, our children’s home lost 50 per cent of its staff overnight. As a trauma-informed home, we realised immediately that this would have a huge impact upon our children and young people, as they had only just begun to form positive relationships with adults and were frightened and untrusting due to early childhood trauma.

Conor’s response was immediate. When I explained that half the team would have to go home, his response was, “Give me an hour, I’ll pack my things and move in, until we know what we are going to have to do, to make the children feel safe.” Conor arrived at the home and moved in for the first two weeks of the pandemic.

He applied himself to providing our young people with a shared experience in which their already uncertain world was changing again. He made a very frightening time a shared experience, where they could find positives every day. Cooking, gardening, painting, Joe

Wicks and make up became daily activities, and our children commented that they felt we were in this together.

Conor provided invaluable support and care, and was truly a credit to the profession. He provided care and support through the laughter and tears. I feel he deserves to be recognised for this and for being a role model in our service. This was an act of compassion for others and an understanding of their needs.

Debra Evans, residential manager at Harwood House and Baker's Way in Bridgend

Nominated by Steven Howell, Debra's line manager, who said:

When the coronavirus pandemic prompted the national lockdown, Bridgend County Borough Council took the decision to temporarily close one of its children's care homes, Baker's Way, which usually provides short breaks to disabled children and young people aged up to 18 years old.

However, at the end of March 2020, the council received a referral from hospital when a young child's parents were admitted with suspected Covid-19. Both parents were seriously ill and their young child was wandering around the ward. At the time of the referral, Debra, who manages both Baker's Way and another children's care home in the county, was at home.

With very limited access to PPE and with little regard for her own health, she immediately agreed to prepare Baker's Way to take in the young child, quickly pulling together a small staff team who were able to work exclusively at the home and arranging for a minibus to collect the child from hospital and take them to Baker's Way. With the young child unable to communicate due to a hearing impairment, Debra arranged to have their hearing aid box delivered to Baker's Way.

During their time at Baker's Way, Debra effectively lived at the home from Monday to Thursday to limit the number of people coming into contact with the child and to build a relationship with them to help ease their distress. When the child tested positive for Covid-19, Debra continued to support the child, managing her staff's anxieties and her own.

While caring for the child, Debra had to pass on the devastating news that it was very likely their mother was going to pass away and when it happened, she had to let the child know the very sad and distressing news. Debra spent time with the child, drawing things their mother liked and prepared a handprint and lock of hair to exchange with their mother.

At the same time, the child's father was also very ill in hospital with nursing staff believing he would also pass away. It fell to Debra to talk to the child about the possibility this would happen. It was with great relief that the child's father responded positively to treatment and survived, being able to Facetime the child on their birthday.

Throughout this extremely traumatic period for the young child, Debra liaised with professionals to ensure they were able to support the child, doing so with great empathy and sensitivity, and with the additional challenges of lockdown, PPE use and the overall uncertainty.

I believe Debra went above and beyond in the way she responded so selflessly during a worldwide pandemic and placed the needs of this child before any anxieties she held for herself. As an indication of what impact Debra made, the child's father said, during a recent discussion over who he would like to care for his child if he were unable to do so in the future, that he would like Debra to do so.

Social care support for older people

Katie Hall, care assistant at Bryntirion Tregaron in Ceredigion

Katie was nominated by her colleague MC Lai, who said:

Katie is a splendid carer who understands the elderly instinctively and knows how to make them believe in themselves and shine, especially when they have dementia.

When Covid struck Min-y-Mor in December 2020, Katie found herself the only permanent member of staff in the care home within days. She organised the agency carers drafted in in emergency, worked days and nights for weeks on end to offer all our residents in isolation the comfort of her familiar face and hers was the last voice some heard when Covid stole them from us. She risked her life without hesitation at every moment of every shift she covered – and she is only 26!

When I hear of unsung heroes, I think of Katie in those terrible days and I sincerely believe that her professional selflessness and generous courage deserve to be acknowledged.

Katie Newe, service manager at Denbighshire County Council

Nominated by Ann Lloyd, her line manager, who said:

Since the start of lockdown in March 2020, Katie has thrown herself into ensuring all the older people we support in our services are safe. The well-being of our residents was of paramount importance to her and she went out of her way to champion best practice.

Katie shared the experiences in our homes with the independent sector and pushed them to critically look at their own practice to reduce the risk of Covid transmission. She set up weekly meetings to provide peer support to residential care home owners and managers – with a separate meeting for domiciliary care – recognising that we were a lot stronger together than apart.

While leading a large service and supporting our independent partners, Katie also rolled her sleeves up and helped out wherever she was needed. She worked tirelessly in our own care homes, extra care housing and in homes in the independent sector that were at crisis point. It was nothing for her to work seven days per week and cover evening and night shifts if that was what it took to support our citizens and relieve staff who were exhausted and at breaking point.

Katie was a tower of strength for her team, and her passion and commitment to the social care sector was second to none. She truly was an exceptional role model. I am convinced that her doggedness and determination throughout this pandemic protected many of our vulnerable older people in Denbighshire.

Lisa Parfitt, activities co-ordinator at Hafod Housing Association in Caerphilly

Nominated by Karen Davis, Lisa's line manager, who said:

Lisa has worked tirelessly the past 18 months to keep up staff and resident morale in the care home. During the lockdowns, when train and bus service timetables were compromised, Lisa went out of her way to help her colleagues. She provided transport for staff to come to work and take them home again at the end of their shift. This meant she would often come into work early and return again in the evenings to ensure staff got home safely.

Lisa inspired colleagues to keep the residents entertained and in contact with their loved ones via digital media platforms when the home was closed to visiting. When outside visiting was permitted, Lisa worked hard to arrange for as many relatives as possible to visit and implement the visitor screening protocol to keep everyone safe.

Lisa has an excellent rapport with colleagues and residents. She is cheerful and helpful, always putting the residents first. She has taken part in TikTok sessions with residents and posted them on our private Facebook page so their families can see their loved ones are safe and happy.

Lisa has looked after our Facebook page and, with the appropriate consent, has posted information for families about visiting, along with photos of residents laughing, smiling and taking part in activities, which has helped give their loved ones peace of mind. Lisa also devised Facebook surveys, so we get feedback to help us improve our service.

Lisa made sure residents took part in games, cooking and craft work, and decorated the windows to celebrate events. She also helped boost residents' appetites, while having fun. The cooking Lisa has prepared with the residents, which has included making bread, stew and cakes, has been enjoyed by all.

Recently, Lisa, along with the residents, made vast improvements to our communal garden and it is a pleasure to sit and enjoy the flowers and foliage. Lisa is a well-respected member of the Ty Penrhos Team – nothing is too much trouble for her and this recognition is very well deserved.

Contact us

If you have any questions about Care Stars, [get in touch with us](#).