

AGM Speech 2021

What a strange year for us all. In one respect time has appeared to stop, our lives put on pause and in another way things have moved on and changed completely.

I am sure like most people, who when we locked down on March 2020, expected it to be just for a few weeks and then life would return to normal. How wrong we all were. When eventually the call came to return to work in July I was overjoyed, not really having taken to the life of inactivity and no it wasn't like being retired, of that I'm certain, although people tried to convince me otherwise!

Throughout the initial lockdown with most if not all of our members self isolating our wonderful care staff did a magnificent job keeping everyone connected with weekly phone calls. If it wasn't possible to speak with the customer, the staff spoke to their families and carers, helping them feel less isolated. By June the message was coming through loud and clear 'when will Waverley be reopening?' This cry came especially from those caring for someone with dementia. Although the pandemic has not been kind to anyone, those with dementia and their carers have found it worse of all.

After speaking to WCC and working to their COVID compliancy guidelines we started to plan to reopen for 2 days in August. For all those families and carers who stuck with us and were confident and happy for their family member to return a special thank you.

By November we were once again seeing a steep rise in infections and consolidated services to just one day per week for 4 weeks.

After returning to 2 days up until Christmas time we managed to celebrate the festive season in a scaled down way. Sadly, no outside entertainment, no extra guests for lunch. Although I think Sue secretly didn't mind not having to cook all those sprouts.

We closed our doors again in January 2021 due to rising infection rates and increased hospital admissions. Thankfully the COVID vaccines were well underway by this time for our older members, the 90 plus having had their first injection in December 2020.

Once again our staff stepped up and recommenced their weekly befriending contact calls. Also the KCSG who has quickly organised themselves in the first lockdown continued supporting people of all ages in the town to get through this difficult time.

My thanks go to WCC for providing the link to ensure all staff and vital volunteers could access the vaccine. Also to all the staff who without any hesitation booked to have their injections. This was completed by April 2021 just as we reopened for 2 days per week. We added a 3rd day in May and have now been fully open 4 days per week since 5th August. Normally we open for 200 days in a year but in the

year to 31st March 2021 it has only been possible to open for 40.

Well what have we learned during this time? Primarily that Waverley continues to be a place that is needed to provide physical and emotional support that is so vital to many older people. To enjoy company, chatter and good food. We all now understand firsthand what loneliness can do. I read in an article recently about the 'loneliness pandemic' and that is a good way I think to express where so many find themselves now.

Although things have changed over the last 12 months with use of face covering, sanitizer and social distancing it is still possible to create a welcoming safe space and undertake meaningful activities.

My job has been made that much easier by having such a good team around me, our carers, cook, administrator and mostly the time given by the volunteers who are vital to this whole operation. When I felt the pressure of reopening yet again, they came to my rescue and lifted my spirits as they did the customers.

Overall being appreciated for what we do by our clients and families makes it all worthwhile. COVID is still circulating and we still need to protect ourselves and others as we find our way out of the pandemic.