

## Leading with Care: Paula Cashmore's 40-Year Journey Shaping Social Care

Paula Cashmore has dedicated over 40 years to improving the standards of care in the sector. From her early days as a nurse to becoming an independent quality consultant, Paula has seen the sector evolve. Here, she shares her passion for quality care, her approach to overcoming challenges, and her advice for women aspiring to make a real impact.

### **Q: Can you tell us a bit about your role in quality monitoring within the social care sector and what motivated you to pursue it?**

I've been in social care for 40 years. I started as a nurse, and I found my passion in geriatric care. Coming into the unregulated social care sector in the 80s, I noticed the lack of consistency in care standards. That really drove me to focus on delivering the highest quality possible. Over the years, I've worked in various roles, witnessing both the highs and the lows of the industry. When I saw the opportunity to become a quality consultant, I knew that I could make the most impact by working with those who genuinely want to provide the best care. Quality care, after all, starts with strong leadership.

### **Q: What strategies do you use to network and find clients in a niche sector like social care?**

Networking if you are a solopreneur is challenging, especially in a niche like social care. Regular networks like BNI or social gatherings like 'ladies that lunch' don't always align with the needs of my clients. That's why I support the Care Connector Network, which brings together people who truly understand social care. I also emphasise the importance of face-to-face connections. It's key to find clients who are committed to quality and who are open to working collaboratively. Social care can be isolating, but through the right networks, you're not alone.

### **Q: Managing burnout is a significant concern, especially for women in leadership roles. How do you advise managers who are struggling?**

Self-care is vital for managers. Just because you're rostered from 9 to 5 doesn't mean you have to stick to that rigid schedule. It's about taking control of how you lead and finding what works best for you, your staff, and your clients. Every service is different, and so are the people involved. Recognising your own leadership style and being flexible is key to avoiding burnout. Additionally, having the right support network in place is crucial. Don't be afraid to delegate or ask for help—managers should never feel like they're in it alone.

### **Q: You've mentioned learning valuable lessons from working in poor-performing care homes. Can you share those lessons?**

There's no such thing as a perfect care home. Mistakes happen, and corners can sometimes be cut. People will let you down, procedures may fail, and quality issues may arise. However, where there is a culture of hiding those mistakes or avoiding accountability, that's where the real problem lies. Managers must stand up and take ownership of these situations. They are legally

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responsible for what happens within their services, and they need to be empowered to manage and address these issues effectively.

I believe that a manager's role is not just about day-to-day operations; it's about creating a culture where mistakes are acknowledged and used as learning opportunities. When you recognise that mistakes happen, the key is to learn from them, adjust policies, and make improvements to prevent them from recurring.

The recruitment crisis has also contributed to poor performance in many care homes. Managers often feel that anyone is better than no one, but that mindset can be dangerous. It's crucial to deal with poor-performing staff in a fair but firm manner. Quality care cannot be compromised, and it's essential to have a robust process in place to manage mistakes, improve performance, and ensure staff align with the values of the service.

### **Q: Why do you think this sector offers such great opportunities for growth, and what do you find most rewarding about mentoring and empowering others?**

One of the things that both frustrates and thrills me about the social care sector is that it offers opportunities for growth to anyone, regardless of academic background, as long as you have the right values and aptitude. If you're passionate about making a difference, social care welcomes you. It's also a flexible sector, allowing people to work part-time if that's what they want.

However, if you have a good employer who is committed to developing your abilities, social care offers rapid progression. In just a few years, someone can move from an entry-level carer to becoming a senior, then a deputy manager. Once you have experience as a deputy, the doors to management roles open, and from there, opportunities as a registered manager and beyond become available. The sector offers regional opportunities, and these roles aren't always reserved for those with formal qualifications. Experience in the field often outweighs academic qualifications, and that's something everyone can gain through hard work and dedication in social care.

### **Q: How have you built confidence throughout your career, especially when dealing with imposter syndrome or difficult situations?**

Confidence comes with experience. Over the years, I've seen systems work, and I've learned what good management looks like. Seeing positive changes and knowing I had a hand in them boosts my confidence. As for imposter syndrome, it's real, especially when social care is undervalued. But I've learned that innovation in social care is essential, and it's important to have the courage to try new things. Even if they don't work out, the learning experience is invaluable. It's about finding your voice and knowing that the work we do is important.

### **Q: Burnout is a major issue in social care. How do you support others in dealing with it?**

Burnout is one of the biggest challenges in social care, and it's often the result of working short-staffed or not setting boundaries. I work with managers to help them understand the

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importance of professional boundaries. It's crucial to delegate tasks and ensure that staff aren't overburdened with unnecessary audits or work. Having a support system is key. Being able to talk to someone who truly understands your struggles can make all the difference. Managers need to feel that they're supported, and they can't do it all alone.

### **Q: Looking ahead, what changes would you like to see in social care to better support women in the sector?**

I'd love to see a greater recognition of how essential social care workers are—particularly carers, who are the foundation of the healthcare system. They need to be valued, not just through words but through actions. I also believe the regulatory bodies need to work more collaboratively and focus on outcomes, not just paperwork. We often see services that perform well but have paperwork that doesn't match the reality of care. Streamlining the inspection process to focus on the quality of care delivered would be a huge step forward.

### **Q: Finally, what advice would you give to women aspiring to build a resilient and empowering career in social care?**

My advice is simple: Find what you're passionate about, and don't be afraid to pursue it. Social care offers so many opportunities for those who are willing to learn and grow. It's about connecting with the right people and getting the support you need. Whether you want to stay hands-on with care or move into leadership, stay true to your values and keep learning. And most importantly, surround yourself with people who understand the journey you're on.

### **Paula's Vision for the Future of Social Care**

Paula's journey in social care highlights the importance of leadership, continuous learning, and the power of supportive networks. Her passion for quality care and empowering others resonates throughout her career. For women in social care, Paula's advice is clear: stay true to your values, embrace innovation, and never stop growing.

For more insights from Paula or to connect with her, find her on LinkedIn, Facebook, or through her website.