

Making a Difference Through Activities: Rosie's Journey from Retail to Care

“Don't ever be afraid to start again. I know I've made a difference, and I'm very proud of that.”

Rosie's journey into care wasn't planned, but it turned into the most rewarding role of her life. After 15 years in retail, she made a leap into the care sector, where she now works as an Activities Coordinator. We spoke to Rosie about her experiences, the challenges of engaging residents, and the power of music, companionship, and making wishes come true.

Finding a New Path

Q: Rosie, can you tell us a bit about yourself and your current role?

I live in Suffolk with my husband, and I have two sons who live nearby. I love music—especially Oasis—and yes, I did get tickets! I'm also a big Ipswich Town fan, but those tickets are harder to get now they're in the Premier League!

I have worked as an Activities Coordinator in Manson House in Bury St Edmunds since August last year.

I love my job and look forward to every day.

Q: You spent years in retail before moving into care. How did that change happen?

After the pandemic, I lost my job as a store manager. Retail was all I'd ever known, but I realised I needed a fresh start. I took a deep breath, a pay cut, and went into housekeeping at a care home.

To my surprise, I loved it! I enjoyed chatting with the residents, and one day, a lady I played dominoes with said, “You befriended me, thank you.” That moment showed me I could make a real difference. I started helping with activities, and when a role became available, I applied—and here I am!

Bringing Joy Through Activities

Q: Working with dementia patients can be challenging. What have you learned?

Activities have to be dementia friendly. You can't just put paints in front of them i.e.—they might mistake them for something to eat! Music became the heart of our activities. They loved singalongs, musical bingo, and “Name That Tune.” I spent most of my day singing—something I never thought I'd do!

Q: Some residents are hesitant to join in. How do you encourage them?

This is one of the toughest parts of the job. Some residents prefer one-on-one visits, and that's fine as long as they still feel included.

Sometimes, all it takes is a conversation, there are many things people can do which doesn't involve large groups, we have rickshaw rides, and therapy dogs. Animal visits work wonders—residents who never join in will come out for a puppy cuddle!

Making Wishes Come True

Q: You've granted special wishes for residents. Can you share some of your favourites?

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This has been the best part of my job! I ask residents, "If you could have one wish, what would it be?" Most requests are simple—one lady just wanted an embroidery kit because she used to sew with her mother.

Other wishes needed more planning. One resident wanted to go to a motorbike show and eat a hotdog. I found a local bike meet, and off we went—he loved it! The hardest wish was for a frail gentleman who wanted to see an airshow. After lots of emails, RAF Honington invited us to their Friends & Families Day, where he saw the Red Arrows fly past. He was thrilled!

I also take photos and make little albums so they can relive their special day.

Q: You use music a lot in your activities. Why do you think it works so well?

Music is magical for dementia residents. Musical bingo works better than regular bingo because they sing along as they mark their cards. I also do music quizzes where they guess the artist—keeps their minds active!

One of my favourite events was a Eurovision afternoon. We had disco lights, headbands, non-alcoholic wine, and score sheets. We played songs from different years, ending with me and my colleagues in ABBA masks singing *Waterloo*. Everyone had the best time!

Learning and Moving Forward

Q: Balancing everything must be tough. How do you manage your workload?

You have to switch off when you get home. It's hard sometimes as I often sit and write quizzes etc at home, it's hard to get everything done at work, but if you don't take time for yourself you'll burn out.

Q: You've built strong bonds with residents. What has that taught you?

They feel like family, and I think we become family to them too. One lady at St Peter's barely spoke when I first met her. After weeks of sitting with her, she started chatting. Eventually, she even got up and danced with me at an event. Seeing her that happy was incredible.

Q: What's next? Are there any new activities you'd love to introduce?

In my new home, the residents are more independent, so I'd love to take them to the cinema or a panto. I also arranged for a local school to visit for Christmas carols, and I have a contact at a card company who visited and helped residents write and send Christmas cards for free. It's all about finding the right people and sending nice emails!

Q: What changes would you like to see in care home activities?

Budgets need to be bigger. The residents deserve more. I've spent my own money on extra supplies, but I can't pay for entertainers myself. It would make a huge difference if more funding was available.

Advice for Others

Q: What advice would you give to someone looking to work in care activities?

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Find what you're good at. I'm hopeless at arts and crafts, but I'm great at organising and entertaining. My dream fantasy job would be Santa Claus, so arranging wishes is the next best thing!

Q: What's the biggest lesson you've learned since switching careers?

This is the most rewarding job I've ever had, but you have to learn to switch off when you go home. It's easy to burn out if you don't have the right team around you. It's not about money—making people happy and seeing them smile is everything.

Q: Any final thoughts?

I can't believe I started a whole new career at 60! If you're thinking about a change, go for it. You never know where it might lead!

Want to learn more about Rosie's activities? Get in touch and be inspired!

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