

Future-proofing care the Stow way

Social Care Covid Hero



Alex Ball

The Covid-19 pandemic has felt like the world coming to a standstill, perhaps even going backwards but it's a truth universally acknowledged that some people, companies and organisations always have an eye to the future, like it's part of their very DNA. Richard Branson's Virgin is an obvious example, I guess. None of them possesses a crystal ball, of course, but they know that change is always part of moving forward to meet challenges ahead and to improve upon what's gone before.

And yes, doubtless most of us can shout out examples of how the above seems not to apply to the care sector, so read the following piece and take heart...

Stow Healthcare Group is known for taking over failed care homes - it's their USP. They go into services with a poor history and management and take on the massive job of changing the learned culture.

Alex Ball was working at one such care home as a bank kitchen assistant. She was scooped up by Stow and began working for them in their first care home. Ten years later, she is now Operations Manager and talking with me about the state of care right now:

"We're at a crossroads and staffing is the crux. With the minimum wage increase coming up it will mean the end for some of the smaller providers and I know what it's like

"Alex is now an iCare Ambassador approaching schools and colleges."





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to be made redundant and see the people you genuinely care about being moved out of their home because the service can no longer run. It's heartbreaking. We need something that will attract different people into the industry, that will help them thrive and make a rewarding career out of it.”

So, with this future ahead of us, Stow started to research ways of creating opportunities to reach tomorrow's carers and nurses - to show them that a career in care is in no way second class. They could tell pretty quickly that careers fairs weren't the right place as parents rushed their children past the stand, so they re-thought the strategy and approached teachers to find a direct audience with students...to start the conversation:

“We got great feedback from those sessions! We then looked at some of their coursework and could see there was a big module around infection control: PPE before everyone in the world knew what it was! We brought them into the care home setting and involved our staff and domestic teams so the students saw everything in situ: different coloured bags, how we separate different types of waste etc and they all got a bit of PPE to take away with them for their portfolio - not that we'd do that now given the pandemic shortages!”

Perhaps because we all know experiencing things in practice brings them to life often far more than sitting in a classroom or reading a textbook, it has proven

very successful: Alex is now an iCare Ambassador approaching schools and colleges, innovatively dispelling myths and showcasing opportunities for future careers.



Another nod to the future has been the building of the Memory Centre at Brandon Park. It's a specialist unit for any type of cognitive impairment and having researched different approaches, Montessori principles seemed right for their care ethos. Within this method, there are no prescribed or delineated roles: all staff are Homemakers and they do everything together, working alongside residents, helping them to help themselves and rebuild skills through repeated movement and motion. And it has been a huge eye opener for people to realise that the previous model of care was often disabling rather than enabling residents.

So could part of the future be Homemakers? *“Well, yes. It's been a pilot for us but we might end up rolling it out company-wide because care has to*

change. It cannot stay as it is.”

Helping to build the workforce of tomorrow especially with the presence of Covid-19 is no mean feat but, cards on table, Stow can future-proof my home any day of the week.



Debra Mehta