

Bringing care and comfort at Christmas and every day

On Christmas Day, care workers will be on duty as usual and striving to make it special for those they look after. Barbara Eeles reports

Imagine you are in your 80s, frail, and unable to look after yourself as you once did. You might have no family, or they could live too far away for regular visits.

Perhaps you are bed bound after coming out of hospital, or living in a care home.

On Christmas Day - as on every other day of the year - a vast army of people will be working to bring care, support and company to the most vulnerable in our communities.

More care sector workers are on duty on December 25 than any other occupation, according to the Office for National Statistics.

In Suffolk and Norfolk, staff in residential homes including carers, housekeepers, nurses, and cooks will be doing their utmost to make it a special day for residents while carrying on with their usual tasks.

And thousands more people living in their own homes will be relying on visits from care workers from local authorities or private agencies.

Caring is a skilled and responsible job. It can also be a tough one, and no-one would say it is highly paid. But those who do it also speak of the rewards of knowing you are making a difference.

Home First is Suffolk County Council's reablement service which offers short term free care and support to elderly and frail people when they come out of hospital.

Rachel Sadler is acting manager of the west team covering towns and rural areas around Newmarket, Haverhill, Bury St Edmunds and Sudbury, and earlier in December was looking after almost 100 customers.

"We operate seven days a week, 365 days a year. Our purpose is to reable those discharged from hospital, and maintain the independence of those in the community to prevent hospital admissions," said Rachel.

"During the customer's assessment period with us we make decisions whether long-term care is required.

"Our Reablement Support Workers (RSWs) are highly trained in all aspects of care and reablement."

In winter they are especially vigilant looking out for the more

vulnerable, and can provide winter packs with things like a fleece blanket and hot water bottle, to help them keep warm.

Emily Fellingham is one of the Home First team based in Sudbury. "I've done other jobs but I always come back to care - it's in me, it's what I enjoy, providing the service," she said.

"For me working for Suffolk County Council is the best thing I've found. I can't fault Homefirst and everything they stand for. Even when I have to phone out of hours needing advice, it's never a problem.

"I'm working the early shift from 7am to 3pm this Christmas Day and that's absolutely fine by me. I have three children who are 17, 15 and 11. My partner Michael cooks Christmas dinner."

The first calls of the day can include helping people to get up, wash and dress, and get breakfast. Then it will be lunchtime calls for those who need them.

As a reablement service they encourage and support people to do what they can for themselves.

"Our clients might not have any other interaction with anyone throughout the day apart from our calls," said Emily.

"Come Christmas Day when people tend to reflect on things, they are even happier to see us. That's especially true with people who are bed care only, and can't do things the rest of us just take for granted.

"If we can come in and provide a bit of cheer, as well as the service, that's good for them."

She says that for anyone thinking of care work, Home First would be a great choice. "We really are a team," she says.

Kay Andrews is a carer at Stowlangtoft Hall nursing home. She became a professional care worker in 2009 after spending 24 years looking after her son, who was born with a genetic disorder, until he passed away.

Christmas Day is a lovely day to work," said Kay who has been at the home, owned by Stow Healthcare, for two years.

"I'll be doing a half day shift, from 8am to 2pm. The atmosphere is so different from any other time.

"You are going into the residents' home, which is their room, and you might be the first person who has



Nurse Izzy Dale with Melford Court resident Barry

greeted them that day. It's magical. "They have breakfast and come down if they can to open their presents under the Christmas tree.

"If they're bed bound we will go into their rooms and make the day special. We make sure they don't miss out on anything. My mission is for them all to have a nice day.

"There are lots of people working here on Christmas Day, so they see lots of people. It's a special place.

"Everyone gives 100 percent every

at 5.45am to start her 12 hour shift at 8am. But on Christmas Day it will probably be earlier so the night staff can get home to their families.

Izzy has been a nurse for more than 40 years, most of them spent at NHS hospitals.

"On Christmas Day some residents go out with their families, but for those who can't we try to make it as nice as possible. Families also come in, but we always have some people who don't have any visitors."

In December the home's activities team build up to the big day with lights, decorations and making cakes with the residents.

"All members of staff are paired up with a resident to buy them a gift, and the company buys them something as well," said Izzy. "They are a really good company to work for."

"Christmas dinner is set up downstairs for residents who can manage that. For those who can't we sit with them and assist them and chat. The staff have dinner together as well.

"I'll wear my uniform as usual but will probably put on some silly headgear, maybe tinsel.

While Izzy is working, her husband Alan, their children and grandchildren will be enjoying the day back home in Boxford. Then on Boxing Day she will cook Christmas dinner number two for the whole family.

Francesca Cross started with Home First in Bury St Edmunds in January covering calls mostly in the town centre, but also nearby villages.

She used to work in community transport. But after she had her daughter in 2020 going back to her old job didn't really work.

"I'd never done care before and I never thought I'd enjoy it, but I really love it," said Francesca who lives in Ixworth and will be doing

Stowlangtoft Hall staff (left to right) Ben (Head Housekeeper), Teresa (Domestic), Jane (Laundry), Marina (Domestic), Sharon (Care Assistant), Kay (Care Assistant) and Jake (Kitchen Assistant) with residents Judy and Liz

afternoon and evening calls on Christmas Day.

"It's about knowing that to each client we can make a small difference.

"Sometimes people don't have any family around them, or they might be a long way away or even in a different country. So it's even more important at Christmas.

"I'll be wearing a Santa hat, and taking a mince pie to everyone I visit. I think it makes them feel a connection, and they feel appreciated because someone has thought about them.

"We try to support them to get them back to independent living and gain strength and confidence."

Francesca is looking forward to Christmas dinner of steak and chips

- chosen for less cooking time and more family time - with her husband and two children before starting work.

Housekeeper Marina Holder volunteered to work on Christmas Day at Stowlangtoft Hall nursing home because she believes her younger colleagues should be able to spend the day with their children and families.

She has worked at the home, owned by Stow Healthcare, for seven years. Previously she spent 26 years as a teaching assistant at Badwell Ash primary school, and also worked for Age UK.

She will report for duty at 7am on Christmas Day but her half-day shift will probably end an hour earlier than normal.

"When I finish work I can go back to my home, but for the residents this is their home. They like their routines and seeing familiar faces.

"I've always enjoyed coming to work. It's a lovely atmosphere. I'll be dressing up for Christmas Day - I'm looking forward to it.

"I'll probably put tinsel in my hair. I've got a Christmas mask as well - we still have to wear masks at work.

"I always say I have my own family, and the residents and staff here are my work family."

When her shift is over, Marina and husband Colin will be starting their own celebrations with their daughter and son and their families.

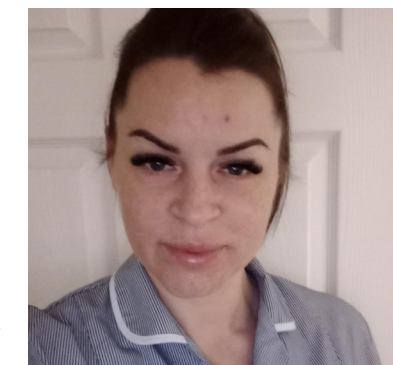
Sophie Hooper is one of the county council team based at Haverhill. She has been there for

“It's about knowing that to each client we can make a small difference

Francesca Cross
Reablement Support Worker
Home First



Home First's Rachel Sadler



Emily Fellingham



Francesca Cross from Home First



Sophie Hooper

two years, and has had a long career in health and care work.

"This year I'm working on Christmas Eve not Christmas Day - but it will be the first time in 13 years I've had the day off, said Sophie, whose previous jobs include healthcare assistant at Addenbrooke's Hospital.

"At Home First we start calls at 7am on Christmas Day, the same time as usual. Our job includes personal care and giving medication.

"It's not an easy job but it's really, really rewarding, you feel you're really helping people.

"And it's even more rewarding at Christmas when you go to people who don't have any family, and go in and spend time with them. I definitely get a lot out of my job."

She also makes calls if needed in places like Sudbury, Bury, Monks Eleigh and Lavenham.

"Staff travel between their nominated teams to help cover work in rain, wind and shine," says area manager Rachel. "We have 70 RSWs and 18 bank workers in the west team."

Since January they have had 1704 referrals accepted - equating to 16,854 care plan hours. Almost 600 people have been fully reabled and a further 318 have left the service with a reduced package of care.

"Our staff are all very dedicated to the people of Suffolk. No matter what their role, they happily go out to assist RSWs when a situation arises that requires extra help," she adds.

"We are always looking to recruit people who are passionate about making a difference to the lives of those within our community."

To find out more, search Home First Suffolk online or call 01473 296300.

WIN A £250 SHOPPING SPREE AT GLASSWELLS

Glasswells home department store is giving you the chance to win £250 to spend at their big Winter Sale!

Glasswells are the largest home furnishing superstores in East Anglia, offering the best in comfort, choice and quality since 1946.

Discover a massive range of stylish furniture, durable flooring, designer fabrics and stunning home accessories, all with fabulous sale savings this winter.

Q. What year was Glasswells established?

A. _____

Name _____

Telephone _____

If you would like to receive special offers and discounts from Glasswells, please provide your email address: _____

CLOSING DATE 5TH JANUARY 2023

Please either return your completed entry form to your local Glasswells store, post it to the address below, or email your answer to competition@glasswells.co.uk.



Terms and conditions: One correct answer will be selected at random and the winner will be notified in January 2023. Only one entry per person. There will be no cash alternative. By completing this form, you are consenting that Glasswells Ltd. can process your data to administer the competition, send winner notification, publish winner details and winner photography. You can remove yourself from the competition and withdraw your consent at any time by writing to us at the address above. For full details see: www.glasswells.co.uk/privacy-policy.

GLASSWELLS Newmarket Road, BURY ST EDMUNDS, IP33 3TU | glasswells.co.uk