

Beneficiary Statements from the CWC-Solihull Council Collaboration

Lauren

Lauren is a Care Assistant in her thirties and a single mother to three children. She works in domiciliary care and in 2020 applied for a grant from the Care Workers' Charity.

I live with my kids who are three, seven and thirteen, so it's a lot of work! I don't have any other family except my Mum now. It was when my dad was ill that I first got into care... I was impressed by the care workers who came over to the house to take care of him and thought I'd like to try it myself, so I moved into the sector in 2016. I just wanted to give back; I think... I get a lot out of my work, despite the stress. Working in homecare, it's nice getting to see people where they're most comfy in their own space, but it can be nerve wracking the first time you visit a new place, because you never quite know what you're walking into.

Leading up to my application to the CWC, I'd left my ex after suffering mental and financial abuse from him and was back living with my Mum while on the council housing waiting list. I was having to repay debt that my ex had taken out in my name, so money was really tight. Then, on top of that, during lockdown I had to drop down to four shifts a week, as schools were closed and I couldn't find any day care, which meant I took a massive hit financially. Even when schools reopened, I couldn't send my daughter back because apart from her disability, she also suffers from severe asthma, so she was at greater risk of Covid. I really wasn't coping and what with the drop in income was living off my mum, which started to cause a lot of tension between us.

Eventually I was offered a council house, but I hadn't moved in yet, as it was completely unfurnished and without any carpets. It may not sound that important, but my youngest was crawling at the time, and one of my other children has a disability and rolls around a lot, especially when she's upset. She doesn't have much awareness of danger either, so bare floorboards just wouldn't have been safe for either of them. Given my financial situation, I was really stuck.

A friend who also worked in care told me about the CWC and said that I should apply. So, I filled out the form and requested help with some flooring for the kids' room and a bed for my eldest, who'd just been sleeping on loads of pillows on the floor before that, which made for tired and miserable mornings. I also asked for assistance with a cooker, but the main thing was the flooring, as I wasn't going to be able to move my kids into the new place without that.

I was awarded a grant of £1,000, which allowed me to get flooring for the kids' room and the rest of the house, and a bed for my eldest. We couldn't afford the cooker in the end, but luckily someone gave me a used one which works fine. We all just felt happier, more relaxed and less stressed. It took a lot of pressure off me mentally, so I was also able to do my job better as well. The grant just really helped; it came at a point when I was about to leave the industry, but it made me think twice because we were finally able to move, which meant that I wasn't as stressed.

A lot of people have left work since Covid and haven't been replaced, but I'm still working in care. We're fully settled in the new house, which I've made feel homely, and things also improved between me and my Mum - we're even closer now.

Amber

Amber, a single mum with four children, was on maternity leave when her landlord issued her with a Section 21, meaning that she and her kids would have to vacate their home of 13 years within six months.

I started caring for my nan when I was much younger. Then when my first child was born, we found he had autism, which meant that he needed a lot of looking after too, so caring's second nature to me. I've been working in the sector for nearly 10 years, and I love it. I do homecare, and it's lovely, you see every client as if they were family - it's really rewarding. I care for over twenty people and worked through the pandemic, up until the point I went off on maternity leave.

Being a single mum on maternity leave money was already tight, but when the landlord told me he'd decided to sell, I was suddenly facing the possibility of being homeless. I couldn't afford to rent privately - there was really nothing in our price range. So, I contacted the council, and they told me I'd have to get in touch with them once I'd actually left the old flat.

I applied to the Care Workers' Charity for support towards the deposit we would need to put down when renting a new flat and was lucky enough to receive a grant. In the end though, we used that money towards moving expenses and putting stuff in storage, which made things so much easier when it came time to leave. I also bought a carrying cot for my baby, as I knew we'd be moving around a lot.

The council put me and the four kids in emergency accommodation after that. We were all in one hotel room, which was about a 45-minute drive from their school. It was horrible, there was always fighting going on in the other rooms and corridors, and the police were in there all the time - I ended up needing counselling after staying there.

We've since been moved to temporary accommodation and things are much better. We're staying in a three-bedroom house at the moment, but know we'll have to move again eventually. Although it didn't solve all our problems, the grant really helped us at a very difficult time. I'm still working in care.

Linda

Linda, who's in her fifties, was employed as a Care Assistant. She left her former company in July 2020.

I started out as a housekeeper at a residential care home and my manager saw that I was good with the residents, so she suggested that I move over to the care side. This was back in 2015 when I was about 53. It was a new beginning for me. The end-of-life care aspect of the job was very emotional because they become like your family. And it's not just the residents themselves that you get attached to, it's also their families. I loved it, I did.

I couldn't be at work at the start of lockdown, because my husband was on chemo – unfortunately, there isn't a cure for the condition he has. My daughter also came to stay with us because she has a compromised immune system too, so we decided to shield together.

I'd been put on SSP and was struggling. I used to earn around £1,100 a month, and my husband's a self-employed welder, so losing both those incomes was really hard. I first heard about the Care Workers' Charity from one of the secretaries at work and decided to apply. Receiving the grant of £2,000 made a really big difference to us. What the CWC and Solihull Council did was an absolutely amazing thing. If it hadn't been for the grant, I really would've struggled.

Sadly, I never got to return to work as just before Covid hit I had a bad fall at work and hurt my back. Some discs have deteriorated a lot and I've gone from being a carer to being in the situation where I need help myself now. Although the pay wasn't great, I loved the job. I cared for my Mum for years. Working as a paid carer, I cared for whoever it was that I was looking after as if they were my own parents.

Katie

Katie, a Care Assistant in her thirties living and working in the West Midlands, applied to the Care Workers' Charity for support in 2020. Katie lives with her husband Mark and their three kids, aged between six and 14. Mark hasn't been able to work for some years due to poor mental health, making Katie the family's sole breadwinner.

I grew up in Kent by the coast and moved to the Midlands about 15 years ago. We get back to occasionally to see family but can't afford to visit them often. I work in a large care home with a specialist dementia unit. On top of that I take care of the kids, and my husband also needs a lot of support when he has his bad days... So, life's busy.

I've always had a passion for helping people, but first thought I could make a career of it through helping my husband. He was ok when we first got together, but things started to go downhill, and he ended up getting sectioned. It was while taking care of him that I realised I could help other people. If I can put a smile on people's faces... That's what gives me satisfaction. The job's really about helping people to maintain their dignity and respect. That, and working as a team.

I was doing a lot of overtime at the start of the pandemic, partly to raise a bit extra to support the family, but I also wanted to be a team-player, what with a lot of my colleagues having to isolate or shield. The extra income led to me getting a housing benefit over-payment. It was awful – I only had a limited time to pay it off, while also maintaining the whole household and paying bills as usual. Then I missed some work because a child in one of my kids' bubbles at school got Covid, so I was off on SSP for a while, which just made it worse.

Meanwhile, the family still needed things. My youngest was sleeping on a bed that was a hand-me down from his older siblings, and the old mattress was so thin that you could feel slats through it. My kids shouldn't be living like that... Then the washing machine's drum went, which was a nightmare because I needed to wash my uniforms every day for work. I started taking stuff to wash at my mum's, but that wasn't ideal, because she'd had heart trouble and also has COPD, so she wasn't comfortable with my dirty laundry from work being around the place. It was really tricky. Sometimes I did night shifts and then went straight to mum's to do my laundry at eight in the morning, which left me exhausted.

I was really struggling and the loss of earnings while having to isolate was the last straw, so I went to my manager, and she gave me a leaflet from the CWC. The impact that the grant had on my family was massive.

With the £750 that we received I was able to buy a new set of bunkbeds, a washing machine, and pay off £390 of the housing benefit overpayment arrears, which was so helpful because it meant that the repayments were smaller each month after that.

Day-to-day life's still difficult. The kids have been ill in the last few weeks, and I can't always leave them with my husband because of his condition. On top of that loads of staff have left recently, including a manager and a couple of colleagues who wouldn't have the vaccine. At the same time, we're seeing more residents with complex ongoing needs because of having had Covid, as well as residents who are struggling emotionally due to not being able to see their relatives through much of the pandemic. All of this has made things more stressful at work and has had an impact on my own mental health in terms of anxiety, but the truth is that I can't afford to dip, so mostly I just keep going.

Having said all that, receiving the grant was fantastic, and to be honest I'm not sure if I'd still be working in care if it wasn't for that. I would encourage any local authorities considering partnering with the CWC to do so. The grant made such a difference and the pressure it took off the family was huge, so local authorities should do what they can. And to care workers, I'd say: don't ever be afraid to call out for help.