

Film 4 Care and caring relationships

Research team discussion

- Marian: You know you can't really talk about well-being in old age without talking about what is good care and how it's given and received.
- Bea: Although it's easy to talk about and try to negotiate care on behalf of somebody else, it's very difficult to do it for yourself.
- Bunty: It is very hard to receive care graciously in a way you know from when you have always been independent.
- Liz: There was one lady who said she would rather crawl on her hands and knees than ask for care but when she actually wanted something, she expected somebody else to pick up the hints that she wanted care but she wouldn't ask for it.
- Marian: Often people are not very good at saying well actually I need help with this but not that so the carer has to be very attentive to the sort of messages that people are giving and also understanding the way in which people are responding to the sort of care and help that they are getting in order to not, if you like, take over entirely and make people absolutely dependent on them.
- Bunty: There was one lady managed to get her dancing classes and still, she had a very caring attitude to her husband but she enjoyed dancing now that sort of thing makes a big difference in her life didn't it, it gave her an outside interest as well as just thinking that her life was centred round being a carer.
- Marian: So it probably helped her to carry on.
- Narrator: Every one of us has a different attitude towards giving and receiving care. It is shaped by the context of our relationship with others as well as how we feel about ourselves and what is important to us. Accepting help can entail a transition in self-identity and a shift in power, authority and decision-making within a relationship when we have been used to being the one who is giving care it can be hard to acknowledge our own need for help. It can generate complex and sometimes conflicting

emotions. In this scene we return to May who is now receiving help and support from Ruth, a worker with a voluntary sector re-enablement service. Ruth has been helping to build May's confidence since her stroke. She wants to enable her to leave the house and to enjoy some of the activities she did before.

Acted Scenario

May: It's open.

Ruth: Hi May it's me, Ruth. I wish you wouldn't leave that door unlocked.
May.

May: I'm alright, just give me a minute.

Ruth: Oh is one of those for me? oh dear May, what's happened?

May: Oh I'm just being daft. It's Robert's tea.

Ruth: Well where is he?

May: He's gone. I'm sorry, I'm just being really silly.

Ruth: Well I've never known you be silly or daft. Why don't you tell me what happened?

May: He just, but he just, he came in like a whirling dervish. He came to bring me some shopping which is nice but he was in such a hurry.

Ruth: I see.

May: Well, he phoned to say he was on his way so I made him a tea and then when he got here I was just trying to get some biscuits out of the cupboard.

Ruth: Go on.

May: He asked if I was alright.

Ruth: And were you?

May: Well yes, oh, I thought he would stay for a chat I suppose but he was in a hurry so I said I was fine and he gave me a kiss and then he was gone.

Ruth: You must have been disappointed?

May: Well I was alright I thought and then when I came back in here I just, well I just saw the tea and I got upset.

Ruth: May I am sorry.

May: Oh he didn't mean anything by it, he was just in a hurry.

Ruth: I'm sure he didn't.

May: It's just that I look forward to seeing him.

Ruth: I understand.

May: Well, anyway, how are you?

Ruth: Oh I'm alright May. Is that tea still hot?

May: Oh yes, it's got one sugar in.

Ruth: Perfect.

*Commentary
Marian Barnes: Many of the older people we spoke to had been parents and they were therefore used to caring for their children. And for many of them it was really very hard to receive care from their adult children. The roles had changed and the way care was given really affected the ability of older people to receive care. So if they felt that care was rushed, people were doing it because they felt they had to, they found it very difficult to cope with the fact that they were now in this position of needing to receive care.*

May: The thing is I feel well I think that the slower I get the more impatient Robert gets with me.

Ruth: Why do you think that?

May: Well I was always such a doer, out and about, busy. I think Robert liked

that he didn't have to worry about me.

Ruth: And you feel that's changed?

May: Yes, no, well it's not him I blame. I just feel what use am I now. I mean I feel like a burden, I feel as if I have outlived my usefulness.

Ruth: Well I don't think that's true. But, why do you feel that do you think?

May: Well I have to depend so much on others now. I am not giving anything back.

Ruth: Well you could argue that you have been giving for years – raised a family - and now you are having a well-earned rest.

May: I just don't like feeling dependent.

Ruth: No, I know you don't which is why I was surprised last time we spoke when you said you weren't sure about the shopability scheme.

May: Oh yes, that.

Commentary
Beatrice Gahagan: *Sometimes when we are interacting with somebody there are other people who aren't present but who are present really, who are important people in that person's life. And so the way that the person is thinking about themselves and their decisions, there are other people present in those thought processes and so it's really good to be attentive to that and perhaps the difficulties they are having with those decisions.*

May: If Robert doesn't have to bring me shopping, when will I ever see him?

Ruth: I see. OK. You're worried that if you use alternate means Robert won't visit as often.

May: Well, or not at all.

Ruth: Do you have the same worry about Malcolm?

May: Oh no, no that's awful isn't it but Malcolm and I just get on, we can chat for hours.

- Ruth: Does he have more free time than Robert?
- May: Yes, I think so
- Ruth: Well perhaps if Robert didn't have to do the shopping anymore he'd have more time to pop round and see you.
- May: Well maybe.
- Ruth: Well you could broach it with him as a good thing.
- May: Well do you mean say you don't need to bring me eggs anymore, just sit down and drink your tea.
- Ruth: Something like that.
- May: Well he'd probably see the funny side of that, oh it's not that Robert doesn't care, it's just the, well these things they come more naturally to Malcolm.
- Ruth: Yes, I understand.
- May: Robert's always been used to me being independent his whole life well he doesn't really know how to cope with me now.
- Ruth: Well if that's the case the shopability scheme could be really useful. You'd have more independence and Robert would feel more secure that you were coping and he'd be less worried about you and more able to relax.
- May: Yes, that's probably true. I might have a chat with him next time he comes round, oh, I am sorry I got into such a state.
- Ruth: There's nothing to be sorry for May.
- May: I do get a lot more emotional of late.
- Ruth: Well May you've been through a lot in the last couple of months. It's perfectly normal to feel unsettled and emotional.
- May: I just thought that I'd come out of hospital and just get back to normal.

Of course it doesn't work like that.

Ruth: Well, yes, no, but things will get better. You've had to adjust to a lot of change and you are doing really well. The key is accepting help. Everybody needs help from time to time and that's why we're here.

May: Well you are, it's your job. Oh I didn't mean that like it sounds but I know you love your job pet but what I mean to say is it's not what Malcolm and Robert signed up for is it?

Ruth: You seem comfortable with the help that Malcolm provides though?

May: Oh yes, yes, well that's true. He's not my son, he's not Robert, he's more like well a good friend I suppose. We have a bit of a laugh. It doesn't feel like, well I know that he's helping me but it feels more like well more like a social thing.

Ruth: You've known him his whole life haven't you?

May: Yes. I was good friends with his mum. She passed on a few years ago.

Ruth: Well then I imagine it's really comforting for Malcolm having you around.

May: Yes, something like that.

Ruth: It's clear how much you love Robert. Maybe he just has a different nature to Malcolm.

May: Yes, he's, well he's more of a doer like me I suppose. If something is broken Robert will fix it for you. If you need something you will get it. Well that's very handy. Maybe I should just give in over this Skype thing and give him something to do.

Ruth: Skype?

May: Yes, he says it will help me keep in touch with friends.

Ruth: Well I think that sounds like a great idea. Might be nice for him to have a project to do.

May: Well he does like a project.

Ruth: Perfect.

May: Well, my head does feel a bit clearer I must say.

Ruth: Helps to talk things through doesn't it?

May: Yes, yes it does.

Ruth: Is there anything else you want to talk about?

May: No, no, not for the moment thanks love.

Ruth: Well we did really well on our walk to the post office last week. Have you managed to get out at all since then?

May: No, I haven't really felt up to it on my own.

Ruth: Do you still feel up for heading out for a bit now?

May: Oh, well, not today, not really thanks.

Ruth: OK. How about you beat me at scrabble again?

May: Yes, alright then.