



## A Christies Carer's story - Emily Dawson

**Emily Dawson explains how becoming a carer has given her freedom to explore, to grow lasting friendships and build her own confidence and resilience. Working for Christies Care has also offered Emily career progression and she now works as part of our recruitment and compliance team helping others to understand what it takes to be a carer, offering assurance and passing on what she has learned herself to help others as they embark on this rewarding career journey.**

“My mum had been a carer in the UK when she was in her early 20s. She worked hard and loved the people she met, the independence and the excitement of living and travelling overseas. She has always spoken fondly of her time in care and suggested it as something to do after school if you're not sure on what direction to take.

I was 19, a student nurse in an underfunded public hospital in Cape Town and I was hating it. I thought caring for people would be the main part of the job, but it was dealing with the lack of equipment, safety measures and skeleton staff that had suffered through the system for years.

I used the money that I had saved and bought a ticket to New Zealand and used the much-needed break to come up with a plan. I wanted to use the skills that I had learnt in university and thought of my mum's adventurous time in London. I applied to Christies Care the week I got home.

My application and compliance stage was swift and whilst at a dinner party one evening, I received a call asking if I could be in Saxmundham, UK, on the other side of the world that coming Sunday! It was such an adventure. My first time buying a train ticket, figuring out which side of the train is the front, getting my bags ready, waiting by the door 5 minutes before the train shows in case I miss the stop and dragging my bag down the small streets, Pam's directions in hand.

Training taught me everything I needed to know while working with clients and the trainers put me at ease about asking for help on the job if something unexpected came up. The support was there from day one.

I also found a new family in my training group, a few of us were similar in age and we did everything together; picnicked in the park on our lunch breaks, made Sunday roasts and made plans to meet up on our breaks while working. These were strong relationships and I didn't know how much I would need them whilst with my clients. I am so grateful that the training provided 2 weeks to build them.

I was anxious for my first client as I am sure we all are. I felt shy and still slightly overwhelmed. I remember she had an electric door that closed on a timer and locked once shut. I locked myself out in the rain on my first night and had to run around in the dark to her window and shamefully ask for the code. I had never driven an automatic car and couldn't understand why it wouldn't drive if I accelerated while my foot was lightly on the break, panicking I would roll back into the car parked a few inches behind me. We laughed a lot at my mistakes and the tension eased over the first few days. We chatted and walked, watched TV and on those nights, I was homesick my training friends and I would group call while cooking dinners.

My clients were mostly young, a few years older than me with Cerebral Palsy or elderly clients with Dementia. Both I loved equally. I was often made to feel part of a family and was treated with respect no matter my young age. I felt my confidence grow with Christies as a support behind me and the independence I gained was life-changing.

I made a point to go outside and walk every day on my break. Rain, shine or snow. I valued the time and relationships I built with my clients but I thrived in my work because I was always so excited to go and experience somewhere new and beautiful, especially in Suffolk.

Those 2 hours off a day, I would just walk and think and watch and quite often charity shop on the way home. This internal happiness is what gave me the ability to do my job through the rough patches.

My biggest challenge was being with a client who was unable to communicate at all, nor was there any sign that my client could hear or understand me. The house was a big beautiful home and garden but it was deathly quiet and I felt like no sun ever reached me while I was inside. I was lonely and always cold and tired of hearing only my own voice. This was the first time I didn't go outside on my breaks and as soon as the agency care came to relieve me, I'd crawl into bed and sleep. The second week, one of the carers who came in for lunch told me to go into town because I needed to get out and they were playing music in the square. I changed my routine from then with a run through the forest and a hot bath when I got back, in time for some much-needed conversation. While I had many a supportive phone call from Christies, that was a challenge I needed to overcome myself.

I left Christies Care to pursue my education back in South Africa, but I left the UK a different person with a suitcase packed with my favourite Sainsbury's Chocolate biscuits. I had grown up, faced the world, learned to be okay on my own and build relationships with so many different people. Being a carer is not an easy job every day. But it taught me commitment, resilience and gave me a new confidence I don't think any other job could have given me.

I now work for Christies Care again, 3 years later in Recruitment and Compliance. I speak with applicants wanting to embark on the same journey I did. I can use my knowledge from being a carer to decide if someone would have the personality traits and skills needed to be a good carer. If they would treat someone as they would like to be treated. I have full Christies Care Support as I did when working in my clients' homes. I have the training needed to give me full confidence in my ability to do the job and I have the hope that those who I help to become carers love the clients who they work with, meet people they will

never forget and become better versions of themselves while helping someone else. The hope that they too walk along the River Deben in Woodbridge, have a picnic with some Sainsbury's biscuits in Christchurch Park, and take a week off to walk the coastal path in Falmouth.

These memories will stay with me forever. Now, like my mum, I think that caring is something that gives us purpose in life when we may not feel like we have any. I think it builds us into the people we want to be most and gives us plenty of stories to tell about our adventurous time spent in London.