

Current Title: Community Aged Care Worker

Curveballs, Chaos and COVID

My name is T*** or T for short. I have been working in the Aged and Disability Care Sector for some time now. Studied Community Services back in 2013/14 and have grown and developed myself and my experience from there.

As I started out in the Disability care sector first then sort of moved over into Aged Care I believe this has given me good scope in regards to the two sectors and where they're the same and where there are differences.

As I approached the industry from the Activities/recreational side of things I feel I have come in from a side angle and worked my way in from there. As the Disability sector moved over to the NDIS I moved into the Aged Care sector and thought 'oh how hard could this be surely they are similar and Residential Aged Care has designated Activities/Lifestyle Roles.' Subsequently I landed myself a role working as an Activities officer in an Aged Care home.

Let's just say I have learnt a lot. What similar and what's different and what made me stay in the sector and grow.

Firstly I love working with disadvantaged people and found this a main motivation for doing my Community Courses in the first place. My previous roles involved working with children in Aquatic environments whereby I found myself being drawn to help people that didn't fit the mould and subsequently found myself as a volunteer swim coach for the local branch of Special Olympics movement which I really enjoyed.

Adaptation is one of the key principles that I have found that links all these fields together and makes them all challenging in different ways. I enjoy finding ways to make things work for different individuals and believe that this principle holds the key to working with pretty much anybody.

So after 2-3 years in above mentioned fields I moved into aged care, and since then feel like I have learnt so much more. It was a bit of a baptism of fire but I believed I was up for the challenge. Any Residential Facility takes many people to make it work and run. Housing so many vulnerable people with high needs requires many people and awesome teamwork. Ensuring they receive adequate care is a hard task from all the aspects they ask you to look at.

Balancing your time on the floor, care plans, training, paperwork and preparation for any activities all takes time and there is never enough staff to go around in the activities department as while it is important so is the resident's personal care and clinical management.

Previously I had worked in residential disabilities and a small group home with 5-6 residents in each house. Residential aged care is like this but on a much larger scale. But while larger homes might be more profitable it makes it harder to be able to deliver/maintain the level of care that these elderly and vulnerable people deserve.

As the NDIS has been rolled out now for a few years, I believe the Aged Care and disability Care sector could learn to work together to develop better models of care for both of them. I cannot comment too much on the NDIS as I can see there has been a lot of money thrown into it and this is something that is being refined and will continue to be. However as we are being asked to comment in relation to the employment models in the aged care sector I feel that conclusions can be drawn from NDIS modelling and tried and adapted for the Aged care sector.

This is already happening with development of online platform work, allowing care workers to work independently and allowing families/persons more choice in how they receive care and what works best for them.

As with the NDIS there is Residential facilities (all be it larger), independent community living and home care options for persons in place as they age. Unfortunately some people's health determines what type of help they need and where they are able to go but we are afforded the luxury of choice as well with the NDIS and aged care sector offering clients different options for in home care services. One of the basic principles of the NDIS model is allow persons to have a choice and a say in what they want and how they have their care delivered. Choice is a theme that continues through into aged care and as a worker who has experienced both sectors, feel this is vitally important for the aging population as well.

When working in Aged care facilities I found myself working in the locked dementia ward in the afternoons, which helped provide me with great insight into how people's behaviour changes with dementia throughout the day and how that time in the afternoon is extra important having an activities person on the floor a to help with the things that don't arise during the day, and have since learnt a lot about dementia care and what could be done better in relation to what types of care can be offered for these people also, and strongly believe that if there were more staff on the floor in different capacities then more personalised services could be offered which makes a huge difference to someone's mindset if they feel that someone cares.

I am very grateful for my time spent working in residential care facilities in an Lifestyle and Allied health assistant roles and believe this has given me the ground work, skills and experience I need to go out and be able to offer my services out in the community independently. As I have experienced both sides of the coin I can see that not all platform workers would be the same and finding good solid dependable people requires the onus to fall back on the family or the people hiring the workers in the first place. However as we have all seen no two people are the same whether they work in a care facility or a person's home abuse or sub care standards can happen either way.

I personally believe you wouldn't be in this industry if you didn't care and if I was out there offering community care without the prior experience I have I would be a very different person. Platform work is my main source of income right now and I enjoy the flexibility it offers me without the stress that goes with having to work for a company. Unfortunately not all workers on platforms use it for the same reasons and would not come with the same level of care and responsibility but I think if platform work can be offered for NDIS services I do not see why it shouldn't be there for the elderly community also.

As this report is focussed on the personal care workers and RN's of which given my experience I do believe I fall into this category it is hard area to define. The paper is asking us to comment on the

value of labour hire services, contractors and platform workers. As discussed earlier we are all different and because we are all different we will all work differently no matter how we are employed. So the overarching principles which encompass direct employment in residential aged care will be different for home care settings and given the COVID pandemic and chronic staff shortages these issues have been brought to a head.

From my experience Residential facilities do not like to use labour hire services but are sometimes forced to as current directly employed workforce are inadequate to cover rosters placing too much pressure on the staff that do turn up which can lead to higher turnovers than usual.

However have seen some amazing labour hire nurses and care staff come into the facilities and believe me when I say they have made a huge difference. Platform workers can be used the same way and have obviously filled gaps during the pandemic in care homes, but does pose the risk of persons working across multiple sites which under normal circumstances isn't such a big problem.

Another issue I have noticed in an Aged Care setting is the amount of different nationalities working in the sector. Some of which are highly efficient and well trained with a good command of English and others not so much. Unfortunately with persons that are generally hard of hearing or have other barriers to their communication this is another hurdle that they have to learn to adapt to. Diversity should be celebrated and I am sure it enriches the lives of the people they work with giving them other things to share with the residents whilst giving them real world experience to help build up their skills but have also heard that sometimes accents are too hard for people to understand.

From this aspect the industry needs to remain viable option for people who's first language is English to pursue as a career because I believe there has to be a balance and therefore might need to become or remain flexible in the ways it allows people to work. Wages is always a topic for discussion and has been discussed that wages for care workers in residential facilities need to improve.

In relation to having a flexible workforce out in home care type settings I think is vitally important to allow people again the power of choice which is something that has been highlighted in the new aged care standards.

The dignity of choice and risk are some of the things that remain paramount in care setting be it under the NDIS or Aged care, and yes accountability is something that also has to be considered. As a platform worker/independent contractor a lot of the onus falls upon me to provide a good service. I enjoy this as I believe it makes me a better worker and people can see I know what I am doing which gives me a sense of accomplishment and makes me want to learn to keep ensuring I offer a good standard of care. The ratings system on online sites help give people an incentive to do well and see what others have said about the services that a particular person has offered but can also damage a reputation if for some reason someone leaves a bad review. I guess that's just part of sites like Mable's way of ensuring transparency for people looking to engage and connect with services on the platforms.

I have found working for sites such as Mable highly rewarding and have been able to connect with some amazing opportunities to grow and enhance my skills and to have that seen and displayed for what it is makes me feel so good.

The aged care commission into Quality and ageing has a section where you can make a complaint or seek resources or provide feedback of a different kind and is a way of keeping people honest. It is a peak government body/regulator that allows for persons to be able to seek independent advice if the other paths they have gone down have been unsuccessful. As we all stumble sometimes I think it is good to remember that there are these avenues that individuals in a particular industry can take if they feel they need extra help or resources.

In conclusion being able to run my own business as a flexible platform worker has been a game changer for me and allowed me to continue in an industry I love but was wondering where I would end up next. I do hope that my personal account of my experiences has helped and that I provide some insight into what I have learnt along the way.