

Zimbabwean refugee, teacher and PhD struggles to find work outside of the care industry

This carer is employed full time to provide comprehensive care to three gentlemen with complex special needs between the ages of 30 & 57 in their own home. She came to the U.K. 12 years ago after seeking refuge from her home country of Zimbabwe, she is highly educated, is a qualified teacher and holds a PhD. The level of education that this carer has is unusual, although she has been trying to move out of the care industry and gain employment related to her education and non-care experience, she has found this difficult, it is for this reason that she has stayed in the care industry for so long. However as she has recently gained her U.K. citizenship this may change.

'I am struggling to get out of the care sector, I am underutilising my skills'

Despite her extensive education, she has not received any formal education beyond basic vocational courses in care, surprising when considering her time spent in the industry and the considerable responsibility that she has. Medication administration, cooking and personal hygiene are examples of her day to day responsibilities and she also keeps her service users integrated with their local communities. Empowering the service user to make choices and decisions is difficult with non-verbal services users, yet is possible with her patient approach.

Although this carer is a paid worker, she feels the level of remuneration is inadequate when compared with the responsibilities, difficulties and risks of her job. She feels that there is a high risk of catching diseases due to the personal nature of many of her responsibilities and the proximity between the carer and the service user and has caught viral infections previously. This risk is greater than usual as these service users are unable to talk about their ills, this is complicated by the fact that the use of full PPE can be seen as disrespectful to the service user. She also feels that her employer is not appreciative of her work and her opinions are undervalued, yet will be passed off as the ideas of her superiors when it suits them. She also feels that often in disputes between the service users (and their families) and the carer, the carer is often at a disadvantage and can be dismissed for any accusation without evidence.

However the reward that this carer experiences through the provision of care for vulnerable people is considerable. She feels that she is doing something good for humanity and the level of reliance that service users develop for their carer is somewhat maternal and is nothing to do with the level of remuneration that she receives. She also feels that the general public value her contributions when they see her out in the community with the service users.

'It is the feeling you get by doing something good for people.'

This carer has received no formal training, yet has received vocational courses to cover the basic job roles. She believes that many skills spawn from inherent personality traits such as empathy, problem solving, teamwork, punctuality and honesty. She feels that other skills can be learned on the job such as problem solving. Her perception is that anyone who has been to school can be trained and become an expert carer and may benefit from the career advancement in the industry which could take someone to the project manager level or beyond through the attainment of NVQs. However, she feels that there is a shortfall in training in many areas including legislation that keeps carers up to date with new regulations to allow carers to stay aware of changing legislation.

'Sometimes you're confronted with a situation where you have to think on your think and you've never come across in training'