



Transcript:

Older People and Residential Care: Roger's Story

Narrator: In the late 1980s Roger Newman was living the Good Life with his partner David.

Roger Newman: We could afford holidays, things that we either needed or even didn't need. And so consequently it was a really fun time, I used to enjoy leaving school on a Friday and motoring down to Bexhill and the weekend would be there and the holidays would be there. And we had a dog and two cats and lots of fish and friends and dinner parties, and so on. And you kind of get that feeling that things are forever.

Narrator: But things weren't to be forever. David started to behave oddly.

Roger Newman: David used to come home every single day with something that he'd bought. And I used to think it was funny, we could afford it. Although we ended up with sixty dinner plates, Heaven knows how many tea services, mountains of clothes and I remember my parents finding it very funny as well. This is David, you know, he couldn't stop buying things. Then in 1992, I realised that things really were bad. People were saying that he was walking into people's gardens looking through letterboxes and that there were strange people who were going to the house and quite clearly using him in some way ... perhaps even stealing things.

Narrator: Although they were no longer partners, Roger sought medical advice and David was diagnosed with pre-senile dementia.

Roger Newman: I decided that he would go into residential care, but I would ... who would look after the nuts and bolts of his care and I would provide the tender love and care. And I had decided from that point onwards that I would give him whatever he needed.

Lyndsay River: The anxiety is really that, because people have usually experienced homophobia or trans phobia in their lives, they are concerned when you go into the care home, you are losing control over what people you're with. You're going to be with other residents who may be anti gay or anti trans. You are going to be with staff who may be inadequately trained or indeed may believe that your sexual orientation or the fact that you're gender has been reassigned is wrong. And they may conclude that they now have to go back in the closet.

Narrator: Roger decided the care home should know that he and David had once had a close gay relationship.

Roger Newman: We never really had any discrimination; it was more a lack of understanding about a lack of empathy. A lack of asking the right questions. I mean there were significant things that I had to point out to them, for example on one occasion one of the staff said "Oh he has a dental appointment next week." And I said "But you haven't told me about that and you don't do that unless I have a space in my diary so that I can come along. I always come along to this." And I think that there was a sort of a feeling that now he was in their hands that they were primarily responsible for him. And in some ways that was true, but I was more than the carer I was the lover. I decided that it was really quite important that they should learn from this situation so that they could make it more comfortable for us.

Narrator: Sadly in 2000 David died suddenly, but Roger had been impressed by the efforts the home had made to become more inclusive.

Roger Newman: Just watching, making a mental note of the things that surround the person will enable the person working in the home to give out the right signals that make the resident feel safe. That they can perhaps take a little step forward and say, you know, "I really like him. We've

been really good friends.” And making people feel safe is the issue and once you feel safe ... and this is always the issue related to coming out, once you feel safe, then you deliver those heart rending words “I’m Gay”.

Narrator: Eventually Roger met Mike and they formed a very happy Civil Partnership, but in 2002 Mike was diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer and had to go into a hospice.

Roger Newman: One of the things that we had decided right ... almost from the very start, was that if people came in to our situation as carers, health professionals and so on, that we needed to be out to them. Now Mike was not out and so it was a considerable decision on his part and a brave decision. I remember him saying to me on one occasion, “They’re watching us you know.” And I said “What do you mean?” and he said “They know they’ve got to get it right.” And I think that was the wisest thing that anyone could have said, and it was the best approach that any residential accommodation or any place could offer, they were watching us so that they could get it right. And they did get it right. On one occasion I ... when I went into the small ward that he was in, one of the nurses said “He’s having his bath do you want to come in and help?” in other words it was a recognition that even in the most personal aspects of Michael’s care that I was involved. I mean I’d been bathing him for months before, so why shouldn’t I continue with that now? And they recognised that. Things like that really made us feel that we were being honoured and respected and accepted for who we were in relationship to each other. And so when he died and at that moment when he died and I always remember just pressing that buzzer and they came in and I remember the nurse saying “You’ve just been wonderful.” Sorry. It’s doesn’t usually hit me like that, but she said “You were there for each other.” And that’s how it was.

[End of Recording]