

ROSE A. CARROLL OAK TREE VILLAS

I have been employed with Oak Tree Villas-A StoneBridge Community, for 11 years. Throughout those years I have been lucky enough to work in several different positions, allowing me to get to know our residents and their families on all levels of their care. My current position is Social Services/Admission Director and I have been in this position for the last 3 years. Previously I worked as a charge nurse/clinic supervisor as well as Director of Assisted Living. My experience come from a combination of these positions that I have had over the last 11 years.

Seeing our residents rejoice in the happiness of others around them and showing love to each and every person who enters their room has helped me do the same. I have learned how important it is to be able to love people even when they are at their weakest moments. Everyone reacts different to illness. Some people take things in stride, and others have a more difficult time. Some also have a difficult time expressing these emotions, and they come out in all different ways. Some make me cry while others get mad. Being able to love someone at their weakest moments does not just mean their physically weak moments, but also their emotionally weak moments. Showing love and kindness to someone on their good and bad days shows you really do care.

Helping our residents has helped me learn how to provide and teach dignity. This is not something you can learn in class. These lessons must be taught by real people that you can relate to. Helping our residents has Helped me to always remember that everyone is someone's somebody.

No class can teach you to tell someone's family their parent has died or is dying. I have done this job many times, more times than I care to count, but we do what we have to do even when it causes yourself such pain. If you work in the industry you know that you love all your residents, but there are always those that you hold a little closer in your heart.

I had a resident I became very close to over several years of caring for her. I had been with her as she beat lung cancer. This was following a history of colon and breast cancer. She once again had been diagnosed with breast cancer in her remaining breast. Doctors told her after her lung cancer, that she could never have surgery again because it was just too risky. She wasn't willing to give up. She did the impossible, and it worked. This lady was so very brave and again beat cancer against all odds. We continued to grow close as did her family and I. It was always my pleasure to help her with anything she needed, even if it "it wasn't my job". About a year after her surgery, she slowly continued to decline but was still fighting to get better. After going to several doctors' appointments with little answers or results, she asked me to call the doctor and ask them to tell me what the prognosis was and what their plans to get her better were. I did

this and got the answer I had heard many times before: “There just isn’t anything else we can do”. At that moment, my heart sank. How was I going to tell this lady and her family there wasn’t any more that could be done? This is a lady who had fought so hard for many years. This is a lady that I loved with all my heart just like my own Grandma. This is the lady who asks about my children and remembers their birthdays just like they are her own. This job wasn’t something I was new to, but nevertheless I couldn’t figure out how I would tell her. I had her family present when I went to tell her, because I knew this would be very hard for her to hear and that she would need the support. As I tell her and her family the news I find that she is comforting me. She tells me, “I know this is hard to say but I will be just fine.” She let me know it was ok to hurt with her and that it is ok if this message is hard. Helping her helped me remember nursing is more than pills and documenting; it’s opening your heart to care for others.

My lessons didn’t stop after I gave her and her family the news. I continued to help her as her physical and emotional needs grew. Sometimes it was just sitting with her. She helped me learn lessons that no book can teach you. No book can teach you how to cry with your residents. On the day she passed, she was amazingly alert. It was a weekend, but she called and I came in. I had tears in my eyes as she told me goodbye and promised to give lots of hellos and hugs once she reached the gates. I couldn’t come up with any words, because I knew if I did I would no longer be able to fight back the tears in my eyes. She held my hand and again told me she would be just fine. She told me it was ok to cry in front of her and with her. She opened her heart to me and helped me know it’s ok to be who we are and to love everyone even in their weakest moment.

Helping our residents has helped me learn that opening your heart to others means you might get hurt, but showing love and compassion to someone in need is worth every second of it.

I have had many residents help me become the person I am today just by helping them, and I am forever grateful for this.