



## Outcomes under COVID stories – Personal Outcomes Network

### A personal family story – Lockdown with Betty - by Denise Noone, Freelance Photographer and carer



Denise 57 Freelance Photographer,  
Ian 57 Plasterer,  
4 offspring:  
Ethan 23 Bar manager;  
Alistair 23 Student/supermarket  
assistant;  
Lili 20 Student/waitress;  
Ruby 16 Student/waitress.  
Mother/Grandmother Betty 79 who has  
dementia

#### How have you been able to keep a focus on what matters to people during COVID?

Before lockdown my mum, Betty, who has dementia, was on a visit from London and we were expecting my sister to come up and bring her back down south. It turned out my sister's husband was on immune suppressing drugs and it was decided that mum would remain in Scotland with us during lockdown.

At first, I was worried it was going to be too much because Mum needs a lot of attention. Because there are six of us already, with only one person working part-time, we decided we could share the care. Also, to be honest I was feeling guilty about her going back down south, she would have been near the epicentre so her staying saved me a lot of anxiety.

#### What have you had to do differently and what made this possible?

We did not have any spare rooms so Betty had to share with my sixteen-year-old daughter Ruby, who found it hard sometimes. One of Mum's symptoms is paranoia. She would think people were plotting against her. I would deal with this with distraction, by putting the news on or getting everyone to play cards with her.

At tricky times Ruby would try and reason with her but there was no placating Mum and this would upset Ruby. To dissipate and alleviate this situation my older daughter Lili would swap with Ruby for a few days at a time.

Our days had to be very structured for Mum. I would get up early to get a couple of family-free hours and Mum would wake up later. I would bring her some breakfast and watch

something on tv with her, to get her in a positive frame of mind. Mum insisted on doing chores and she particularly enjoyed ironing. Being in lockdown there was not a lot of ironing to be had, so the decommissioned school and work shirts came out time and time again to be pressed. Any task we were in doing in the house would always include her in some small way and it kept her occupied and content.

Mum would not ask for or make herself food, so we had to make sure she ate. She could not function very well if she was left on her own in a room for any length of time and couldn't see people so there was always one of us in her view. A few times we took our eye off the ball, she would get agitated and leave the house "to walk home, I am not wanted here!" My boys would be dispatched to persuade her to come home.

All our efforts were made easier by lockdown because we were all available to give her the attention she needed.

#### **What have you noticed that has been better?**



When mum comes to stay in normal times, the family are often off to work, school, college or socialising and the majority of mum's care falls to me. The most she usually stays is three weeks. I have MS and that time span is usually my limit. On this occasion, she had already been with us for weeks and then due to lockdown that extended to over 3 months. Betty has always been a sociable being and she responded well to being locked up with all of us. There was always someone to make eye contact with and banter with, which she loved.

#### **How did this make you feel?**

Having all my family together certainly made my life easier than it would have been and I am grateful that they were all so patient and kind to their Nan. For me it was a pleasure to have my children all in one place for this period of time and kind of get to know them again because in normal times life is hectic. I am ready for them to fly again but worry about what lies ahead for them

#### **What have you learned through this?**

Sometimes mum would get unreasonably cross with me and it would get my hackles up and I would defend myself and it would get quite fraught. My daughter Lili suggested that I should bite my lip and apologise to her for those imagined slights and it worked a treat.

Generally, I have learnt to treat everybody more softly, it works in an obvious way with mum but it is better for everybody and me.

#### **Anything else you want to tell us?**

Looking forward to a more gentle normality