Making Every Day Count

Article by Lara Bywater, Director, LDC Care Company and The Outstanding Society

How often do you or people you know say, Life is Short? We all use this phrase, as a reflex reaction, to encourage and validate people to take that risk or decision whether it is applying for a new job, booking a holiday or eating that piece of delicious cream cake. It is ingrained in our collective psyche that indeed life is short, we turn on the news to hear of tragic events – this again collectively validates us as individuals and a as nation. I have visions of Roman Gladiators going into battle and having Carpe Diem echoing through the stadium. It is how we are wired.

Do we translate this into social care? Do we honestly, systematically incorporate this thinking into everyday living for people receiving paid-for support? I fear that we can be so caught up in the implementation of a beautifully crafted support plan that we can lose sight of the freedom needed to make those impulsive decisions.

At LDC Care Co I am proud that we embrace this as part of our culture. We have been referred to by many professionals over the years as a 'can do' organisation, in spite of working with many people with legally imposed restrictions. This has meant we have become an organisation that is approached to provide support for people who need a different approach to risk management. I want to be really clear we are not irresponsible or maverick, but our default is never no, it is always how.

A recent case really made me think about this. We started supporting a young autistic man who has most of his adult life in secure settings, with multiple failed discharges. His files were thick with clinical observations, records of bad days and restrictions. Lots of work went into facilitating a transition to his new house. The clinical MDT were brilliant – they included him in the planning meetings with us and our teams. We collectively worked with him to create the best chance of success. We are seven months in and whilst, like all of us, he has had a few bad days, he is settled.

I was moved last week when I was chatting to him a couple of weeks ago and he said to me, 'I want to go to London for the day'. He told me about the things he would like to do. Now, many of us would not consider this a huge ask in life, but for him, having had so little freedom for so many years it was. Excited conversations ensued and within a few days, with discrete but meticulous planning, he made the train journey to London with his brilliant support workers. This was a monumental achievement as he had been labelled historically as someone who 'cannot tolerate public transport'. He then went on to use the DLR, the tube and the cable car at Stratford. As the day went on he mentioned that he would like to go to Buckingham Palace (not part of the original plan) – the team could have said let's do that another day but they read the situation and ensured that he went to the palace after all 'life is short'. That day is a reminder to us all that people in paid for support still deserve to have impulsive moments of joy. He had a wonderful day, his support team were thrilled to be able to facilitate this and the clinical MDT were delighted to hear of such a great adventure after such a short period of time. He now has the confidence to express more of his desires – he is currently planning a short break in September.

I believe that this day is borne out of our culture of enabling the people we support to be surrounded by teams who are confident and motivated in an atmosphere where moments like this happen every day – big and small.