

TELL ME M♥RE...



In 2020 Age Cymru began a Welsh Government funded project called Tell Me More to find out how care home residents have been during the difficult period of the pandemic.

Residents from all-across Wales were asked over Zoom about their experience and have taken their time to share stories with us.

The stories and insights we heard were often uplifting, sometimes sad but always full of inspiration and hope. The conversations were highly valued by us and the care home residents.

Why conversations like this matter

Since the dawn of humanity some things have remained constant: we live together in groups, we travel and move around together, and we have a fundamental need to communicate with each other. It makes us feel valued and connected. We all function through interaction with other human beings and much of our communication is facial, non-verbal. During lockdowns people have needed to feel that connection more than ever.



Looking at faces is one of our first forms of communication, allowing natural facial mimicry to occur, helping us feel empathy towards each other. During the pandemic face masks have often made this difficult, especially for those with hearing loss; unable to rely on lipreading and to see people smile. Communicating with distant loved ones via Zoom means although we haven't always been able to physically be in touch, talking virtually has helped because we can see faces, enabling us to gauge mood, reactions, and responses more easily.

Eye contact is an important part of communicating with people

- Making eye contact allows us to respond in a personalised way to the needs of the person we are talking with, engendering feelings of empathy and compassion
- “Making eye contact signals to another person that you are paying attention. It is one way we share intention and emotion, and it requires that you synchronize eye movements with someone else”¹



- Our mutual gaze connects us to each other, showing we are 'present'
- We learn through stories; from bedtime stories when we are small to shared memories, tales of our own childhood relayed to us by our elders, helping us to build and shape the people we become
- Sharing our stories improves our self-esteem and is especially beneficial for people with dementia.²



Through sharing our life stories, with others, we discover common ground, making connections and recognising many of our experiences are universal, as well as letting others glimpse into our past, forming strong bonds in the process.

Residents living in care homes often rely on their care staff to help them reach much of their basic human needs³ and central to this process is belonging, achieved through connection. When we talk, what really connects us is knowing we're being heard. Not just audibly, but in a way that shows empathy and understanding. This is integral to our sense of self and wellbeing. When we're 'present' through active listening we connect with people, we feel, seen, heard, acknowledged. It's what makes a place feel like home. It's what makes people feel alive.

When someone shares their story with you, they're letting you into their world, allowing you to feel something of their lives and perspective. Being open to listening to another's story and share in their experience is simultaneously brave and vulnerable and engenders trust and empathy.

"Empathy plays a critical interpersonal and societal role, enabling sharing of experiences, needs, and desires between individuals and providing an emotional bridge that promotes pro-social behaviour."⁴ Empathy isn't trying to 'fix it,' empathy is feeling with someone, connecting through common ground, even if it's sometimes painful. **"Rarely can a response make something better, what makes something better is connection."**⁵

The Senses Framework⁶ and person-centred care creates positive and sustainable relationships in care homes, between residents, families, and staff. It can achieve enriched environments of care, recommending staff, residents and their families need to experience the senses of security, belonging, continuity, purpose, significance, and achievement in the care setting; successful practice of relationship centred care results in residents, families and staff, having these six senses met.⁷

Getting to know you “...the conversations became more broadly thematic and [...] started to develop along the lines of the ‘Senses Framework.’ Jon, facilitator for Tell Me More

Some of the questions we asked in the context of the Senses Framework:

Security	What helps you feel at home?	What helps you feel safe?	What would you change if you could?
Continuity	What are your interests? Tell me more...	Are you able to do the things you love?	Do you have opportunities to try new things?
Belonging	Do you have good friends in the home?	How do you stay connected with your family?	What could make things better?
Purpose	Are you able to plan your day?	What are your ambitions?	What are your hopes for the future?
Achievement	What has been your biggest achievement?	Do you set yourself goals to stay active?	Does your home help you with this?
Significance	What makes you happy?	What do you look forward to?	What is your favourite food/smell/place?

How to hold conversations online

Support from care home staff is essential in arranging Zoom chats in homes and is really appreciated by all those they help. Virtual engagement can be challenging and a little bumpy to start, but it’s also instant and can work brilliantly, as well as being very quick and flexible.

Residents have told us that they like to be asked. How are you today? What do you think? Is there anything you want or need? We know it’s important to our residents that we ask them their opinions; asking lets people know they are significant.

At the end of each chat, we thank the residents for taking time out of their day to talk to us. Researchers studying gratitude have found that being thankful and expressing it to others is good for our health and happiness. Not only does it feel good, it also helps us build trust and closer bonds with the people around us.⁸

Here are some other things we've found useful along the way...

Ditch any preconceptions, go with the flow, relax, be yourself, listen and empathise

Video chat checklist: Top Tips!

- Have a member of staff on hand to help with the technical set up
- Quiet room
- Good wi-fi connection
- Get your device in a stable position for the duration of the chat
- Make sure you can see and hear each other well – check the volume!
- Be conscious of your own body language
- Smile, say hello and say your name!
- Ask “how are you doing today?”
- Say thank you for taking the time to have a chat.



Developing the conversation

- Share some of your own life stories and experiences, or a favourite joke, find common ground, where did they like to go out?
- Give space for your conversation partner to respond, don't rush to fill the silence
- Read the mood of your conversation partner as best you can and respond sensitively, especially in tone of voice
- When residents are new to video calls, a care worker that will reassure them that it's going well and that they're doing fine, is really valuable

Our Tell Me More conversations took us to many different places, hearing many wonderful and insightful moments, here's a few we'd like to share with you:

The little things...



'Wil was amazing. He is 90 and an absolute star. Conversation flowed so well. After our chat ended, I had a wee cry, he made me really reflect on how small things that we (or I) take for granted in life but can have huge impact on others. All he wanted to do before he left this world was to see the new bypass. The same bypass that before my chat with him, I used to moan about being stuck in the new road traffic!'

Sandie, facilitator for Tell Me More

Treasured memories...

'I asked, "how long have you been here?" Peter responded with the most beautiful story of love and loss during the pandemic. He's such a gentle soul and so pragmatic about his experience. He shared memories of a family outing to the beach and his favourite song. His son came to take him out to lunch just after we had spoken, and Peter shared our chat with him. His son was delighted to hear these family stories that were new to him.'

Laura, facilitator for Tell Me More



"What's your secret?"

Was a good question to ask! She told me she is 95 and used to work in a brewery, she says she thinks that's why she's lived so long!'

Emma, facilitator for Tell Me More



So many stories...

'I especially enjoyed my chat with a chap called Len. Len was living with dementia and used to be a binman from what I could gather. He told amazing, vivid stories about picking wimberries for the women to make delicious pies, he talked about walking up the mountain on a thundery night...he talked with joy about ripping bread up and watching the birds come down to get it.'

Jon, facilitator for Tell Me More



Experiment at home

Try sitting with your conversation partner and

- Talk to each other for a minute with your eyes closed
- Silently look into each other's eyes for two minutes
- Look into each other's eyes and talk for three minutes.

What happened? How does it make you feel?

What did you discover?

Try asking each other some of these questions

- What are you looking forward to right now?
- What is your favourite food?
- What's the best thing that has happened for you today?

Where did your conversation take you?



1. Lydia Denworth, Brain Waves, www.psychologytoday.com
2. www.realcommunicationworks.com/the-real-framework
3. www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html
4. Helen Riess MD, The Science of Empathy, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5513638/>
5. Brené Brown, RSA Short Empathy, <https://brenebrown.com/videos/rsa-short-empathy/>
6. Nolan et al., https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.811379!/file/Senses_Framework_Posters.pdf
7. <http://myhomelife.uws.ac.uk/scotland/resources/senses-framework/>
8. https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/the_ripple_effects_of_a_thank_you