

Vignette twenty-five

I was in a residential home, level 4, and there was a client there I formed a pretty good relationship with. I was his key worker. He was an older guy. We had a lot of things in common. He was originally from the same place as me, and we just struck a cord and got on particularly well. It really all came to a head when he unfortunately died. He had a massive heart attack at the home and passed away. It was a time of great sadness but, going through the process of reflecting and also participating in his funeral, one of the things was linking with his family. I had only ever met one of his family members before. The whole lot of them came up for his funeral, and they had asked me to speak at his funeral, which I did, which was also incredibly moving, the response that came from that. I had talked at the funeral of a part of their family member's life that they just didn't know. They had very little to do with him. He had been long term institutionalised, and that response started to get me thinking about the role that I had actually played in this guy's life, for his last 2½ years, or whatever. It made me feel immensely proud that I'd actually done something in this guy's life. I had been a part of this guy's life, supported him to do what might have been silly things like going out for a drive, taking a guitar with us, and having a strum, or nipping off down to the pub for a cheeky beer. He didn't mind doing that. Just all these little things that I think were really important to his quality of life, and he enjoyed, and, in talking with his family about these things, they expressed this belief because they knew their family member as being someone who was massively unwell, they just couldn't relate to him at all. They were expressing to me all these feelings of guilt and everything which I could understand, but it all boiled back, to me, to the privilege of being able to play a role in supporting someone. And it really was in that hindsight of realising that what I had done, and what other people like me had done in working with this guy, really was about supporting him to lead the best life that he could live. That's really what came out of it. So, out of a time of sadness – and it brings back the emotions just thinking about it – it was in that moment that I began to understand how important our role is and how privileged we are to be a part of people's lives – often at times when they really need support.