

John's story

John, who is 89, lives in a small pensioner in a provincial town. His only daughter, who lived in Australia, passed away over ten years ago, and he soon lost contact with her family. John grows vegetables and gets great pleasure from sharing these with other residents in the complex.

One day a teenage boy, Tim, turns up and says that he is John's great grandson, and the police have said he has to live with John. John seems to remember that there might have been a great grandson called Tim, but he has never met him. He cautiously agrees to Tim staying.

Tim comes in, lies across the only sofa, lights up a joint and takes control of the TV. This sort of behaviour continues, with Tim depleting the food in the pantry, not contributing to expenses, and soon his friends start coming around too, and the change John keeps in a jar on the windowsill has disappeared. Tim and his friends play loud music and leave dirty dishes around the house and are often stoned.

John contacts the local Age Concern about his predicament. A coordinator visits and talks with Tim and John, listening to both their stories. She arranges a meeting with Tim, John and the probation officer where it is revealed that Tim's mother had told the courts that Tim could live with John as she did not want him living at home because he was a bad influence on his younger brothers and sisters. John had no knowledge of this arrangement.

Eventually it is agreed that Tim can stay with John on condition that his friends do not visit, drugs are banned, Tim contributes to expenses, money is kept safe, and Tim helps his grandfather with the gardening for at least one hour each week. The probation officer will check regularly with John to ensure this plan is working.

Jane's story

Jane is in her late fifties. She has recently started working in a new rest home where she finds some of the practices disturbing. She relates some of the things she sees and hears during her work.

Note: These stories illustrate the difference Age Concern services can make. In order to protect confidentiality, names and some details have been changed.

“In one dementia unit, patients are constantly being flicked on the bottom by carers. One carer started this, and others followed. They think it’s funny. Even the team leader joins in. They often slap patients on the bottom after changing an incontinence pad, especially in dementia units. Some care assistants who are meant to shower patients, do not do it. No one checks.

When it comes time for meals, the food is often left on the bedside table. After about half an hour, someone else comes and takes it away. No one seems to notice that the older person needs help with feeding, they are too busy delivering meals and clearing up. The same happens with drinks. Cold cups of tea are just tipped out. The older person does not get offered help to drink it while it is still warm.

Jane contacts Age Concern to tell them about the things she has seen in her workplace. The Age Concern educator suggests that Jane tell her manager about these incidents, and also that Age Concern can provide training for staff on how to give respectful care to residents. The manager arranges for the educator to come and give a series of 4 training sessions. Soon the bad staff practices stop, and residents who have difficulty eating and drinking have charts where staff record what has been given to them, and what they have eaten or drunk.

Mrs Stone’s story

“After my accident, I spent a long time in hospital. When it was time to go home, there was still a lot I needed help with on a day to day basis. My son and his wife, Peter and Judith, said I could move in with them until I got back on my feet.

They spent most of last year renovating their house – new carpet, all the mod cons – it looks like something out of House and Garden now. The trouble is, it seems to me they’ve put their heart and soul into their house and have nothing left for people. Judith hated the marks my walker left on the new carpet and watched me like a hawk whenever I walked down the hallway, to make sure I didn’t bang into the walls and scrape the new wallpaper.

I wasn’t allowed to have the heat pump going during the day when they were at work, and Judith refused to cook for me. She wouldn’t even let me join them at the dinner table. She told me - “You eat like a pig, dripping your food everywhere. I’m not looking at that when I’m eating. You make me sick.” She was very rude and I felt so embarrassed. All my friends and family are scared of her, so no-one comes to visit me. If I’d known she was that bad, I wouldn’t have gone to stay.

My daughter was worried about me and contacted Age Concern. When I first met the lady from Age Concern, the Coordinator, I cried. I never cry in front of other people but I was just so depressed and scared, and I felt so alone. I told her I wanted to leave but I just didn’t know how to.

The Coordinator suggested we have a family meeting. I laughed at her. “No way” I said. “Judith will just yell at me and I’ll be so embarrassed and nothing will change”. But she told me she’d be there and would make sure everyone got a chance to speak. Well we had the meeting. It was pretty tense, and some difficult

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things were put out into the open, things we should have talked about years ago. But I think they all got the message that I'm still their mother and that I have thoughts and feelings and needs too."

The Age Concern arranged for the local needs assessment provider to assess Mrs Stone's situation. As a result, it was agreed that Mrs Stone would complete her recuperation at a nearby rest home. The Coordinator reported that after just three hours at the rest home, Mrs Stone had laughed more than she had in three months! She left Mrs Stone with a drink in her hand, listening to someone playing the piano and a smile like a Cheshire cat!

When the daughter who had referred Mrs Stone to Age Concern, visited her, Mrs Stone just lifted her glass and grinned. Her daughter was so thrilled and happy, she cried. "I didn't think you would be able to get her out so quickly. You are a miracle worker."

Edith's story

Edith is 77 and lives in her own home, a two-storey property with a separate unit downstairs. Her 38-year-old grandson, Michael, does shift work and when he is on night duty, he stays in her downstairs unit. Michael invites a friend to live in the unit without Edith's consent. Edith pays the electricity bill for both units without contribution from Michael or his friend. Michael does sometimes help his grandmother with shopping and other small chores, although does this begrudgingly, telling her "You're useless. No-one needs you. Why don't you do the world a favour – don't wake up tomorrow."

Edith tells Michael that she does not want him there any longer. Michael and his friend start yelling at her, telling her she was a "selfish old cow" and threatening to break her windows. Edith doesn't have a lot of money and relies on her national super to cover her expenses. She cannot afford to pay the higher electricity bills that have been coming in since Michael's friend arrived.

Edith is very distressed at Michael's behaviour, and frightened by his attitude towards her. She contacts Age Concern to see if they can help. Edith tells the Coordinator that she gets a bit forgetful and confused at times, and that she doesn't have many friends or other family members she can turn to for support. She has a few health problems and sometimes finds it hard to get out and about.

The Coordinator talks to Edith about her rights and together they go to the local community law centre for advice on how to evict Michael's friend.

The Coordinator facilitates a meeting between Edith and Michael which results in Michael agreeing to ask his friend to leave, and to paying his grandmother board whenever he stays after night shift. With encouragement from the Coordinator, Edith starts going to the local seniors' centre, being transported by an Age Concern mini-bus service.