

# A New Tradition

## Background

This story aims to capture and share a little of the experience of the Balquhiddier House care home team during the Covid-19 Pandemic. This was a very challenging and difficult time, however this team forged a new tradition; taking time to mark the passing of their residents, and support the care home team in their grief.

This reflection was undertaken with Isobel (Home Manager) and Victoria (Depute Home Manager), to whom we are grateful for sharing their experiences and supporting our learning.

## April 2020

Isobel, a nurse with 30 years experience, recalls the start of the pandemic in Balquhiddier House. Having been off for 3 days awaiting the result of her own Covid test, Isobel returned to the home, to find they were in the midst of an outbreak, with the majority of residents being barrier nursed. Victoria and Isobel described the home suddenly becoming very quiet, and that "it was clear that there was a significant change underway".

## Deciding to stay

As time passed, it became increasingly clear to the team that they were dealing with a widespread Covid-19 outbreak. Isobel, along with some other members of the team then decided to stay within the home, to prevent further spread and protect vulnerable family members at home.

A few days later, the home lost its first resident.



## Heartbreak

The team at Balquhadder House prided themselves on ensuring that they paid their final respects to any resident who had died, always trying to have a member of their team at the resident's funeral.

The team felt that when residents came to live in their home, they joined them through the front door; therefore when the time came for the resident to leave for the last time, that they should leave the home in a dignified manner and by the front door. Due to increased infection prevention and control (IPC) protocols as a result of Covid-19, this existing tradition was increasingly difficult to maintain.

Victoria and Isobel remember the upsetting sight of undertakers in white hazmat suits, escorting a resident out by the back door, recounting that this felt like an undignified end. "This sight was heartbreaking and just felt wrong". The team wanted to do something to return to their standards, to say a proper goodbye, and process their own loss and grief.

## Guard of honor

The first occasion that the team can remember their new practices, was following the loss of a resident who had recently celebrated her 108th birthday. Staff would have ordinarily attended the funeral, however funeral attendance was restricted, so this was not an option. The team felt a sense of helplessness in being unable to pay their respects.

As the resident left the home for the last time, the team formed a guard of honour, standing silently at the doors to each unit as a mark of respect. The resident was to be escorted out via the front door, where a small group of staff had gathered, playing a piece of music cherished by the resident, and silently waiting for her to leave.

This guard of honour and musical tribute provided the dignified ending and a opportunity for the Balquhadder House team to say goodbye.

## An emotional release

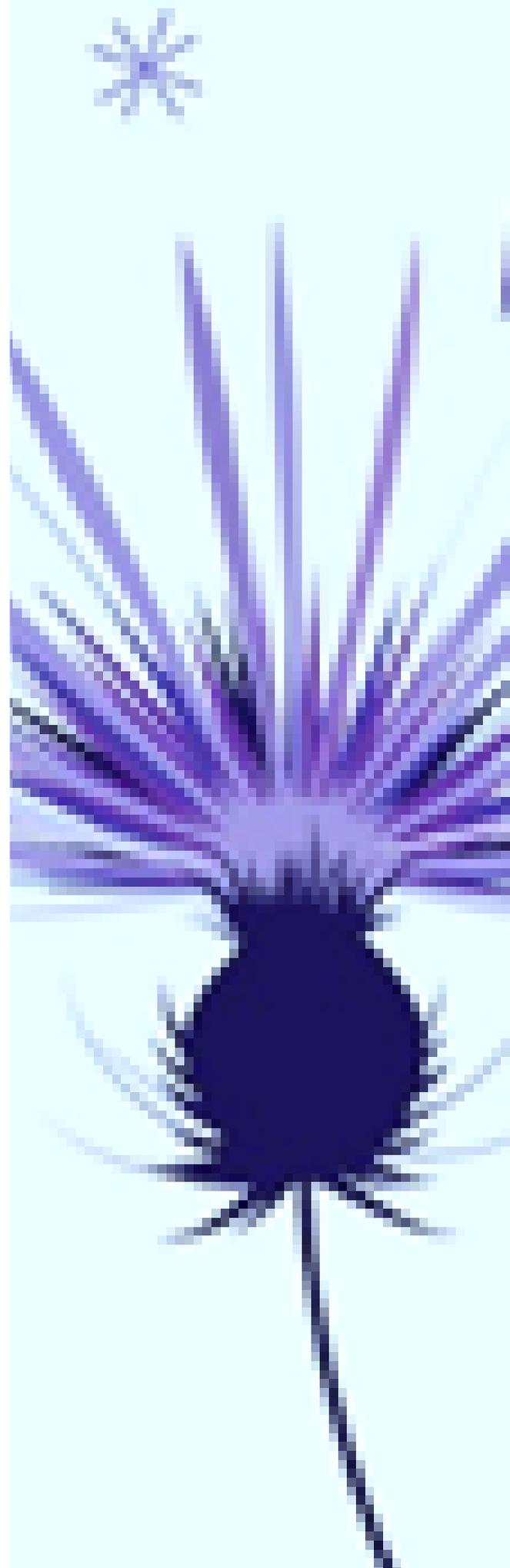
Isobel recalled a time where two residents died on the same day. Each resident left separately to a guard of honor and a piece of music played in their memory.

On the second occasion that day, Isobel recounted feeling tired, very fragile and having wept. This was an emotional release which has since been experienced by other team members. However, these new practices supported the Balquhiddier team to express their grief, and to care for and support one another through challenging times.

The whole of the Balquhiddier House team are involved with and pay their respects to residents as they leave for the final time, with a kitchen porter who sometimes attends to say a silent prayer for the resident as they leave.

## An family of sorts

Victoria advises that this practice has brought an already close team even closer. "Covid was a difficult time to understand and reflect on, however how we marked our residents passing acted as a light in a dark time. Together, we have shared experiences that others may struggle to imagine and understand... It's as though we're a family".



## A new tradition

As normal life returns to Balquhiddar House, and the home buzzes with the admission of new residents, and the induction of new staff, Isobel and Victoria, are looking to support their team towards recovery.

Despite looking ahead, their new traditions of standing guard and playing a resident's preferred piece of music is embedded in the home's practice. Forming part of resident's care planning, their musical choice is written-up in their notes as a part of the end-of-life care delivered.

The team make sure aspect of care is delivered, whether day or night, and have taken these practices to heart as their new 'family' tradition. This has resulted in a truly person centred expression of end-of-life care for residents, and dignified and a meaningful expression of grief by the care home team.

