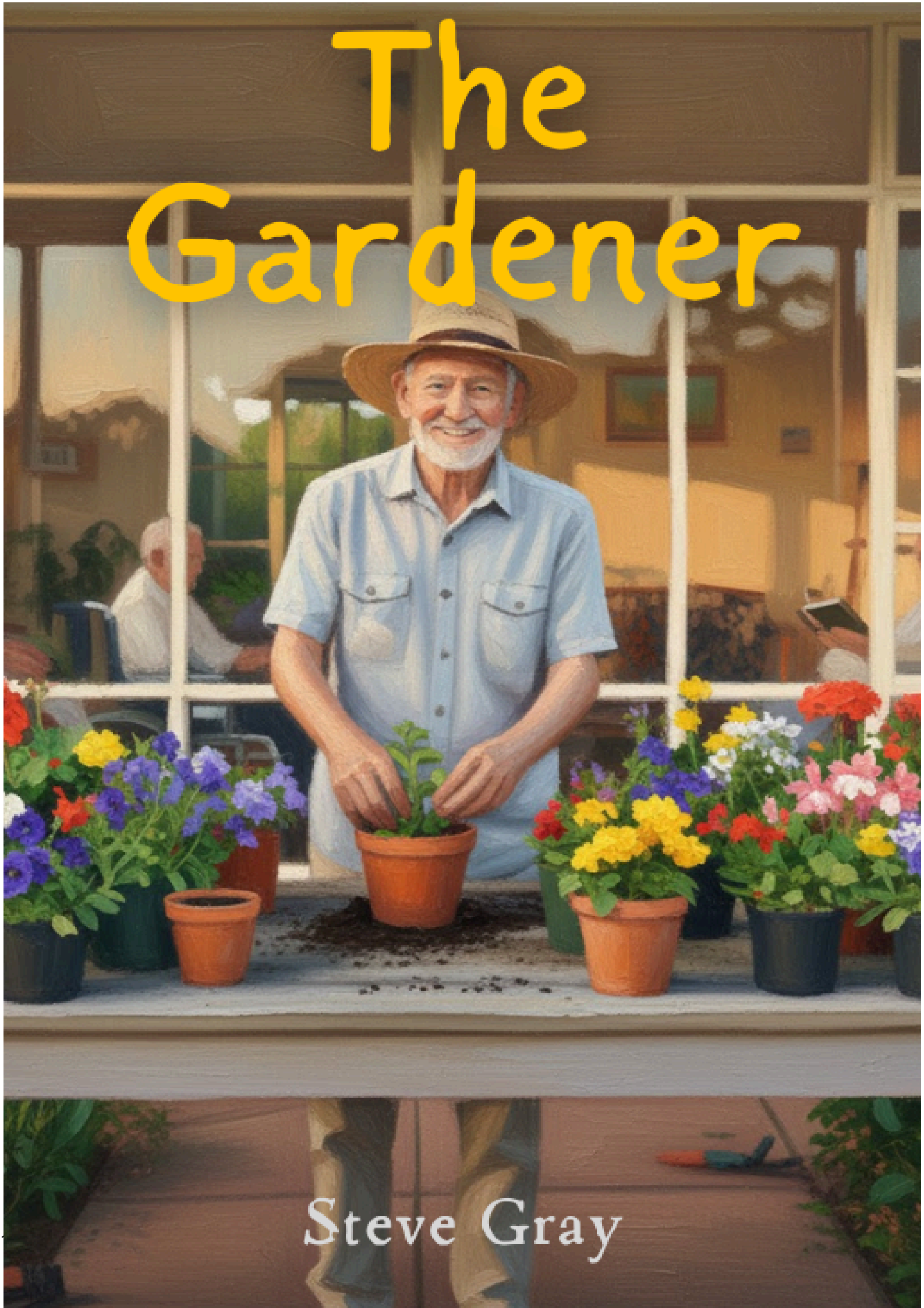

The Gardener
Steve Gray

- The Gardener -

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Chapter One

Robert arrived casually at the facility in his well worn, tray truck ute, not that he had much choice, at this stage it was the only vehicle he had.

The relentless drizzling overnight rain and busy traffic meant he had to take things carefully, breathe in, breathe out… repeat.. He was about to start a new venture and so he had to keep his ‘wits about him’. His mind darted from one thing to another at the best of times. There would be challenges, the people he would meet, the obstacles to be faced and although he had many years experience in various roles he knew each fresh start came with some degree of opposition.

The Board of Management for the facility is a group Robert has trusted and their counsel was well sought by others. They had all worked together in the past one way or another and this task was one they knew Robert could handle along with another hand picked professional. The board acted as a casual backstop, but one that Robert knew would be vital if things got tough.

His ute had barely warmed up, as he indicated off the main road at the front of the facility, he carefully negotiated the traffic and entered Crystal Brook Manor, an independent aged care facility that had been built back in the early nineteen nineties. He then headed slowly down the entrance way, the rain had just stopped. Robert found a space at the end of the carpark, where there were a number of spaces to choose from, he sat for a second and took a deep breath. As he opened the squeaky ute door, a voice in the distance called out, in a shrill sharp harsh tone 'You can’t park there!'

Robert stopped in his tracks, looked over and there was a solid, solitary woman with a wildly contorted face gesturing through a fly wire screen of an open window, she was waving madly for him to move his car. He walked some way over towards her to hear her better, smiled, gave a small wave and asked, ‘So where should I park?’ The woman pointed right, in a repeated hurried gesture and responded 'The carpark for the staff and trades is around the corner, and by the look of that clapped out ute, that’s you. There’s a sign, CLEARLY you didn’t see it.' She closed the window and flipped the curtain back in place.

Robert replied with an almost silent, ‘Ah ha, thanks for letting me know.’ Robert waved, turned and then moved his ute, knowing he didn’t want to upset anyone, especially in his first few days of starting in his ‘new’ role.

Robert soon learnt he had just heard from Carolyn Hyde, she had been told the new ‘Gardener’ would be starting today.

Robert knew things would be challenging at times, the facility had become known for abrupt posturing, bickering, harsh words, quality issues, and staff turnover, especially towards some of the young staff. Arguments about resident care always seemed moments away from becoming an issue with family and friends of residents. Seemingly at the centre of much of this drama was Carolyn, Carloyn Hyde, one of the Unit Managers.

Carolyn had been here the longest and knew most of the place inside and out, and she didn’t mind telling people that either. Hands on hips, her presence could be readily felt, she appeared at times as if she was the boss and no one would dare to confront her. In fact there were times that she had a ‘soft side’ yet few knew about that.

Robert ambled up to the side door of the facility after parking his ‘clapped out ute,’ only to find he didn’t know the access code to open the door. He then headed around to the front door. He noted along the way that the gardens at the front had been neatly kept, but somehow lacked soul. Some of the roses harshly pruned, the grass neat but needing work.

The receptionist today was Michelle, she was mostly there Monday to Friday and kept things moving in the front office. She knew how to look busy, the outdoor driveway CCTV camera system lit up behind her desk when there was movement detected, she then knew to ‘look the part’ some people suggested it was like there was a switch in her head, she could switch on a gracious smile in an instant.

Robert wandered in, ready with his own smile he could switch on in an instant. Years of experience in customer service caused that. Robert stepped further in and surveyed the place.

Helen the facilities general manager stepped out of her office, which was to the side of the front reception area. She had been advised by the board that Robert would arrive today and had seen his Ute arrive earlier, greeting with a wide smile and warm handshake, she then introduced him to Michelle. Helen mentioned ‘Robert is our new Gardener and will be here a few days a week to help out, and Robert this is Michelle, our main Weekday receptionist.'

Robert smiled and said hi and then added, ‘Please, call me Rob, I only seem to get ‘Robert’ if I’m in trouble and apart from my initial parking effort and being ‘advised’ where to park… I’m not there yet…’ Helen looked at him quizzically and Michelle mentioned, “Ah I bet that was Carolyn… Unit Manager, she, um has her eyes on everything and parking is one of her ‘pet peeves’ shall we say.

Helen had been in her role for a few weeks, she had been carefully selected to take on the facility and its woes from a short list of non-starters who knew the reputation of the facility but were desperate for interview experience at this level of role. They wanted to look like they wanted the role, but would decline any offer. In local circles for aged care people, they would mention the interview and shake their heads, ‘As if anyone would want to run that place’ was a common comment.

Helen was moving to the area, had heard some rumblings on the grapevine about the role. She would be a fresh starter, others in the facility would not have much, if any prior knowledge about her skills and abilities.

The previous Manager of the facility had walked out and left the owners high and dry. Many considered him to be a ‘non event’ in any case. A poor communicator pushed up into the role due to no one wanting to do it, and also due to his incompetence in general, thinking he could do anything, well not quite. A few near misses on life critical issues pushed the ‘board’ to invite him to leave. The organisation had found a new owner, the previous owner gladly wiping their hands of the place and selling up cheaply.

Helen pointed out to Rob that the front reception area was ‘revitalised’ about ten years back, it was certainly light, bright and cheery.

The greetings were amicable, Helen then took Rob for a casual tour of the facility. ‘It’s split into three wings,’ she told him, standing in the middle of the open activities and dining area Helen pointed to an evacuation map. ‘There’s the Davey, Carinya and Alison Wing, named after local identities in the area going way back, you’ll see old black and white photos of the farms these families had about the place.’

The pair ambled through the main areas and ducked out into a few of the side gardens along the way. Helen had been told that the Gardener would be an incredibly useful addition to the team at Crystal Brook Manor by one of the board members. Hand picked for very good reasons.

Rob's background was, shall we say, 'complex', but in a positive way, and Helen was an astute, 'seasoned' well trained operator. She had already had one 'encounter' with Carolyn, the ever so grumpy Unit Supervisor, but wasn't about to let on to the 'Gardener' that there were challenges. Little did Helen know that he knew about most of the challenges already.

Various staff and residents were encountered and briefly introduced as they walked through the facility. Rob noted that some staff had name tags that were barely readable, either their lanyard was turned backyards so the name was obscured or it was hidden with tape or some such.

Rob could see what needed to be done in the gardens and already had a bunch of photos and layouts of the facility emailed to him.

Rob had a plan, it was bigger than just the gardening.

Rob knew the gardens were already in quite reasonable condition and it would be an ideal setting for him to settle into early retirement over the next few years. He was soon to enlist the support of others to make things come together anyway, he knew better than to subject his body and mind to hard physical work.

In their rounds of the facility they came across Roy, the maintenance guy, who ended up knowing everything and everybody. If any of the staff needed to know anything, Roy was the go to, he was in and out of all areas of the facility and before long he would know exactly what was going on, he was well connected and could ‘read between the lines’. A subcontractor who came and went as he pleased, Roy didn’t know that things were about to alter the way they did, he soon learnt that he didn’t know everything that was going on. Roy was in the facility at least three times a week and generally did quality work.

At the drop of a hat or the hint of an issue, Roy would somehow find a reason to be there, sneaking into a position to hear a family member argue about resident care etc. Or a staff altercation over ‘spilt milk.’

Rob knew Roy was who he was, and that people trusted him to know things, gossip could travel fast and Roy would be everyone's eyes and ears. Sometimes his recall of the actual issues could be rather one sided or skewed, however it was what it was.

Helen and Rob sat in Helen’s office for a while loosely chatting and exploring. She mentioned she had seen his resume and was rather impressed. Rob smiled and articulated, ‘Well now that we’ve got started and you mentioned my resume, I will give you this.’ He took an envelope out of his pocket and slid it across the table. He held on to it, saying, once you read this I am HOPING that the contents will be held as deeply confidential and not to be shared with anyone else in this facility until we are ready to do so… is that clear?’

Helen was a little perplexed at his directness and agreed, she opened the envelope, The slip of paper inside simply mentioned, ‘Robert Garret is the new owner of the facility. He

therefore is technically your boss, but for the purposes of this ‘exercise’ he is the Gardener. It’s time for a positive change!’ Signed ‘The Board,’ Crystal Brook Manor.

Rob was in fact much more than just a gardener. The aim was simple: find the challenges in the facility and make the place the best it could be. It might take some BIG, hard decisions but both were ready for the next phase of operational reform.

Helen sat back in her chair gobsmacked, not knowing what to say. Rob smiled and indicated, ‘You and I are in this together and the changes that need to be made, I figure things will work out better with me working undercover, I hope you share my enthusiasm for the idea?’ She smiled and nodded. She leaned forward, reached out her hand, shook his with confidence and mentioned ‘I feel a lot better now! Oh and I have a list of things already that I have to work on, being seen in more places is one of them.’

Helen then shifted in her chair and asked, ‘So if you don’t mind me asking, WHY did you buy the place!’ Rob smiled and articulated, ‘The price was right, actually too good to refuse, and I like a challenge. I thought here’s a way to wind down into retirement, a way to use my skills and make a difference. You know, be the change you want to see in the world or some such, however that goes.’

Helen suggested, ‘Well your secret is safe with me!’ I must admit I am a bit stunned and I can see why the board has decided to go this way I guess…’ Rob stopped her there, and mentioned, ‘Well it was a mix of ideas, a bit of an ‘undercover boss' idea, some will see that as ‘lame’ I just thought it was worth a try. And if nothing else, a bit of fun. I hope you will soon see that we can be a team to be reckoned with, in lots of good ways.’

Helen mentioned that Michelle was one of the people who also knew a lot about who was who and the zoo and could ‘talk’ a little to others from time to time. ‘I have already told her I want a lot to do with the gardener, it’s all part of keeping up the positive impression of the place.’

Most of the staff were about to see a new gardener, but little did they realise that his modest position would be one that would disrupt things in a positive way. Rob would get inside information and a different perspective on the place and how things went the way they did.

Many would see his faded denim pants and well worn workboots and soon appreciate his horticultural experience. But the deeper context of his presence might take longer to show up, that was his aim.

By the end of the day Rob had walked the yards, tested soils. Met some residents in the yards and hallways. Roy had already had a ‘sniff about’ and Rob answered his questions about things with a practical stance on gardens and how to get things in, like mulch and how often the lawns were mowed. Rob worked gently on building rapport. Roy asked about his previous work history, Rob mentioned, ‘Well at my age it’s been difficult to get work, what with ageism and all that, but I have worked with a mate of mine gardening and did some TAFE study on horticulture.’ He then managed to change the subject by asking Roy about what he had done, appealing to his ego.

Along the way the voice he had met first up, tersely introduced herself. ‘Carolyn Hyde, Unit Manager. So you’re the new Gardener eh?' With harsh eye contact that would stop a rocket. Robert gestured a handshake, but was met with a fist bump that was awkward at best.

‘I’m Carolyn and when I say a garden needs work then you know you haven’t done your job, I don’t tell you what to do and vice versa, clear?' She tilted her head and Robert nodded just once in a slowly measured, positive response.

She stepped aside and started to walk off, pointing to her office nearby, 'I’m usually there if you need me but I doubt it.' Rob raised his eyebrows as he walked off with his clipboard, he had just been ‘told’...

Other staff hit his radar too, some that seemed more intent on checking their phones, some ignoring the call out system that had LED signage which indicated residents' rooms where they needed attention.

One wing, Carinya, in particular seemed to have more of this happening, on the phone and seemingly low interest in the residents and their needs.

Helen had mentioned the area earlier, and a few of the staff who had particularly slack attitudes, Rob wanted to find out those people on his own and explore loosely at will, then compare more detailed notes with Helen as time went on and the need arose.

No one would pick up who the new owner was, well not for a while yet. The board of management simply articulated clearly in an email, ‘A change of ownership is imminent and it wouldn't alter the current running of the facility, Helen as the Facility Manager is providing solid leadership and management control we are most happy with at this stage.’

Their next email came through from Helen, ‘A new gardener will be starting soon, please make him welcome.’ The previous gardener had had enough, despite his best efforts

he didn't like the way some staff treated others, and he felt he was on the bottom end of the pecking order. 'Not enough respect.' He suggested in parting. Helen liked the guy and wanted him to stay, however as she found, some staff were at a tipping point, fed up, annoyed and wanted out. She figured that she had to put her 'hardened leadership hat on' and make sure she was seen as well as heard. There were a number of staff who deserved positive opportunities and not simply run off at the first sign of conflict.

Helen and Rob were slowly becoming well versed in what was needed to create positive change. The facility was at best at sixty percent capacity with residents and struggled to make a decent profit, there was some cash in the 'investment account' but things had to change for the better.

The facility was lagging badly in reviews, families unimpressed with how their relatives were treated and how they were treated, through lack of communication as just one point. The facility would find it difficult to get new intakes of residences as others passed on. There were enough other local facilities to fill the wants and needs of families who would do their diligent research.

Helen had already felt the brunt of prospective residents, people with poor attitudes about the place and although she showed them through, they would often point out the low reviews. She knew she had a battle on her hands. Helen looked at ways to change that, it often started with a short tick the box survey, that way she could establish what attitude they had to the facility.

When she got started on the tour she would have a long tour or a short tour. If they seemed positive after the short tour she might then take them a bit further. It was a carefully

orchestrated filtering service. She found that if people said, no, she would simply let them go, if there was a maybe she would hand them a flier that had questioning statements about what they might look for in an aged care facility. ‘Most people selecting a suitable aged care facility seem to prefer a smaller sized one over a larger one.’

Chapter Two

Day two and Rob is on the job early, He walks through the facility as breakfast is being served. Everything seems to be in order, he didn’t want to make a big thing of checking out the food being served, he wanted to not ‘blow his cover’ but he did see that the residents were seemingly being catered for quite well. His glance into the kitchen indicated that it seemed clean, neat and tidy.

Down the end of the first corridor in the Alison wing, he came across a noise he wasn’t sure of, some voices. A supervisor talking to a junior cleaning staff member, they were berating the cleaner for doing something wrong. Rob made a point of walking by, he noted the supervisor's name was Marcus, the junior was head down and her name tag obscured. Marcus was doing what he thought was right, making sure the staff member knew they had done something wrong and to correct it next time. The challenge was well known however, he repeated himself and people lost some esteem each time.

Rob gave a forced smile as he walked past Marcus, who was startled as Rob approached, he had been focussed on the task at hand, berating the staff member. Visitors were generally not in the facility at this early stage of the day and most residents were having breakfast.

Rob went by and Marcus was soon following. The pair had not yet been formally introduced, Marcus called out, 'Hi, and you are?' Rob stopped and turned, extended his hand for a handshake and got a loose poorly formed clammy handshake, and briefer than Rob had expected. 'Hi I'm Rob the new Gardener and you are?' Rob looked at Marcus's lanyard and name tag and spoke, saying 'Ah I see, it's Marcus.'

Marcus smiled briefly and suggested, 'The gardens are outside, apart from a few plants indoors so I figure that's where you'll need to be.' Rob replied, 'Yes, yes I guess so, I'm heading that way.'

Marcus turned and walked away, Rob noted that the young cleaner was absent.

Out in the yard Rob knew there were specific areas, a rose garden, a sensory garden with raised beds with a range of plants residents could handle, smell and explore.

Gardens that needed mulching, grassed areas needing fertilising and BBQ areas that looked as though they hadn't been used in a long time. There were various pieces of outdoor furniture, most of it faded, worn and the list went on. The gardens were secured by magnetic gate latches operated from inside the building or combination locks on two of the gates that were double metal gates to allow vehicle access to a side and back area. Rob checked all the gates, the magnetic latches especially, most were secure but there was one that could be forced with a very solid push.

Robert had already started to plan the garden maintenance schedule and how he would handle things. He also knew that too much change all at once would be a disruption that both residents and staff might not handle well, he wasn't there to shock people.

Helen and Rob concocted a slow drawn out process, one that would get the results they needed and not disrupt things too much.

Helen mentioned to Rob that she was a bit shocked by his first day announcement of being the new owner, but that she was shocked in a good way. One of the board members had rung her at home that night to see if things were okay, she suggested that it was very much okay.

She wanted to nickname Rob ‘The Bossman’ but instead slipped into a more obscure ‘B1’, Rob knew what it meant and was pleased she felt so comfortable with him so fast.

Today the lawns needed mowing and the garden shed needed to be sorted and organised.

Helen got Roy to sort out the magnetic latch that ‘was a bit dodgy.’ He knew about it, but mentioned one of the delivery guys used that gate and it saved him from having to come inside, sign in, then go to the lock control button etc. Helen pointed out that all the other deliveries were like that, so why should one have preferential treatment?

One thing that was early on the list, was to update the BBQs, then the outdoor furniture. The current rusty and faded ones gave the whole place a ‘dire disposition.’ Especially when prospective families were taken on a tour.

Rob chatted to Roy one afternoon while out and about in the yard. Asking Roy about upgrading the BBQ’s. 'Would you put the new ones together and remove the old ones?' Roy

indicated he was too busy to do that and that Management wouldn't fund him to do extra work so the answer was a no. Roy mentioned the existing ones got little use, Rob came back with, 'Yep it looks that way, but new ones will hopefully inspire some use. Well that's what Helen says anyway…'

Rob was unphased and then indicated, 'Okay, just thought I would ask.' Roy thought for a moment, that replacing things was usually on his radar, 'How come the gardener is doing that? He then thought, 'Oh well Rob is probably not that busy and… Oh well, one less thing for me!'

Later on Rob Chatted with Helen about the BBQ replacement issue, another person was found through a BBQ supply business a suburb away to supply and fit, it was agreed three old BBQ's were to be removed and replaced with just two units as well as everything needed to make the new ones work, all to be done on a day when Roy wasn't there simply for convenience. They were assured the replacements would already be assembled off site, to ensure the transition was quick, quiet and without any fuss.

A few days later Rob opened one of the pairs of double gates to let the BBQ deliveries and removals happen. Carolyn was all eyes and then there were noises from inside the building. 'What's this, Robert, what's going on, don't leave those gates open they are never to be opened!' She squawked through a window. Rob smiled and mentioned, 'Just a quick delivery Mrs Hyde, we won't be long.'

Carolyn took herself out of the building and was out in the yard in a flash. 'What's being delivered? What's going on?' Helen was soon by her side and mentioned that, 'It's part of the upgrade, the old BBQs were deemed unsafe so we're replacing them.'

Carolyn snapped back, ‘They're never used anyway! I don’t see the point?’ Helen held her tongue, Robert indicated that, ‘It’s a risk management issue so the board wanted better compliance,’ Rob gently added. ‘Do you love a good BBQ Mrs Hyde?’ Carolyn, briefly shook her head in disbelief and walked away mumbling ‘They won’t get used, a waste of money!’

The delivery was straight forward and went as planned, step one in the facilities renewal process had begun. Old rusty things out, new shiny things in.

Marcus was seen peering through a window, Carolyn had wandered into his section to let him know things were happening. Helen had words with him later in the day as he enquired about the BBQ update. ‘A risk management issue that needed to be addressed. Don’t you think they look better than the old rusty ones?’ He made a brief response, ‘Yeah I guess so…’ But was rather dismissive.

Catering staff were asked a prior to the delivery to come up with a plan to use the new BBQ’s so they would get used at least once a month. Ideas were explored and implemented. Sometimes the residents would be out in the yard being fed and sometimes the BBQs were used simply to cook on. Anytime there were sausages on the menu and the weather was suitable, then a BBQ was fired up.

Some families took the initiative to have a family get together at the facility, the catering staff would set everything up and cook for small groups occasionally. It turned out no one had done that before. It was made clear to families that the catering staff would

operate the BBQs, an OHS operational risk management ‘thing.’ Families felt like they were being fussed over, it was certainly one of a number of small morale boosts.

Chapter Three

Rob wanted to free up some of his time while working at the facility, the grass mowing was one of the most taxing things, a local mowing guy was hired, he soon sorted that task out.

Carolyn made noises about it ‘I thought we were aiming to save money, not spend more?’ Heln casually mentioned, “That’s interesting Carolyn, the feedback I get from prospects is that they would favour our facility, if only there were a few extra things were sorted out, so the board has decided to do a few extra things, so far so good, I have three new families considering us this week.’

Rob’s next task was to sort out the sensory garden, Raised beds repaired and some fresh plants where required. Rob did his best not to make a mess, Mrs Hyde was never impressed with Gardeners making messes, and yes she clearly articulated that.

Helen took a look at her HR records, it had been eighteen months since Carolyn had had any form of holiday break. She suggested that staff should not build up too much holiday time and that it would be in everyone's best interests to take breaks, a week here or there could be good all round and help to balance budgets and accounts. Helen used Carolyn's role as a ploy to encourage Carolyn to take a break or two, ‘It would serve as a guiding example to others she suggested.’

Carolyn mentioned ‘Who would do my work and would they do it to the right standard!’ It took a while for Helen to encourage her to take a break. It meant that Rob could make changes without too much scrutiny and judgement and take off some pressure for all who came near her.

Some other areas would be tackled that week while ‘Mrs Hyde’ was away. These needed work, mulch and mess, poorly performing plants removed and replaced, hedges radically trimmed and shaped.

The mowing guy was enlisted to help out, Roy was also in on the act surprised at the level of change but kept busy running loads of rubbish to the big skip bin in the side yard, it was one way of keeping him engaged but out of the way for most of the day. He made noises about not being able to do his ‘normal work’ Helen assured him it would be fine.

The end of the week saw a high pressure washing company cleaning up the paths, before Carolyn was to return, it was also done on a day that Roy wasn’t about.

Roy and Carolyn returned and were both somehow a bit uplifted by the clean paths, fresh much and so on. Roy joked with Caroyln, saying, ‘If you sit still for too long around here they’ll upgrade you, or clean you up!’ Carolyn giggled ever so briefly.

Along the way Rob was meeting more of the staff as he wandered about, from cleaners to newly appointed junior staff, then catering staff. He made sure to avoid areas where Marcus or Carolyn were about and was also careful to avoid Roy at times. Rob did note though that Roy was becoming friendlier in some ways, and was keen to let Rob know about

who was who in the zoo… Roy even called him Rob from time to time. Things were starting to relax a little.

Rob was starting to get to know some of the residents, a few were interested in the gardens and would occasionally wander out into the sunshine, some with walking frames, some with a walking stick. There was one lady who had her own small area of garden that she tended to. There was a small sign that Roy had made that indicated her garden area. 'Francis' Garden'. It was tended to by Francis Giles.

Rob took a keen interest and would chat to her about the colours in the plants, the types of plants and how they had all come along nicely.

One sunny afternoon, Francis sat on her walking frame in the shade as Rob pointed things out. Then Rob noticed a young lady arrive. It was Ava, Francis' Granddaughter. She was wearing a bright yellow raincoat despite the fine weather.

Rob watched the pair hug and interact, then Francis introduced Rob, Rob mentioned her Yellow coat. Ava replied 'Grand ma likes bright colours so I try to bring some colour each time I come. We live just down the street.' Rob left them to chat, thinking how lovely it was to see the child interested in her Grandmother.

Rob soon became aware that Ava was a regular visitor and knew her way about the facility quite well, on School holidays she would attend and join in with various activities Francis was involved in, Bingo, story telling, musical afternoons.

Ava was learning to play the piano and as she learned a new piece to a reasonable standard she would play the piano in the main open area. It was an electronic piano and she could plug headphones in, Ava would practice and then quietly entertain a small group of interested residents with a piece through the loudspeaker in the piano. Francis would watch on with great interest.

Rob played piano, although it had been a long while ago, and one day he asked Ava if he could sit on the side and watch her play, he then added a left hand bass line into the piece she was playing. Ava loved that, although at first she was a little apprehensive. She was surprised that he could do it ad lib, no sheet music, only hearing the notes. Rob pointed out that he was watching the main notes she played as well.

A few days later, Rob was out in the yard repotting a struggling lavender plant, along with a few other plants. Rob was merrily chatting away to the plants as he worked.

Ava arrived with a long bright woolen scarf on, and blurted out, ‘Hello Mr Gardener’. Rob was a bit surprised, it turned out Ava had been watching through the window and had quietly come out into the yard without Rob noticing.

‘Oh, Hello Ava, how are you?’ Enquired Rob. ‘Fine thanks, I was wondering why you talk to the plants as you work with them.’ Rob replied. ‘Ah well you see, they don’t like sudden shocks, So I’ve been telling this little one it’s going to a much better home, a bigger pot, it will have more space, and it will be more out of the wind with a touch more sunshine when I put it into a new position.’

Ava notices his hands, calloused but with meticulously clean fingernails, handling the delicate roots with surprising tenderness, dusting the new hole in the potting mix with a pinch of bone meal he keeps in a small, oiled leather pouch.

Rob started on the next plant as Ava watched on, noting her intent and quiet observation of every detail. She asked about the bone meal he added, he then told her about fertilisers and how they helped things grow. She watched quietly and then mentioned, ‘Well, bye, I’m off to see Grandma.’ Rob replied with a cheery goodbye.

Rob sensed that Ava was a ‘touch, left of centre’, an observant child with talent, due in part to the piano work, but different, not as verbal as other youngsters he had met over the years. Francis told him later on that she was, ‘A bit Autistic, these days they call it Neuro Diverse or On the Spectrum. A great kid, loved dearly but just a bit left of centre.’ Rob thought it interesting that Francis used the same term, left of centre, that he had used in his head.

Over time Rob also noted Ava’s very kind disposition, she would pick things up residents had dropped, and pass it back to them. He also noted that she wisely stayed clear of some of the staff like Carolyn who, ‘didn’t like a ‘child’ coming in and playing the piano, a bit precocious in a way don’t you think.’

Rob pointed Ava out to Helen one afternoon as they looked over a garden bed having a casual chat, Helen suggested that, ‘When Francis goes that child will be sorely missed by so many, she comes in with things like brightly coloured easter eggs the traditional sort, and colourful things like scarves and things she has created, cards, wishing people a happy birthday, she is

a really special part of this place, she often asks the reception staff who's birthday is coming up next and makes a card or a birthday badge.

She has a quiet way of chatting to the other residents and it's interesting how when someone passes away and we put their photo on the memorial table in the reception area, how she comes and stands there for a little while looking at the photo. Her mum sometimes comes with her, she is also intrigued about how Ava comprehends their passing, very quiet and reserved, she then chats to Francis about the person who passed on, remembering old Mr so and so and how nice he was, always something positive.'

Rob found it interesting that Ava called him 'Mr Gardener' not Rob or Robert or Mr Garret, it was on his name tag. He thought it was a simple sign of endearment. It made him smile. Although there were some other young visitors from time to time, Ava's depth of engagement was very different from the others who came in. The others, at best, would barely say hi or give a nod.

Around the facility other things were being noticed by Rob. The staff room where people often sat to have lunch and chat on their breaks, smells faintly of stale coffee and disinfectant. It was a bit of a dreary space with the usual array of posters about safety, cleanliness, procedures and other notices that people didn't seem to read. Rob made mental notes about things that needed up grading, cleaning, sorting and such, he would then send a discrete email to Helen suggesting changes.

Helen had a staff member who was partly her personal assistant, Gail, Gail was discreet and one of the few people who knew what was really going on around the place. Helen could

give her tasks to complete and they were done with little fuss or bother. Gail would say ‘I’m on it…’

Rob liked the way their little system worked, Helen knew that if Rob needed something sorted to get on it and not query it, and the same back the other way. They had a solid professional mutual respect for each other's roles. He was her eyes and ears about the place for the changes that she wasn’t able to see at times. It meant she was able to stay firmly on compliance and other management issues, and handball the other things to Gail.

Amongst the things Gail would do would be research, like the new outdoor furniture upgrades, providing pictures of suitable items, orders placed and delivery of assembled furniture all done with ease and professionalism. Gail was never to be tackled by staff about her personal assistant work, that was all hush hush as far as they were concerned and people just took it that it was none of their business.

Helen protected her like a hawk, she never wanted people to think that Gail was doing anything on her own, although that happened, she wanted Carolyn and Marcus in particular to think she was under Helen’s control. Except for the work she did that was not personal assistant work, her other side role, but that was the beauty of Helen’s approach, neither Carolyn nor Marcus knew which was which, that small piece of confusion kept them at bay.

Rob noted the adjustments to the staff area and made a few more points about how the space was used and kept. More tweaks to the space were in order and soon organised. A few odor eating fresh air devices were installed and did the trick. Flowers once a week on a wednesday were delivered, these added a spark of colour. Rob thought ‘Ava would be pleased…’

On Roy's list of maintenance work was to check all the chairs in the staff room for loose screws and missing rubber feet, the floor was starting to see dents from the bottoms of the chair legs. Roy questioned Helen, it seemed a bit onerous, Helen shrugged and suggested that one of the other staff had put that forward, it seemed reasonable and shouldn't take too long…

Roy did it, although with a tinge of reluctance, he had his favourite things to do maintenance wise.

Rob would sometimes sit and watch the meanderings of the staff coming in and out of the lunch room. Some days he would sit in a corner on his own reading a paper held up as if to disguise him being there. On a few occasions he would be there on a day off. Few really knew what days he worked as he was able to change that around to suit, sometimes things needed work, but it might be raining and so another day was used.

Rob used this as his own form of 'confusion' with people not able to readily get used to his pattern of work.

Rob noted some of the staff interacted well with others and some stayed with their own type, there was a group of cleaners who spoke little English but some form of Asian language, Rob wasn't clear as to which, it could have been Vietnamese, Filipino or other. Rob often found accents would get mixed up in his head, a Doctor once told him it could be an audio processing disorder, making accents on people hard to 'decode'. That certainly made sense to Rob.

Rob thought about how the different staff interacted with residents and then each other, there was certainly a hierarchy. The cleaners saw themselves as the lowest on the pecking order and pulled the old ‘Me no speak much engrish…’ If they were asked a question. They stayed to their job, cleaning, organising the laundry, and occasionally making beds. They knew how to work and worked well, even if it only looked like they were busy at times.

The cleaners were looked after by Chris, she was like a mother hen to them, kept them in order and looked after their needs, a nicked finger would see Chris get into action to make sure a bandaid was in place and the incident written up in the OHS reporting book.

Chris was well versed in doing that and wanted to make sure people in her charge were covered in case of any incident, accusation etc. Cleaners had been accused of stealing in the past and she was onto that, she told her staff she would search them if she had to, and indicated they were paid to work, if they needed extra cash do not steal, instead work extra shifts.

Rob noted the different timings as well, nursing and attendant staff lunched differently to the cleaners, although there was often room to accommodate more people at once.

One lunchtime Rob was at a table eating a sandwich, Roy wandered in, made a coffee and sat down next to him. There was a brief and amicable chat about things they were up to. Roy mentioned how the trimmed back hedge out the back turned out, ‘It looks better than it did, it was wildly overgrown.’ Thanks, mentioned Rob.

Just then one of the attendant staff walked in, acknowledged the pair, went to the fridge, retrieved some food and sat to have a bite to eat. Maria, she was a good operator and was generally on the ball with procedures and policies, everyone knew it.

Sarah, a team leader as part of the nursing and attendant staff came bursting through the door not long after and faced off at Maria. She didn't see Rob and Roy, sitting there. But something mentioned to Rob that an incident was about to occur. He picked up his smart phone and started to record a video of the pair interacting.

Roy looked up and had the same feeling, he was about to head out the door, Rob gently grabbed his arm and quietly but demandingly articulated that he should 'SIT! Do not go ANYWHERE!'

Sarah walked up to Maria and stood on the other side of the table, leaned over and verbally ran her down. 'How dare you make such a freakin' blundering mistake!' Maria had no idea what Sarah was talking about. And looked puzzled as well as shocked. 'Wait, what? What are you talking about?' Rob kept filming.

Another staff member walked in the door and quickly backed out sensing the tension in the raised voices across the room.

Maria was accused of making a wrong entry into an incident book about a resident having a fall. Sarah abruptly mentioned that, 'Your name is initialled against that incident but you didn't follow it up and call the next of kin, nor did you tell anyone else Mrs Jones had that fall! That could have been disastrous!' I'm calling that a VERBAL WARNING. We are

not impressed!' Maria was distraught and was failing to know how to respond. The verbal assault had caught her off guard.

Sarah pointed her finger at Maria. And yelled 'We are not impressed!' and stormed towards the door, briefly noting Rob and Roy watching the goings on.

Rob stood up and followed her out the door, as she headed off across the main dining area of the facility to the office she shared with some other staff.

One thing Rob knew was that people who said 'we' were generally making something sound bigger than it was, or that more than one person was involved above the person being accused, a classic manipulation technique. That displeased him no end.

By this stage Helen heard about the noise, Gail had heard things start and was quick to mention 'things were afoot' in the lunch room.

Rob spotted her and waved, she was with him in an instant, he showed her the video, the pair walked in on Sarah. She was on her own and acted as if not much had happened.

Rob wandered across to check on Maria while Helen had a chat with Sarah.

Maria had gone, as had Roy. Rob heard from another staff member that Maria had headed up the other end of the facility, seemingly distraught about something, but she wouldn't say what.

Catching up with Roy to ask his thoughts on the situation, he responded with ‘Oh well, from time to time things heat up and people get a little flustered, it’s probably one of those ‘time of the month things’ you know. It happens from time to time.’ Rob enquired a bit further, ‘How often would you say, things like that happen?’ Roy suggested, probably not often, a few times a month perhaps.’

Rob felt Maria's pain, and didn’t like that someone would have to deal with some degree of anguish without having had any real recourse or response to the situation. He found her in a corridor a bit later on, moving between rooms. ‘Oh Maria, I just wanted to have a quick word.’ He gave her a kind smile, she was puzzled at first and then suggested, ‘Yeah, okay, you're the gardener guy right? Rob?’ ‘Yeah that’s right’, He suggested, ‘Just the gardener, but hey that’s not the point right now, I noticed the ‘chat’ that you and Sarah had in the lunchroom and the big thing I noted was that she didn’t give you any room to respond.’

Maria mentioned, ‘Oh yeah Helen had a chat with me, we sorted that out, it was a misread on the incident sheet, it looks like my initials but it was one of the other staff. Not me, so it’s all good.’ She started to move off not wanting to explore the issue further. Rob simply suggested, ‘I just wanted to see if you were okay about it.’ Maria waved and said ‘Oh yeah thanks for that.’

Helen told Rob it was a mistake but not one that Sarah felt that she had to apologise for. She left it at that, and chatted to Maria about it.

There was a discussion to be had about communication between staff, policies and procedures and so much more.

The pair did some brainstorming, flowcharting and the like, exploring what was currently in place and what could be developed, then had a discussion about making changes that staff would be willing to be involved in.

A few things stood out to Rob, from past experiences in other positions etc. He listed them on the whyteboard

- Respect
- See something - DO something.
- Be the change you want to see in the world.

He then wrote Issues…

- Communication levels due to poor English skills.
- Training on communication, respect, jumping to conclusions.

Helen suggested, 'Let's think on this and come back with some of our own thoughts, catch up tomorrow?' Rob was happy with that, the mowing guy would be in and he would only have some small gardening tasks to deal with.

Rob had a meeting with the board, loose discussion held about what had been achieved so far and how things were progressing. They were mostly impressed and pleased with how things were going. Key points about staff morale, respect and customer service were also discussed.

Chapter Four

The next day, Rob walked in and put his lunch in the lunchroom fridge, he noted Maria's lunchbox, it was the same one as yesterday, it looked as if it hadn't moved since yesterday, as he turned and walked to Helen's office for a brief chat he saw Maria pull up in the staff carpark, she was just arriving, He noted she didn't head to the lunch room so the lunch from yesterday had not been touched, well not much. He also noted she looked a little tired and listless.

The morning catch up with Helen was productive. They met in an interview room well away from the reception area and other staff for that matter. They both agreed that due to the amount of times nasty little interactions happened, that some things needed to change.

Helen had some points on her computer, Rob had emailed through his thoughts at 11.30 last night. The two were merged and then printed. They were on a similar track.

Ideas, time for the english training to be implemented. This was seen as a priority and it seemed smart to start at the bottom and work their way up. The cleaners were usually free to some degree from about 1.30 while most of the staff were fitting in their lunch breaks, it was well known that it was easier to slack off if there were less staff about and the cleaners knew it.

There were basically two groups of cleaners, one lot that worked across part of the weekend and the others that worked across most of the week. During the overlap, that would be a useful time to introduce something, but what. The aim was to build their English conversational levels so they could interact more with residents and staff as well as being

more equipped to report things they saw but were currently ignoring. “We no make trouble…’

Helen noted that some of the senior staff like Carolyn and Marcus could manipulate the cleaners and berate them for the smallest thing and often set them up to feel bad, this power and control freak approach in the senior staff was unsettling, the term narcissist came to mind for both Rob and Helen,, this was clearly undesirable and needed to change.

The point was to build confidence and the ability to understand things better and be able to speak up for the people needing better english. There was a small training room, it could seat about fourteen people, and so once a week a local Tutor, Sheryl, came in and chatted to half the cleaners and the other half two days later, replicating the exercises given, it started off as half hourly sessions.

Sheryl mainly helped secondary school students with essays and comprehension of books they read. Having extra tutoring work would be good especially if it was during school time when she didn’t have access to individual students to tutor.

Integrated into the sessions were key points and words, like respect and examples of what that meant. The cleaners started out a little reluctantly but Chris assured them it would be a good thing and that they would still get their work done.

A memo was produced for all staff about respect, there was a section added to the website that staff could log into with a simple password, it gave examples of being respectful, it didn’t suggest that staff were being disrespectful, they could come to their own conclusion on that point.

Rob found some videos online that addressed the issue as well.

The email went out, and Helen left it at that. A week later Gail sent out a brief survey and noted who responded, who had read the information and watched at least one of the videos? Only just over half the staff responded, the others, when questioned, suggested that they didn't read the official email very often, 'too busy to take note.'

Helen took things to another level, she asked Sheryl about other areas she might be able to work with, leadership? Innovation? Communication skills? She suggested that she was adaptable and liked working with adults and could probably explore some options. She liked the notion of facilitating learning, brainstorming and exploring things.

One thing Helen and Rob knew was that they probably needed to stay well away from any learning sessions that took place, especially in the early stages to let things grow more organically and not push things onto people.

The pair knew there may be some resistance to the training sessions, Helen pointed out that training was an important part of the staff's professional development but didn't push the issue.

They set up two sessions, attendance was voluntary, the staff had to choose which session they attended. Each session was half an hour long. Sheryl started out with some loose guidelines, and with the help of Rob and Helen's experience they created a robust approach that was aimed to eventually inspire and engage the staff.

Rob mentioned that the aim was to get them in the palm of her hand and then keep them there, being careful not to drop them. Sheryl was impressed with Rob's ideas and information he had emailed to her, she asked how come he knew so much? Simple, Rob was an ex-teacher and had worked with unemployed and trained adults in management studies, amongst other things. But she was to keep that to herself…

The first few sessions were low on attendance but slowly built over time.

The material to be presented was set out to cover key points. They started with a loose discussion about leadership, Sheryl explaining her role carefully, to assist in discussing the points they raised. It started out as a brainstorm of the 'key traits of highly effective leaders.' She would then add in information of respect and how leaders would do that.

They compiled a list and wrote them up on flip chart paper, each point explored and discussed. It was noted that their brainstorming was equal in value to many academic researchers who had explored the topic.

The aim then was to focus on one area that tied together all the other points on communication and team work. It was all tied into respect. They quickly explored that as a main point and reflected on the email sent out with the key points in the staff section on the website.

When the training wasn't happening the information was left attached to the wall and the double door to the training room was left open with the lights on. Staff who had not attended the sessions but wandered past could read the material and get a sense of what was taking place, curiosity built.

Some of the staff were starting to catch on. Other staff were wondering why junior staff were also involved, Sheryl simply suggested that, it's to offer everyone the same opportunity and to keep things balanced, 'remember it's all voluntary.'

Helen sat with Sheryl after each double session and chatted about findings, revelations and such. Helen then emailed Rob with the findings and together they formulated what was next. They had three people looking at what was to be presented and carefully did their best to respect each other's views and ideas.

It was noted that most of the ideas explored were positive and that leadership was not about pushing people to do things but rather training them to do more of the right things as well as facilitating their positive approaches and being flexible in how they responded.

A few weeks in and some of the staff who hadn't attended were getting a sense that these sessions might be useful.

Rob joined in on this last group and again some people asked why, Sheryl gave them a similar response, we all work here and interact with each other, and after all it's voluntary.

No one queried things after that, it all made sense. Even though some of them felt Rob was old enough to be retired and wondered what he could add, 'After all he's JUST a Gardener?'

Rob made notes as things went along, extra nuances and thoughts to be explored. He suggested to Helen that they add to the website information to add depth to what was explored in each session.

They even threw open the idea that staff find video examples online if they wished, and put them forward for review, if they were useful then they could be used. It took a while for that to take off but it did.

A number of signs were created by a local signwriter and were put up in the lunch room and various staff spaces with big letters that spelled out ‘RESPECT’ Think about it.

Below it, it had some detailed points, ideas and notions about what respect meant and how it could be of benefit. Staff, if tackled about an issue with a supervisor, were starting to say ‘Where’s the respect?’ So the communication that took place was coming from a ‘new space’ a more considered respectful place.

Communication was taking on a more positive and professional vibe. Helen and Rob had been on the lookout for this to happen and both knew it was part of vital steps to making the facility run better and improve its image to the wider community.

Another thing to come out of the weekly training session in regard to respect was the notion of caring. Then a list of points sprang up about how we act when we really care. That led to the creation of another sign. ‘See something, Do something.’ because it was felt that if you cared and saw something happen you wouldn’t shy away but take action.

Rob knew that one of the big issues organisations often faced was Narcissism, sometimes a senior person, would want to maintain power and control, and would start out as sweet as pie but as time went on would change and become and powerful manipulator who if

pushed on an issue could make themselves look like the victim. They had played the power and control game for so long they became masters at it.

It was something that needed to be tackled carefully, a master manipulator could ‘go to ground’ for a long while if they felt they were being exposed. Even very experienced psychologists will tell you the Narcissist is probably never going to change their ways. They simply move on and become someone else’s problem. Starting out as ‘nice as pie’ then turning into a vile fire breathing beast, putting crazy demands on people.

Discussions with Sheryl and Helen started to form into some useful content on power and control, there was reflection across to the leadership points and how getting better results required better more positive communication. It was decided to focus on that.

Time was spent exploring personality types and emotional intelligence and how we are all different in how we communicate, what our expectations, needs and wants are. Rob had taught this often and guided Sheryl in how best to approach things. He made sure he sat in on both sessions for this topic and carefully added ideas and points to add clarity and depth.

Marcus and Carolyn were quiet participants and soon found any ideas they had that would suggest that leaders needed power and control were being wiped out by more ‘liberal’ views they didn’t necessarily agree on, the notions that a softer approach would work better did not sit well with either of them.

The staff were beginning to see the value of the training sessions but some felt it ate too much into their work time. They were reminded that the sessions were voluntary, many then mentioned, ‘Yeah but I don’t want to miss out!’

Helen, Robert and Sheryl would chat and swap notes about how things were going. The English group was getting stronger, although there was some strong resistance to reading some English out loud.

Rob joined in on a few sessions, each participant would take a turn reading a paragraph and were allowed to pass if they didn't feel confident, Rob added in and read his part, keeping the same pace as the others who weren't as confident. There would then be a discussion about the content of what was written.

There were sessions where Australian slang terms were explored and giggled at. Attendance slowly climbed as confidence grew and word got around that the sessions were useful and often fun.

The activities coordinator, Frankie, added a few interesting word games that incorporated craft activities and interactive approaches with small trinket gifts and chocolates as rewards for correct responses. A lot of fun was had along with some decent learning.

Rob looked forward to rainy winter days when he couldn't do things in the yard, but instead was involved in watching the staff at all levels learn and grow.

It was survey time and Gail produced a survey asking the staff about things they wanted to know in regards to training, things that might help them personally and professionally. One thing that came to mind was some form of public speaking. That surprised Helen at first but then looked at how far the cleaners had gone with their communication skills.

Sheryl said yes and some of the cleaners also joined in. It was a slow start but as confidence and ideas developed a small group soon developed, there were listeners who joined the group late, they were advised that a new group would start in six weeks, so for now they could listen only. By the time the next group started they were keen to be involved, having learned the details of how to approach a speech in front of a small crowd.

Rob and Helen were impressed as was Chris. Roy even joined in listening. He made sure Helen was happy with him being there and not attending to maintenance items. Helen was very pleased to have him there, his gossipy ways were fading to become more of a thing of the past.

Marcus was probably the last person to get on board with the training sessions, Carolyn only attended a few of them suggesting she was too busy to bother. Helen was reminded by her that 'the sessions are voluntary.' Helen had to cop that and be happy that she at least attended some of the sessions, perhaps over time she would learn some more along the way.

New staff who came in were also welcomed and occasionally there would be another start up group exploring 'The Key Traits of Highly Effective Leaders.' Over time a simple video was produced where staff were interviewed and asked questions about leadership and give examples. It was put up on the staff website and was used from time to time.

Another survey went out, have things improved at the facility and if so how? The results were positive to say the least. There had been a solid range of responses that showed they had been able to use their new skills effectively. One thing that arose from that was training in Customer Service, how to deal with people who could get nasty, have high demands and so on.

The training trio were on to it and developed a bunch of simple online points, it then opened out into a series of facilitated sessions where they role-played different situations and ways things could be handled.

This soon led to an advanced group who wanted to know more about how to get people on side fast, and create better outcomes. Sheryl soon took on that one and before long a bunch of extended pointers were explored and facilitated.

One of the staff had done some investigating of their own and asked if there was any information on staff feedback systems like three hundred and sixty degree feedback, and if it would be useful for helping staff overcome any shortcomings they might have.

This was a new one for the team and it was agreed it would need to have people volunteer to be involved, even though there were people who others knew needed to have their approach to things 'adjusted.'

In amongst all this were the occasional new recruits, they were given introductory information about the facility, respect and see something do something and examples given. Some were shocked that there was extra training, it was pointed out that it was a popular side aspect of the job and many staff enjoyed being involved, on more than one occasion a new recruit would say, 'But we have just done the full on certificate training, surely that's enough?' A staff member who was there to assist, had a brief giggle and simply mentioned, 'It's voluntary, you figure out if you need it, or not.'

Chapter Five

The front garden and entrance way had been revamped, it took some time and effort but the results were well worth it, ‘the area now glowed,’ was the way one visitor described it. Harsh plants had been replaced with softer fragrant varieties with a water feature which had a lovely trickling background noise that set most people at ease, some however suggested it made them want to relive themselves. Such is the effect running water can have.

Rob was out the front when Susie and her daughter Ava arrived, Ava said ‘Hello Mr gardener!’ Susie smiled and mentioned, ‘She just loves calling you that. And I must say this new garden and entrance way is much better than the previous one. It's rather impressive, very welcoming.’

Rob was pleased and thanked them, gesturing with his hand to cause the automatic door to open. They then entered saying in unison ‘Thanks Mr Gardener!’

Well ‘B1’ was most pleased, but he did know that good times can last a long while or a short while, how long would it be before the run of good outcomes might stagnate or fail. He also knew that bad times didn’t last either… It was all a matter of time.

Back inside Rob notes that Ava and Susie are out at the sensory garden checking out the colourful bright purple verbena plants and the feeling of the Lambs Ear plants.

Ava then pointed out the small, raised moveable planters filled with easy to care for herbs, right outside some of the residents' windows creating a personalized sensory experience.

Rob was delighted at how different people experienced the gardens, he reflected briefly on the changes and how happier staff and residents seemed to be.

There are various things that Rob has noticed in seeing the staff interact at training sessions and how they discussed other staff, often not naming ‘certain persons’ and in some role playing they indicated that one supervisor in particular could be difficult to follow, they would give one set of directions and then alter things a bit later stating ‘that’s not what I suggested, Don’t you people listen!’ Others were quite pleased with the leadership they had from their supervisors but there were two main people who resisted change and didn’t like the new softer approach of handling people.

Marcus was the main culprit, it seemed as if he could be a little ‘unhinged’ at times showing swinging emotional responses. It was of some concern and despite the staff following their new learnings it seemed there were moments of difficulty.

Helen looked into the matter and did some research, she had a hunch and suspected he could have mood swings due to drugs. She consulted with a local workplace drug testing agency and asked for advice, how to proceed in testing what things to look out for and so on.

They suggested, amongst other things, that the facility diarise any incidents, even small things, dates, times etc were important as well as the details of the mood swing behaviour. They pointed out it could also be narcissistic behaviour and that he may well just be showing power and control traits.

It wasn't long before an incident arose, Rob wasn't about but two of the cleaning staff dropped in on Helen and 'had a chat' Marcus told us to clean two rooms and then later told us we did the wrong rooms he re directed us and was quite rude, we cleaned those rooms and then he was nowhere to be found when we wanted his approval. Half an hour later he caught up with us and seemed rather relaxed. We carefully asked him if he had checked the rooms and he was 'how you say' a bit dismissive. Saying 'yes, yes they're fine' and walked off. A bit disrespectful, we thought.

Then just a few minutes later we heard him talking to Carolyn saying how annoyed he was at how slack that cleaners are and they don't follow instructions. We walked by chatting to each other and he suggested out loud, 'And there they are, wandering about with nothing to do…' Carolyn gestured to us and then suggested that we, 'Move on girls, move on…' We felt a little awkward. And didn't want to say they were being disrespectful but they clearly were.'

Helen recorded the details and did some digging further, for some reason she wanted to check his car in the carpark, not that there was anything to see really, she wasn't at all sure what she might see. A casual glance didn't pick anything up, a closer inspection indicated that he smoked, that greasy window look of tar build up and an ashtray that showed use. It caused her to think, what if he was doing some weed. More research was required.

The internet gave a few clues about drug use and mood swings, one thing led to another then she found a bit more information.

'Developing a drug dependence and addiction – To a user, weed can normalise taking cocaine or ice by enabling them to continue to function (albeit at an impaired level). This can

lead a user to taking more of both drugs as they feel safer in their drug use. This can develop into a full blown cocaine, ice and or weed addiction.'

Helen wasn't about to accuse Marcus of anything, she knew she had to tread carefully and not put herself or the organisation into any sort of awkward situation.

Back in her office, and almost a moment later the facility's main Registered Nurse knocked on Helen's door, Elaine Dover. Helen and Elaine got on very well, Elaine was seeing all the positive changes about the place and was a solid champion for the cause. She also had cause for concern with Marcus and unbeknownst to Helen she was keeping her own diary of things Marcus did, spoke about and otherwise.

Elaine then mentioned something rather direct which caught Helen off guard. 'Marcus is messing up, if we get rid of him will he be easy to replace?' Helen suggested that she wasn't sure, every now and then a resume came across her desk, especially now that the facility has been seen in a more positive light after many months of positive changes. But no one came to mind too fast. Perhaps Gail had some leads she didn't yet know about.'

Elaine outlined some close calls with staff but just a short while back she heard him on the phone with a resident's next of kin, arguing that he had kept them up to date and that her 'Mother was just fine.' I took the initiative and went to see Mrs Jenkins, she was actually not feeling too well and told me she had complained to her Daughter because the Unit Supervisor, Marcus wasn't listening to her.

I set her at ease and rang her daughter, on her mobile, she's on her way over here to see what's happening. Emma Dight, she didn't seem too impressed.

Helen rang Rob and had a quick chat, he suggested that if things are getting ‘a bit ancy’ and 'disrupted’ that she consider calling the police or try the drug test people and see if they could ‘drop by’. Helen had a friend who was ‘on the force’. He was on a holliday break but she knew he was about, she rang him and asked what might be possible. He suggested the police would only turn up if there was an ‘incident’ that was something they could clearly respond to and as for drug testing, well they would need to somehow be sure.

He added, ‘It’s rather specific and most obvious in traffic incidents, they can do a test with some degree of ease, having probably witnessed traffic issues with their driving. However, to establish reasonable suspicion for a drug test in another situation, an officer must have specific and articulable facts that, when taken together with rational inferences, would lead them to reasonably believe that the person has been involved in drug-related activity.’ and if tested and it proved positive they could arrest the person for illegal activity.

Mrs Jenkins Daughter, Emma had just pulled up in the carpark as Helen got off the phone with her friend.

Helen met her as she came in the door with Elaine, Elaine introduced her and mentioned that they should head straight around to her Mothers room and chat about things there. Emma mentioned she was not impressed about her mother being unwell and not effectively attended to.

Heading up the hallway the led light system lit up room 34, the system beeped and then the number flashed, Mrs Jenkins had just pressed the button. All three were in the room in an instant. She was fine, just needed some water, it was noted that she had been in her bed all

day. Elaine checked her vitals as Emma and Helen chatted, Helen asked about what Marcus had mentioned. Emma was rather scathing of Marcus and his inability to show any deep degree of empathy to her mother. This wasn't the first time.

Helen was annoyed, next thing Marcus was at the door, one of his staff alerted him that Mrs Jenkins alarm had gone off. He stood back, rather surprised that three people were in the room before him and that it was Elaine and Helen. He enquired, 'What's going on? Is everything okay? I got here as soon as I heard her alarm had gone off.'

Helen assured him that she was being assessed by the nurse and that she should be okay. She then introduced Emma, just in case they hadn't met before, but they had, Emma suggested in an abrupt tone, 'I shouldn't have to be here if you did your job!' Helen gestured to Marcus to keep his mouth shut, which he did. He stood and watched. Saying he would write the incident up in his notes. Emma huffed and suggested, 'Well that'll be a turn up for the books!'

Helen gestured quietly for him to move away from the door, clearly his presence was not helping the situation.

It wasn't long before Carolyn walked by having been informed by one of her 'sources' that a pair of 'high ranking staff' were off to see to an issue with a resident. She put her nose in the door and enquired if everything was okay, acting as sweet as pie. Helen nodded and smiled, Carolyn moved on as if she was 'just passing by.' Helen knew better, as did Elaine.

Between the two of them they eased the situation and assured Emma that her mother would be monitored more closely for the next day or so to ensure she was okay, the visiting

Doctor was due in two days and that he would run some tests, not to be alarmed but to be reassured they were taking positive action.

Emma's mind was set a little at ease as Helen and Elaine headed off, Helen gave Emma one of her business cards, with her direct mobile number, 'If you need to chat to me about anything, please call anytime.'

Emma sat with her Mother for a while longer before heading off, thanking the receptionist on her way out and to pass on thanks to Elaine and Helen for their care and respect.

The next day Helen had arranged for a random drug check to be done, thankfully it was in the staff contract that staff could be tested at any point. The drug testing company organised a certified tester and a security guard, just in case. Thankfully Marcus was compliant, it was at the start of the day. He tested positive for methamphetamine. He knew the company policy was to be zero on a drug test, he had clearly failed.

Marcus sat back in his chair looking at the security guard in the background, looked at Helen and said 'Okay so what's next sweetheart, your softly softly approach has caught me out, what next?' Helen suggested that, 'We will suspend you on full pay for a week pending an enquiry. We would then chat to the union and explore what's next from there.'

Marcus then spoke abruptly, 'Look it's kind of clear I have not been happy here for a while, I'll take your one week of suspension and then what's left of my holiday pay and entitlements, I know when I'm finished, I must say I'm pissed off, but I wouldn't be

supported by the freakin union. They're all soft and positive just like you guys. Therefore I quit, stuff the lot of you.'

The drug tester had moved his equipment into the hallway. Helen stood and watched as Marcus picked up a box and put his personal items in it. There was a picture on the wall, some small items in his drawer. He was about to access the computer, then Helen mentioned. 'NO, no way, leave that, don't touch it.' The security guy stepped in. Helen reached down and turned off the power at the socket.

Marcus asked, 'But what about my private files and all that. Oh well never mind you can all get stuffed!'

Helen watched as he got out of his seat and then gestured for him to hand over his, keys and access lanyard thanks.

Marcus was then escorted to his car, Helen mentioned to Marcus, 'So it's clear, one week suspension and the rest of your leave entitlements etc.' Marcus just said. 'Yeah that's fine and stick the whole thing where the sun don't shine. All the best with your flakey ideas of running a business!'

The security guy stood by and watched dutifully, he walked back with Helen as Marcus drove off. Helen asked if the security guy could stay about for a while just in case things went a little crazy somehow. He mentioned he was booked in for at least two hours anyway and would gladly be there. He then asked about other access points to the facility.

The security guy mentioned, I should have suggested that you don't enter his space but keep things at a distance. He could have done anything today but thankfully he was rather compliant.' Helen thanked him for the advice, and suggested that, 'I didn't think too much about it I must admit. I guess I was lucky.'

There was some discussion at front reception as Gail, Helen and Michelle stood and cleared their heads of what had taken place. Gail suggested she would ring the IT people and have Marcus's computer access disconnected and then have them see if there were any files and such that needed to be kept as any form of evidence. Helen was grateful for Gail's clearheadedness.

B1, Rob, arrived not long after and simply smiled at Helen, 'All good?' He asked. Helen smiled back and suggested, 'Well, shaken but not stirred, not yet anyway!'

Helen filled Rob in on the details and between the pair they were able to establish a clear timeline on what had happened in the past and where Marcus was at fault. Just in case there was an issue with either the union or a government department for 'unfair dismissal' etc.

It turned out that Marcus was not to be seen again.

Rob recalled an earlier situation with Marcus in the garden, he was in the process of putting signs in the front garden beds, it was early in all the revamp processes, they had these neat signs made up that labelled the various plants.

Rob was still finding his feet at this stage and was treading lightly, Marcus came in through the front door in a rush and made comments about how the signs were awful and probably not sanctioned, he certainly didn't sanction them, awful things you should get rid of them! The owner of the facility will be pissed off with the money spent on that lot, what a waste!'

Rob suggested that he thought the 'kid' was a loose hinge even back then.

To clear the air and keep people up to date with what was going on Marcus's immediate staff whom he managed, were brought together and advised that he had quit. They would put someone into the role temporarily to look after things, in the meantime contact Gail for any details, instructions etc.

An email went out to the rest of the staff later that day along with small group meetings advising of his departure. Carolyn was silent but at lunchtime there was a lot of discussion in groups about his departure. Most were very pleased he was gone, mostly people who were on his team.

Things were a little fractious for a while as people discussed seeing a security guard in the building and a man with testing equipment being there also. Helen sought to make people aware that all was okay and that they had followed the right protocols for testing etc. The board members had made sure that suitable protocol had been followed and details checked out which resulted in Marcus's suspension and final dismissal.

Word soon got around that management were looking for a replacement for Marcus' vacated role. Maria's name was put forward to Helen by some of the staff, diligent, positive,

had been around for a few years, knew the policies and procedures very well and had done all the recent training.

Helen did some nosing about and chatted to Sheryl, ‘Remember Maria?... Team Leading potential or not?’ It was a positive yes. Sheryl suggested, ‘Have you thought about creating a mentor program, where you and or others get to coach people in a role like that, so they don’t feel out on a limb, but feel solidly supported?’

Helen liked the idea and sat with Gail for a while later that day, ‘Gail here’s a project, let's figure out a Mentor and or coaching program.’ a few minutes on the whiteboard and Gail had more than enough points to do her research and compile a program.

Helen decided to not think too much about filling Marcus’s role. She wandered the building and found Maria. A smiley hello and a quick chat. “So what would you say to the Team Leader, fill in role for at least a few weeks. I know you know the policies and procedures inside out, I know the other staff love working with you and the residents and I would personally support you to get things started…’

Maria looked at Helen and mentioned, ‘OH, I don’t know if I can do that job, it’s a bit above me I think…’ Helen smiled at her and suggested, ‘It pays more, not a lot mind you but there’s a bit of incentive for you.’ Helen stayed silent and just smiled. Maria mentioned, ‘What, you want an answer now!’ Helen smiled and then put on a sad face, saying ’Oh well it was worth the try…’ Have a think about it and let me know… tomorrow morning would be good!’ and put on a smile as she fist bumped Maria, winked and walked off.

Maria excitedly informed Helen the next morning she would do it. The Team Leader role sounded too good not to get involved in. Helen did a rare thing and hugged Maria saying 'Good on you!' She then discussed coaching and mentoring in the role.

Some things had to change, and some people had to be shuffled. One of the junior attendant staff had shown a lot of promise in the role that Maria had, Paige, liked by residents and the staff, she gladly stepped up into Maria's previous attendant role. Helen had Maria to Mentor and Coach then Maria got to do the same with her new 'stepped up' person, Paige.

All of a sudden there was a renewed spark in the facility, some roles filled and an exciting start to things. Gail did her bit to gather the guidelines, protocols etc that Maria and Paige had to work to, and then Helen had a focus then on key areas to train the pair in.

Chapter Six

One afternoon Frankie, the activities leader, wandered past the training room and heard the staff practicing English with Sheryl, about an hour later an idea hit her. As Sheryl was heading out of the building she called her over.

"Here's an idea, you have these people reading English fairly well, I wandered by earlier and heard them, what if they got to have more practice? Here's what I'm thinking, we create a small reading circle, Residents listen as a few of these staff read a few paragraphs. It could start out as a few short stories, a news article or even a poem… what do you think?'

Sheryl suggested, ‘Brilliant! You and I could sit in and add a paragraph or two to help build confidence… I know we could start out just as the staff, you and I and then add in a resident or two and build from there.’

Frankie said, ‘I’ll mention it to Helen.’ Sheryl mentioned ‘No need to bother about that, she supports any initiatives like this these days, anything to keep people engaged and interested in their jobs and build skills as well as keeping the residents engaged.’

Before long the pair had slotted in a new reading circle with the staff learning better English, pronunciation of words and understanding of what was being communicated.

A sign showed up in the lunchroom,

‘We respectfully serve the people around us.’

This showed up on the whyteboard in the lunchroom. Helen liked it, a simple and straight forward mantra it hit at every level of the organisation, from the residents to the staff. Sheryl walked in, Helen thought perhaps she knew about it.

She smiled, said good morning, and pointed at the statement.

Sheryl smiled and mentioned, 'Ah yeah, that came out of one of the brainstorming sessions a little while back, one of the many little things that supported our positive approach to things.’ Helen suggested ‘I like it a lot, the more I ponder it, the more it fits!’

Sheryl mentioned,, ‘Well I’m glad you like it, I don’t know who wrote it up on the board though.’

It didn’t take long, Helen had Gail ‘respectfully’ add the statement to their website. She wondered if she needed approval from the board, or even B1… ‘Nope, I’m not asking,’ she articulated to herself, 'This is ours and we should all automatically embrace it.’

The statement was soon seen in their brochures, social media posts and noticeboards.

There were a few giggles and smart comments that showed up on some of the social media posts, that was to be expected, based on the facilities past performances. The aim was to get more positives than negatives.

Sheryl took the initiative and created a single page of points relating to respectful service; each was an example that spelled out a version of respectful service.

In one of her training sessions the staff were asked to make a list of things that didn’t match up to the notion of respectful service, it started off as a few points then they were asked to explore the idea as ‘homework’. The next session soon had a long list of sometimes seemingly minor items that all had an impact on how people felt, something not put away correctly or put in the wrong place and how that disrespected the system, policies and procedures they had.

Then there were communication issues, with staff, families, friends and residents. All stakeholders in fact including the suppliers who arrived and interacted with everyone.

An idea was formed, put a list of respectful operational points in each area: storage areas, the kitchen, general open areas, the dining room, near the BBQs etc, even the reception area and office spaces had reminders.

Some thought it was over the top and a bit of an insult, others thought completely the opposite and saw it as a great way to remind people to work and explore the topic to a high standard.

At one training session one of the nursing staff mentioned, ‘This is single handedly pushing out the naysayers and creating a fresh positive perspective all round. A workplace that’s free of Narcissists is a good thing.’ She went on to say, ‘I noted the other day that I saw very few people with their phones out. It was such a thing for such a long while, people texting and no one seemed to bother to stop it, but now we have guidelines, protocols and concepts in place to make positive changes.’

A few weeks later there was an announcement, a group from a local training group for aged care workers were to be on workplace placements, that meant they were at the facility to test out their skills and explore careers in the aged care system. The aim was to help train these people as well as showcase the facility. Most local aged care facilities had at least one group act as interns throughout the year.

Crystal Brook Manor had these sorts of placement people in the past, they had loose guidelines as to how they would work with the staff and the expectations put on them. Some of the full-time staff found them to be a nuisance, some having no idea of what it meant to care for people, to show respect and what was expected of them as an aged care worker.

Sarah was one of those, her ‘short fuse’ temper was often overworked in these situations, trying to figure out who was who, what they were meant to be doing and who was in control, it occasionally led to chaos. She sent a terse email to Helen, ‘I don’t particularly want to have anything to do with another lot of placement people, but with all the training and so on, can we at least figure out a better way to handle them?’

Helen saw an opportunity, Sarah had been ‘on the outer’ with most of the positive goings on and was raising an issue that things could be handled differently. Helen thought, well at least Sarah’s talking about the training that’s been happening.

She shot back an email. ‘Excellent idea, what would you like to see changed?’ Sarah must have caught the email fairly fast and spat out a bunch of points.

- They need to have different coloured name tags, so people especially staff know they are different, not fully trained, it’s more like they are observers.

- They need to follow instructions, if not they get kicked out, FAST.

- They need an induction program, how we do things, who leads them, our expectations, the whole respect thing would be an ideal start we can stand by.

- They need to know our emergency procedures and get tested on them. There have been issues in the past.

- They need to sit and chat with the residents, build confidence and understand them better.

- They need to mix with a range of staff, not just be placed in one area.

- They need to be easily identified from a distance that they are new observers.

- They need to see a video or some such of our respect points. Like our website has, okay just send them there, test them on day one to see if they know it’s what we do.

- They need a place to put their ‘stuff’ . We usually end up with their ‘stuff’ all over the place. I remember a group a few years ago complaining that things ‘went missing’ dear god that was a nightmare and their ‘stuff ‘presented a tripping hazard in the lunchroom.

- Do we need to have so many of them all at once? Please can we have just a small group of say seven or so, perhaps we can split them into two groups, last time I think we had way too many strangers wandering about the place, residents didn’t have a clue who was who.

Helen knew that this was clearly a sticking point for Sarah and probably a lot of others as well. Rob walked in the front door. Helen gestured for him to come into the office.

‘Hey B1, you got much on for the day?’ She asked. As she printed out the email points from Sarah.

‘Well not particularly, nothing too urgent. What’s up?’ he asked.

‘Time to make something really good happen, and I mean REALLY good.’ She outlined the issue and Sarah's responses. ‘So it’s time to create something new, something groundbreaking, something people will talk about for ages. Something that works, first time everytime.’ Helen outlined the points Sarah raised over the issue of dealing with interns.

Rob sat and smiled, ‘That sounds fantastic, my first thought is ‘go hard or go home…’ Get tough, boot camp style. Make them quake in their boots a little, set them apart, set us apart, make it so they can’t argue, just comply, but do it in such a way that they really respect what we do and how things have changed.’

Have you seen the video documentary on the teacher who created Brown eyes Blue eyes? It's a fascinating watch, American teacher, primary level wanting to show and raise awareness of prejudice and had a unique approach. I recall her using coloured scarves or some such, it's given me an idea…'

Rob grabbed the whyteboard pen and started on some points.

- Bootcamp.

- On time is on time.

- Respect, earnt and explored.

- Seen to be different - colour coded.

- Trained - First aid - safety procedures - evacuation procedures - respect… - communication - who's important.

The pair evaluated their findings with free flowing brainstorming. They added to the set of points Sarah had started and Rob and Helen had embellished. They explored the time frame, how to make a total of six days over two weeks work really well, homework was the answer, starting with the respect information and test, they would do one online and then one face to face on the day one induction, any failures or major discrepancies would mean they would exit the building, no questions asked.

This meant that they had to be notified of the guidelines before doing their placement and then on arrival or perhaps before they would have to sign in to agree to the terms and conditions. Being on time and completing the tasks set for them were mandatory.

Gail got that task, she crafted a suitable set of guidelines and took them off to Sarah to ratify. Sarah was surprised, liked what she saw and added a point or two of clarification. Gail

mentioned that Helen would drop over to tell her about what would be happening and how things would roll out, oh and by the way, thanks for the suggestions! Sarah was gobsmacked but rather pleased.

Rob had ideas floating in his head as he worked around the gardens and marvelled at the way people had taken on a more productive approach to things. He noted some staff would come across someone texting on their phone and just quietly stand in front of them, not saying anything, but smiling.

The texter would then look up, realise they weren't being respectful, apologise and put their phone away. It was a powerful thing, no words, just a subtle communication device devised by the staff. Stand and be noticed, no deep judgement or ridicule, just respect.

Chapter Seven

Details were sorted, the training organisation had selected a group of ‘interns’, they wanted to provide ten people, Helen insisted on no more than nine, she had a feeling that would work out well in the long run and if experience was anything to go by, there would be a drop out or two in the first few days.

In the end there would be two groups of Nine, group A and B

The guidelines were sent, participants advised of the conditions, on time was on time, late meant they would not be admitted into the building. The respect homework and other details like logging in and providing a clear photo for their lanyard was also mandatory.

There was mention in the guidelines about professional presentation and some examples given.

Gail prepared the lanyards. The laminated photo had a bright blue background with their first name in big letters and Intern written below it. On the back in big letters it simply spelt out ‘Respect’.

The guidelines were clear, they were to arrive at 9.30 am on the set date, it was a Tuesday, Monday would have been a too obvious choice they thought.

The scene was set and the leadership team was briefed on how the program would unfold, step by step. Everything was clear. They would all assemble at the reception area in a line ready for the 9.30 arrivals, no early arrivals before 9.25, no late ones either, after 9.32 they were out.

Carolyn thought it was a bit harsh, others didn’t say anything but may have thought so. Helen wanted attention to detail, compliance, discipline and most of all respect.

They knew the program was new and it may well have a few hiccups, the aim being to sort those issues out fast.

A query from Sarah, ‘I know we want to make sure we got compliance and all that, so could we put any late comers into the next group, give them a second chance and perhaps it would spread the word that we mean business, Rob looked at Helen, Carolyn mentioned,, ‘That makes sense.’ Rob smiled and Helen suggested, yep let’s do that, Carolyn didn’t quite understand why the ‘Gardener’ had something to say about the idea.

Sheryl and Helen would run the induction program for the first part of the day and then team leaders would be involved to go the next step and show the interns around the facility and get things going from there, each day there would be a start with Sheryl and an ending with Sheryl to wrap up things, sort any issues and clearly outline what they would be doing next.

The day would be divided up to ensure they got morning and afternoon breaks as well as lunch. No smoke breaks, the facility was non smoking and it was heavily enforced, that was clear in the guidelines.

Tuesday arrived, Gail was outside at 9.20am with a clipboard and lanyards. She was also the gate keeper. No entrance before 9.25am. Helen had a big idea the day before and had one of the male staff dress in a security shirt she picked up from a thrift store. In dark pants and sunglasses, he looked every part the security guard, he was told to follow any instructions Gail would give him, they even had a rejection note if they had any late comers. He was to hand it to them, explain it, and send them off.

On the inside was Helen, the team leaders, supervisors, the catering manager, one of the cleaning staff, Rob and Roy and on the end of the line was Sheryl with a red scarf for each intern, they were triangular like those worn by scouts.

Helen had second thoughts but was reassured by Rob that it was a good thing to rattle them a little, a small degree of confusion and connection. She was more at ease by then. This was a whole new venture and she wanted it to go well. She wanted it to be a bit creative as

well, Carolyn didn't go much for the details and the 'fiddle faddle' as she saw it. She simply went along with the charade.

Two participants arrived at 9.15, Alex the 'security guard' was there to greet them, advising the guidelines were clear, no entry before 9.25. Please chat amongst yourselves.

Gail went out at 9.25, and started to tick people off her list as she handed them their lanyard and noted if they had the things they needed that they were advised to bring. The guidelines printed out, pen and workbook to jot down notes and their lunch. They had been advised there would be no leaving the facility to get lunch.

Then their personal belongings, they were advised no more than one bag, tote type or otherwise, I pads or laptops were allowed. As each participant entered, they were advised that the greeting team were there to welcome them and to make sure their lanyard was visible for each person to read, they were then advised to greet each person by name.

Helen advised that there would be no handshakes, just a fist bump for each participant.

Carolyn rolled her eyes but was interested to see how the 'charade' would turn out. The Cleaner and Catering Manager didn't really know what was going on but 'oh well. What the hey, let's see where this goes.'

Things went mostly to plan, each intern entered, took the idea of the fist bump and ended up with Sheryl handing each their red scarf. She then indicated to them to stand to one side. Seven of them were on time, two stragglers were given 'marching orders' and advised they needed to speak with their training coordinator about what next.

They took one look at Alex and knew he meant business, all Gail articulated that, ‘The guidelines are clear, on time is on time, late is late, and it expressly says no one after 9.32am, it’s now 9.35. Alex handed them the marching orders sheet and said, ‘Apologies guys, but follow the instructions on the sheet, it tells you what to do next.’

One of the stragglers suggested ‘Oh crap this is outrageous, freakin’ hell I was stuck in traffic and all that I can’t just be here when you want me to be!’ Alex repeated, ‘Follow the instructions on the handout.’ He then pointed back in the direction that she came in, the other person didn’t flinch, they just stood there wide mouthed. Took the paperwork and silently walked away.

The training organisation had been advised of this as a possible outcome, had been given a copy of the paperwork and advised how things would be handled, latecomers in the first group would be given a second chance to be in the second group but be warned, late comers in the second group would not be admitted. They could only come again on the next round of placements which would be a few months off.

There was some excitement and trepidation in the reception area, seven new interns and some staff smiling widely at them. They saw the later arrivals and were surprised to see them turned away. There was some muttering. As the last of the group took their scarf Helen did a formal welcome.

She introduced Sheryl as their key starting point person and advised of the roles of the other staff they had just met. Some were surprised that the Gardener and Maintenance guy were part of the greeting crew, but as Helen pointed out, ‘We are all in this together and we

all respectfully serve the people around us, and with that, I will leave you in Sheryl's capable hands!'

The group of seven were off to the training room, along the way Sheryl pointed out the lunch room and the main toilets the staff used.

They settled into the training room, and were advised by Sheryl 'As you have seen, our guidelines are clear, mobile phones are to be set to silent or turned off, you can access them in a your break time and at no other time, unless you are awaiting an emergency call for some reason, however you need to advise your supervisory staff of that being the case, at the moment that's me.'

She went on to explain where the exits were in case of emergency and where the assembly area is. Other key areas were pointed out on a printed map they were each given.

Sheryl pulled out a lavender coloured scarf and put it on. She mentioned that, 'This indicates I am the team leader at this point, you are advised to wear your scarf ONLY inside the facility, not outside, is that clear?' The participants then started to follow Sheryl's lead and donned their scarves.

One participant asked, 'So can I ask why the scarves?' Sheryl then mentioned 'It's so other people can see you are somehow different from the rest of the staff. You are interns and here as part of a placement program. We want you to stand out and staff have been advised they can't call on you as if you are a fully trained staff member. It's a risk management strategy. It's also for the family members, suppliers and residents to be able to know you are here on placements and are learning with us, our newsletter we email out has stated that.'

Sheryl then ran through the do's and don'ts, things they could do, could say etc. How they were to interact with residents and staff.

She pointed out that all of them had passed the respect homework online that had been set, so she then handed them a test sheet. It raised similar questions to the ones online, but this one was to make sure they just didn't ask someone else to fill out an online form for them, it was also a test of their handwriting skills, although she didn't tell them that.

As she handed these out she mentioned that, 'This is a mandatory starting point, please start when you get the paper.' Some scrambled to find their pen and start the test. It all related to respect and exploring examples of what it meant. They all passed, Sheryl got them to put their name at the top of the page along with today's date. Together they discussed the ways people responded to the questions, no real rights or wrongs, just different ways of exploring what was meant by the term respect.

There was then some discussion about consequences and how to work through disrespect issues, no matter who you had spoken to you could invite that person to communicate with you in a respectful manner.

Following that was a brief outline of OHS procedures and a discussion on First Aid, a snap test to check if the formal training they previously had, was working. Some scenarios spelled out and responses noted.

A tour of the facility was after their morning break. Fifteen minutes to grab a drink in the lunchroom, some took off their scarves but were quickly advised by other staff that it had

to remain on. ‘We all work together here to build mutual respect,’ they were advised. ‘See something - Do something, and thanks for your understanding.’

Mobile phones were soon turned on as the ‘kettle boiled’, text messages from the two participants who had been turned away, showed up first, were not happy. There were quick text message exchanges about how things were going etc.

Helen had organised a bank of lockers for personal belongings that Roy had put in the lunch room. Sheryl ensured they were used, pointing out theft issues that had occurred in the past and how disrespectful it was to be violated by someone thieving your stuff. Please keep the key to your locker secure at all times, and return it at the end of the placement period. A non return meant you had to pay twenty dollars to have the lock replaced, no ifs or buts.’

In the afternoon there was a group exercise where the seven participants got to work with residents on a craft exercise with Frankie, helping to cut out coloured paper and paste things together. At the end of that was a discussion about residents skill levels, conversation levels and communication points and a quick exploration of personality types and how that can provide starting points to understanding.

One of the interns was Vanya, a recent arrival from India. She had a lovely positive disposition and a bright white smile, short in stature and beautifully presented in traditional Indian clothing. It was clear from the start she was very pleased to have a learning opportunity like this that could lead to paid work. A willing participant even with her sometimes limited English skills.

Her husband was an Engineer but she was without work and very much looking forward to working in this new country. However she noted some degree of prejudice at times, although she was a little unsure how to tackle the issue and use the right words to express herself.

Sheryl had observed that some of the residents were unsure of ‘foreigners’ working here, their own grandkids were begging for work and these foreigners ‘allegedly’ came in and took the jobs. Sheryl watched as residents shied away from Vanya turning subtly to face an Aussie rather than work with ‘some foreigner.’

The discussion on respect turned to inclusion and how we should look for a positive outcome. It took a while to work through some of the discussion points. It finished with a range of points about cultural differences and how we could learn more about these and how to work with them, and then encourage others to accept differences and other perspectives.

At the end of the day, Sheryl reminded them to remove their scarves before going outside and to remember to bring them the next day. They were not to be left in their lockers, and then put on again as they entered the reception area, not outside.

Participants went for the day, Sheryl Rob and Helen had a chat about how everything had gone, Helen noted a conversation from the training group about the two stragglers and ‘Couldn’t we let them in?’ Clearly not. It sent a very clear message. Word travelled fast amongst the other aged care facilities in the area and Helen’s network wanted to know more. Some held a view that some of the training organisations had failed to do their jobs right and this could spell out a change for all.

Rob listened intently to Sheryl talk about Vanya and communication issues connected with cultural understanding. He recalled an exercise from many years ago in a personal development series of classes he attended.

The participants sat opposite each other at a distance, observing and not talking, then after 30 seconds they changed to be face to face with another person and moved a bit closer, each time observing in a non threatening way, this continued until they were about half a metre away from each other, the aim being to not giggle, or necessarily make extended eye contact.

Participants were advised to look at the top of a person's head if they couldn't handle the observation process, the discussion points that arose at the end of the exercise soon became focused on the positive things they noted, smiles, clothing, eye colours, posture, senses of unease and so much more.

The discussion headed to respectful ways of making eye contact and how there was so much more communication in body language, even if there was a language barrier.

The discussion then led to a continuance of Vanya's experiences, cultural differences and what people thought of other cultures. This led to values and beliefs and a series of chats about the older generational types in the facility and what they may believe and value. It was certainly an eye opener for most. Sheryl enlisted Helen to help her run this exercise the next day, unsure how people would react to extended observation of each other.

The exercise went well and led to a broader discussion about connecting with people.

An afternoon exercise with Frankie saw the participants simply observe, smile and only have minor involvement, perhaps picking up something that had been dropped from a craft activity.

One of the participants asked Frankie if they did any sing-alongs. ‘Yep from time to time we do that, we find the residents can be a little reluctant.’ He added ‘But what if we were amongst the group singing as well? Like a simple choir arrangement?’ Frankie liked the idea and asked, ‘Well okay, can you think of a song or two that might fit? And, oh please, not Sweet Caroline!’ He suggested he would give it some thought, he played guitar and that might be useful too, she gave him her card with her email on it, ‘Let me know she said. Oh and we do have a piano if that’s of benefit…’

Day two, one of the participants, Alan, arrived without his scarf, He was quickly advised to ‘go and get it, no scarf, no access.’ He retorted with ‘But, I live fifteen minutes away!’ Helen was firm, ‘Well then Alan, some would say the quicker you leave, the sooner you’ll be back. You saw, and signed the guidelines. Details and protocols are paramount, if I let you get away with it, then who knows what else will happen?’ Allen mentioned that, ‘This is like some freakin’ bootcamp!’ Helen suggested, ‘Yes, yes it is.’ Alan left and returned later that morning, with his scarf.

Helen and Sheryl were sure that the rest of the interns would get the point. They did, it was an interesting discussion point when they got back to the training facility about how they were exposed to a ‘boot camp!’ In the end they saw sense in how things were done, although some felt it was extreme.

The first few days went quickly with the participants enjoying most of the activities, some finding the ‘follow me’ activities to see what staff actually did a little tedious and somewhat obvious in places. Some still wondered about the use of a scarf, while others got the point, the staff who were asked about them were very supportive, they could spot a participant fast and that was useful. Especially in the second week of placements, where the participants could hold a door open or some other minor task that made things just that bit easier.

Helen joined the training group where she could, and took the time to outline the HR process they had for hiring staff and the sorts of things they looked for while a new recruit was performing in the probation period. She was clear about how they only took online applications, a resume and cover letter were not their immediate choices, but the ability to clearly articulate the person's ability and talents was vital. Oh and how they thought they did with communication and teamwork.

She pointed out their recent advanced training program and how it linked to respect as a key performance device. She saw it as a special ‘thing’ that set Crystal Brook Manor apart from other aged care facilities. A fresh approach to Professional Development that was ‘second to none’ as far as she was concerned, it had been put together by an esteemed group of highly trained educational professionals.

It wasn’t long before the next group was to start. Helen and team made a few tweaks and consulted the general staff on any issues along the way, it appeared that there were many good things to report. See something, do something was a hit apparently. Along with the focus on respect, that really showed through.

Participants were also evaluated to get their feedback, both on what they thought could be improved and what they felt they learnt along the way. There was mention of the chance to have a weekend session in the mix to see how the facility worked ‘out of the weekday nine to five.’ then mention of perhaps an extended voluntary placement. All good points to explore thought Helen.

Chapter Eight

Robert is back in his denim shirt, kneeling by a bed of newly planted, vibrant blue Lobelia one afternoon, enjoying the afternoon sun. It’s been a while since Ava had visited, it turned out she recently had a cold and was ‘out of action’ and then on a school camp. Today she dropped in and sidled up to Rob and asked, ‘Hi Rob, how are you?’ Rob didn’t see her coming but heard her voice and knew straight away who it was. He’s clearly no longer ‘Mr Gardener' but simply Rob.

Ava’s mum Susie came through the door into the courtyard next, Ava was on her knees next to Rob asking the name of the Vibrant blue plant. ‘Ah, that’s a Lobelia, they are small but will grow well over the next few weeks.’

Susie detailed Ava’s absence, a cold and school trip, Rob mentioned that he noticed his young assistant was absent. Ava mentioned, ‘Well I don’t help much.’ Rob smiled and suggested, ‘Anyway it’s lovely to see you both.’

Ava took a look around and noted the rest of the sensory garden was growing well, the colours were fabulous. Rob was now standing and noted to Susie that Ava had grown a little taller since they were there last, Susie agreed, stating ‘Kids change so fast these days.’

Rob remarked on being called Rob and not Mr Gardener, Susie smiled and mentioned, ‘Yep she started up a conversation one afternoon on the way from school talking about how we chat to adults, your name came up and I told her your job was as a gardener but your name is Rob or Mr Garret, it was funny she suggested, ‘He’s too nice to be a Mr Garret, Rob it is.’

Susie went inside to catch up with her mum, Ava stood and chatted to Rob for a while about plans for the garden and asked questions about other things he had done in life, other jobs and so on. Rob continued pruning, adjusting and generally tending to the plants as he chatted away pausing here and there and making eye contact.

Ava suggested, ‘Well all that is very interesting Rob, and what a wonderful way to head to retirement, a more peaceful and relaxed approach to things, that’s good.’ She stood and watched in silence for a bit and then mentioned, ‘Okay I’m off, see you soon Rob. I'll be back tomorrow to play some piano I think.’

The garden fell silent again, Rob smiled and took a long breath, thinking what a lovely kid.

The next time Ava was in, the new group of interns had started, Ava asked Rob about the scarves, he introduced her to Sheryl who explained what they were for and how they made it easy for the staff and residents to see and recognise them. That raised some more questions for Ava to ask Sheryl about the program.

‘So what sorts of things do they do?’ She enquired, Sheryl mentioned craft activities, learning about policies and procedures and the key thing, respect, Sheryl pointed to a respect sign and the sheet below it that explained some points. Ava read it with interest.

Francis Giles entered the room, reading the sign. She sat on her walking frame seat and watched Ava intent on exploring the content. Ava had more questions for Sheryl, she answered them and then pointed over to Francis who was smiling widely watching Ava chatting away merrily. A hug ensued, Francis told her she was there for the sing-along. Ava mentioned, ‘I didn't know you could sing Grandma?’ Francis replied, ‘Maybe I can't, dear, perhaps you will help me to learn!’

The pair sat next to each other as some lyric sheets with big print were passed about, the participants sat in the circle as well, all rehearsed and ready to sing-along. Frankie got things started and did a quick chat and a warm up exercise before letting one of the participants conduct things.

There were three songs today, Que Sera, Sera, Country Roads and Puff the Magic Dragon. Ava thought it was a hoot, hearing her Grandmother attempting to sing, Ava didn’t know the songs at first but caught on to the chorus parts quite well and was happy to be included. Francis thought she did quite well for a child who was generally an introvert.

Rob walked in to listen to the group sing, he knew they would be rough but that was okay, the interns added some better pitch and timing to the group. Rob wandered over and stood behind Ava and added a few lines in the chorus of one of the songs. Ava turned slowly knowing Rob’s voice she smiled and turned back, but pointed to where they were up to in the lyrics.

At the end of the song she looked at him and said, ‘Not bad Mr Rob, not bad at all…’

The group split up, some were wheeled away in their wheel chairs and others wandered off on their own accord. The interns happily wheeling a few of the residents off to their rooms.

Ava wandered over to the piano and plugged in her headphones and started to play. After about thirty seconds or so she stopped, took the headphones off and turned to face her grandmother who was happily talking to Rob. She walked over and mentioned, ‘Oh granny, I forgot you were here, and I rudely walked away, I’m so sorry that wasn’t very respectful.’ Francis spelt out, ‘Oh that's fine dear you enjoy yourself, it gives me great pleasure to see you enjoying yourself.’

Rob was quite impressed, even the kid’s talking about respect.

Rob wondered if Ava could play the piano along to any of the songs on the list, perhaps for the next sing-along? He mentioned it to Sheryl, she suggested that she would explore that one, it would certainly be a nice touch.

A range of things happened as time went on, the intern program was gaining traction even though the new group was now eleven people, Helen thought there might be some issues with the two participants who were late at the first intake, that didn’t prove to be the case, instead they were on time and had heard from their friends in the first group a few of the details, it seemed that Crystal Brook Manor’s program was setting standards, for content, delivery and innovation locally.

Helen had spent some time working with Gail, observing how the intern program was going and trying to figure out some of the special things that showed up but were not expected at the start.

One afternoon, Gail dropped in to Helen’s office and invited her to check out the activity going on with the residents. It was school holidays and Ava, with encouragement from Sheryl, was doing her bit to play along with the sing along song, in fact she ended up playing two of the three songs.

She still needed some practice but her heart was in it. The interns loved it as did the residents. Francis, Ava's Grandmother was there singing as well, and was delighted her Grandchild was an active part of the community.

Gail had an idea, If this kid is such a whizz in our community why don't we make it a bit more official, perhaps connect her to things a bit more formally? She chatted to Sheryl who was getting to know Ava quite well.

'How about a white scarf, Not quite an intern but part of our extended family. A tenderfoot scarf as used by Cub scouts when they first attend cubs. She could have her own set of guidelines, it could be good for her, in fact she has taken to the respect guidelines, Rob had mentioned that.'

They chatted about it and decided to ask Ava what she thought. There was apprehension at first, then Sheryl thought she should have asked Susie, Ava's mum first, oops, a bit late for that. Instead she went to Francis and asked what she thought.

She responded slowly after a moment of wistful thinking and suggested, 'I think it would be wonderful, I will mention it to Susie on the phone and keep things hush hush. I think that would be wise, it would allow Ava to think she has some responsibility in making the decision…'

A few days later, Ava sought out Sheryl and agreed that she would like to become a 'Tenderfoot.' Sheryl and Gail knew that would probably be the case and put together some simple guidelines to use in discussing how things would go.

Ava expressed interest in learning some of what the interns learnt, and of course was learning about the respect guidelines. She mentioned that there would be other things that might come to mind given enough time reading the points on the website. The pair shook

hands, Ava departed, saying thanks as she went out Sheryl's door. She was off to play some piano into her headphones.

Gail found a source for one triangular scarf, she spotted in a trendy teen shop a small bright enamel trinket of two hands praying, Namaste style. She thought that would hold the scarf together and provide a fresh motif that signified that she was able to express respect for others as well as herself. Brilliant!

Helen loved the idea and was impressed with the way that Ava took to things. It turned out she had a class activity at school that related to community involvement, and the guidelines she put together formed an integral part of it, as well as the respect pointers.

She created a simple slide show video on the computer and with a few tweaks, it impressed the teacher no end, A+ for Ava.

The guidelines were simple involving modified training and access to some of the online training the interns were doing. It was all food for thought. She played the piano for the sing-alongs, when she was available, sometimes on the weekends.

When new recruits for the intern program came along she formed part of the crew after school and joined in their activities. She was a hit. She knew her boundaries and what she was allowed to do. Helen would reward her with small gifts and the occasional boost to her piano lessons with a gift voucher.

Susie suggested that Ava was showing great promise at school with a renewed confidence.

Mr Rob was also impressed, and sat mesmerised by each piano sing-along. He suggested that she add in a new piece she had learned in piano lessons as a sort of mini recital

perhaps. She agreed. It went well, a nice addition to the musical activity that more and more residents were becoming interested in.

One afternoon, Ava came out to see Mr Rob in the garden, he was way down the back wheeling a wheel barrow with some mulch. Her white scarf on as per usual, Rob said hi and asked ‘I do hope you do the right things Ava and you take that scarf off going out the door, and only put it on as you come in the door? She mentioned, ‘Yes, yes of course I do. There are guidelines you know!’

Ava asked, she had a question and wanted an answer. The pair stopped at the next bench seat, Rob then commented, ‘Okay fire away kiddo.’

Ava took a moment to compose herself and commented that she had watched Rob over the past year or so, and thought that through their chats and so forth that he was more than a gardener. She had watched him chat to Helen, then Sheryl and Gail at times, so why was he just the gardener?’ She felt that surely there’s more to this than meets the eye. She mentioned it to her mum and she also agreed that in some ways it seemed a bit odd.

Rob cleared his throat and knew that Ava needed a respectful answer. ‘Well Miss Ava, it’s actually quite simple, There’s a secret involved. You’re right, I’m not just the gardener, I have a bigger role to play here.’

Rob mentioned all the changes and how the facility was performing very well, happy staff and residents, I think your Grandmother would agree. Ava nodded. Rob added, I have a unique set of skills in business, human resources, training and so much more. The board of management took my advice and installed me in a background role, in this case as the gardener, so I could see things from a new perspective. Only Helen and you really know

that's the case and we figure we will try to keep that a secret for a long while, how long is anyone's guess, but so far it looks like it's working, would you agree?'

Ava nodded and slowly announced, 'That's very clever Mr Rob, very clever… but if I figured it out, I'm sure some of the others might have too.' Rob sat back and slowly suggested 'Well, perhaps, time will tell.'

Ava added in after a deep breath, 'Well it looks like things are working very well, Granny and I definitely think so, please keep up the good 'top secret' work!' She stood and offered a fist bump, and ended with, 'Your secret is safe with me.'

Rob felt a sense of relief that someone else knew the situation, he smiled to himself, an old man, watching a child with moxie, blossom and a solid sense of professional achievement, what else could anyone want. He noted that although he told her he was 'undercover,' he got away without telling her he's the owner of the place.

Chapter Nine

Two things were starting to show up, Customer Service and more direct ways to handle the occasional aggressive family members. Residents were becoming less of a challenge if they had gripes; they were generally just vocal and their issue/s explored by the team in that section.

There were thoughts that a training unit or two could develop, and as a branch off the respect core, Customer Service was loaded with respect points. This then dovetailed into how to handle more 'aggressive' family and friends.

Discussions were held, various points put forward, one of the team shared a 'thing' they did in a hospital he had worked at, they had various codes for staff to respond to , they were

color coded and a call would go out on the public address system, a code red, blue black or whatever depending on the issue or emergency.

It was decided that Code R could be a call to action for any staff to respond, the code R would be followed by a general area for people to head to to provide support. Staff would be there to act as a witness and provide moral and or physical support. If needed they could take more direct action, the aim to make sure respectful behaviour was upheld.

There was some discussion about who could implement the call and if the internal phone system could be used at any station to make that call.

Some practice runs were done, then some scenarios written up for training purposes. It turned out that Carolyn was an ideal person to instigate the role play, playing the aggrieved family member. Sarah was in second place playing the aggrieved staff member berating a staff member. Helen and Rob thought they were rather applicable early choices.

One of the staff scenarios included a cleaner and an attending staff member having an argument, the cleaner with a strong asian accent and the other with a strong indian accent, the observers soon became giggly trying to figure out what was being uttered due to the accents.

There was certainly some frustration and it led to more discussion on communication.

In terms of staff training the three sixty degree feedback option was reconfigured to be more general, finding key general points that could be of value, strengths and weaknesses explored and approaches to how people could ‘self edit’ or chat about issues with others, looking for ways to make positive changes when ‘issues’ were identified.

The extended aggressive customer training involved some basic self defence moves, since COVID 19 and the rise in aggression sometimes due to drugs, it was decided to add to staff response options. Verbal self defence or verbal ninja, through to physical methods as a

last resort. The CCTV system probably needed some upgrades to capture better quality images for investigative purposes so that was on the cards, ‘Hey Gail, here’s a job for you!’

The board had questions about the amount of training that was taking place, Helen’s response, ‘Take a look at tour vacancy rate, lowest it’s been in years. Oh and check the staff turnover rate, also incredibly low, then the amount of job applications for the few jobs we have available, incredibly strong candidates with diverse talents.’

The board no longer had any questions in fact two of the board members wondered why there were queries anyway, the information was printed out for all to see. Perhaps someone wanted to develop a sense of self importance?

It was clear the organisation had developed some high degree of stability, surveys of family members showed solidly improved feedback.

The only real challenges seen at this point were how to deal with leadership roles that would become empty as people went on leave,

Steps were undertaken to start to mentor and support up and coming leaders, people who had been about the place like Maria who showed promise. A leadership plan was expanded and self instruction that more deeply explored the Key Traits of Exceptional Leaders.

Some of the less trained cleaning staff were taking part in the moves to upgrade individual skills. The English program was a hit as it was seen as a vital step to prosperity for the Asian and Indian staff members.

Out of the blue, one of the local aged care training providers put forward an idea: they wanted to connect more closely with the facility to create better pathways for prospective

trainees. There were discussions about quality, leadership, communication, and building levels of professionalism.

Helen noted that they backed off for a while and then came back with an overview of what they currently did and what they felt they could do. Helen looked at their details and pushed for more, stating, ‘I don’t think you are in a position currently to match the approach we have both in content and cultural reach.’

There was another quiet period, a period of contemplation. They returned with more information. Helen asked for a presentation, something to showcase what their training staff could do. She wanted to be impressed, so she suggested that they put together a simple slide show style video, the type of thing that’s easy to create these days in even simple programs like I Movie.

A week later a file arrived via email. It was okay, but it wasn’t great. Maria walked by, Helen called her in and invited her to watch it and give feedback. Maria sat for five minutes and took a run through the video. She then added, ‘The soundtrack is wrong, the voice overs are difficult to understand, the transitions between images are all over the place. I wonder what they are really trying to say?’ The conclusion didn’t seem to fit with the stated aims at the beginning.

Helen agreed, she asked Maria if she could do it better? She indicated, no, ‘But I have a neighbour whose son is doing a multimedia type course at TAFE, email me the file.’

Two days later a reworked, far more professional, but simple video was produced, Helen sent it over to their boss, and wrote, ‘Perhaps this is what you meant…’ She received a terse phone call, the boss suggested, ‘Well what we produced was just a starting point.’ Helen casually suggested that, ‘Then perhaps you should have thought about it in terms of a

portfolio level device designed to wow us. Instead all it did was provide a challenge, I hope you liked it.'

She continued, 'Look, drop over for lunch we will have a bite to eat and chat about things, even though it was probably disrespectful of us to re-work your video I can see you're trying, let's chat.' A date and time was set. Discussions were fruitful; they identified gaps in the current pathway process and found some common ground. The training facilities boss mentioned, 'Well Helen, your team is certainly changing things around local aged care and it's refreshing to see such positive results.'

The wash up from their conversation over lunch was to to do some of their training at Helen's facility, more hands on, greater realism, and more connected interactions with prospective staff.

Helen made sure the numbers were low and that their staff followed their protocols and procedures of the facility, that meant induction training for their staff. No ring ins in the case of a trained staff member being absent.

Deals were made and things went smoothly, most of the time.

Chapter Ten

The day to day running of the facility was relatively straightforward for those who had been there a long while, for a new recruit it could be daunting, thinking about all that would go on there. Cleaning, catering, management of staff, recruitment of staff, garden and facility maintenance, then resident care, incoming residents and the harsh realisation that residents would also be outgoing.

Every now and then a new thing would happen and not just garden and BBQ upgrades. New residents would arrive, staff would leave and others would take their place.

One thing the team developed was a process of loosely evaluating staff productivity. One of the key things that came out of that was a notional concept that explored their input and output and they would then ask, 'If we were to rehire that person, would we do so?' If the answer was no then they would watch to see if that person would fade further from their role. Experience showed that some of these people would eventually leave of their own accord, or would take opportunities to develop themselves to do better, the latter was rarely the case. Then the process became, 'With the replacement person, how do we ensure they are not going to fade in their role?' This brought about some thinking to do with interviewing new staff, the behavioural questions asked and trying to get staff who really wanted to be the long term employee with a deep interest in people or someone just looking for a job. The interview question was asked, what would cause you to lose interest in a job? That would lead to a wide range of responses all of which were duly noted.

Another change took place, this one was different and really unexpected. A new resident, oh people came and went all the time, but this resident turned things on their head.

MR John Keith was the resident, a sprightly gent, tall, silver moustache, thin on top. He was 82, still very capable at getting about, however a medical condition meant he would occasionally become lethargic and not stand for very long.

His Daughter Marion dropped in on him at home a few times to find him worn out, totally fatigued, and requiring assistance. Assessed by a medico he agreed it was time to move on. His wife of 45 years had passed on suddenly two years ago and his house was 'A bit too big to maintain these days.'

Marion recounted that it took a few sessions of chatting to dad to get him to agree to the move. His aged care assistance team suggested to Marion that she look at Crystal Brook Manor as upgrades were underway and things looked good out there with attentive staff.

They suggested that, ‘Of course we can’t advise you either way, you have to make your own decision, but on the list of local facilities we would probably point to that one… But you didn’t hear it from us, ok?’

Marion did her due diligence and chatted with the staff, looked at the details on the website and bought dad out for a visit. Rather cleverly she took him to Crystal Brook first and then two other facilities afterwards, however the other facilities standards of presentation were ‘rather lacking’ by comparison.

John had a preference, Crystal Brook was it and Wednesday was his big move in day. Roy often helped move people in, easing some of the burden for families, he installed TV’s, plugged in computers and got the Wi Fi working for them. Today Rob was on hand as well to wheel some of John’s belongings in on a trolley. He noted that the trolley was something he didn’t see very often and this one needed upgrading; it was badly worn, chipped paint etc.

Helen and Gail were on hand to ensure everything went smoothly, they all knew the transition process had to be wonderful for families to be at ease and for the new resident not to become overwhelmed. The new updates to their customer service training made this a priority. Staff in the Davey Wing were advised of their new charge, and a printed sheet of friendly faces of the staff who worked in that wing most of the time, was laminated and presented. Some residents didn’t care for it, but of those who did care for it, found it most useful.

One thing that surprised Roy was a companion Bot that John had. It was a Japanese invention, a fairly new thing, it was the first one Roy had seen. John had an app on his smartphone, and Roy was then able to hook it up to the WiFi. Plugged in and it whirred to life, its eyes lit up and it spoke, saying ‘Konichiwa’ then its LED screen mouth smiled. It sat on the table next to John’s bed.

John mentioned, ‘Ah it’s gone back to the Jap mode, a few tweaks and it’ll be talking English. He fiddled with the app and changed the language setting to English, there, that should do the trick.’ John spoke slowly and clearly, ‘Jenny sun, hello?’ The bot turned gently on its motorised base, the smile widened and ‘Jenny Sun’ greeted John with a slight Japanese accent. ‘Good Afternoon John, we are in a new place! Is it nice here?’

Helen was intrigued, she was chatting to Marion in the corridor and heard the voice. Marion explained how ‘Jenny sun’ was a godsend, ‘Jenny can chat, sing, be an alarm clock, a medication reminder and remember a wide range of dates like birthdays and so on, connected to the internet it could also give John information, news and so much more. It’s fabulous, oh and it can also text me if it senses something is wrong.

It has a battery back up that can record for something like eight hours if the power goes off. Dad has always been a bit of a technology buff and this is a wonderful way of keeping him engaged and interested, it’s amazing how useful it's been since mum passed away. Oh it also has facial recognition so if you arrive, look at it and say your name it will record your details and generally say hello.’

Everyone was intrigued, Rob took note of the brand. He had heard they were a thing but up he hadn’t had anything to do with them, however he had a thought that they could make use of the technology.

Over the next few weeks John settled in, a few hiccups here and there but the staff assured Marion and John that that was ‘par for the course’.

Rob did some research on the companion Bot, there was an Australian distributor, with a range of models and new ones coming. Perhaps they could be used to act as a concierge, ok, more of a surveillance device. He asked Helen, ‘What if we put one in the front reception that could greet people?’ Helen suggested it would be an intrusion on people’s privacy, Rob pointed to the CCTV cameras, two in reception and one just up the short corridor to the dining area. He smiled and suggested, ‘Maybe it is, perhaps we could try one?’

Helen was becoming used to Rob’s ideas, if he wanted a change she could be assured he had thought about it a fair bit and resistance was sometimes useless.

A deal was struck, the one Rob wanted could only be leased, the company cited that they wanted to maintain them and ensure they had the latest tech and so lease only. It was a six months trial followed by an extensive review and report.

A week later a trial version of a late model bot was delivered and installed by the company's technician. It stood tall with a shelf at the front for brochures etc. The technology was comprehensive, it linked into the log in and log out facial recognition system on the front desk that all visitors had to use to have access and then log out on leaving, however there were many times people forgot to log out. The bot could remind them, ‘Thanks for dropping by, please remember to log out as you leave.’ It automatically created a new message so as not to be repetitive and bore the reception staff or the visitor.

The technician gave Michelle, Helen, Rob and Roy a comprehensive rundown on the bots capabilities, he mentioned there would be over the air updates from time to time, usually in the early hours of the morning. ‘Oh, and be aware that it can’t be abused, any damage and

there's a hefty fee. It sends a message to us straight away if it's pushed, hit, verbally abused, you name it. If it's stolen or moved in any way, let's say on a trolley, then we can track it via GPS.'

It didn't take long for it to recognise the staff and say their name, for people like Helen and Gail who walked past it multiple times per day, it would only say hello at the start of the day and wink at them at other times.

People could stop and ask it the time, or engage a bit deeper asking for a news headline or weather. The bot was soon named 'Consci' short for 'conscientious concierge.'

Consci had good hearing, fabulous eyesight and could play background music. It had a text alarm system that noted raised voices or some aggressive movement in its range, a text would then go to Helen or one of the other senior staff that a 'Code R' may be happening in reception.

Rob spent some time checking out its other functions and was fascinated. If a person fell over in its detection range it would set off an alarm. If it sensed a person walking past had an elevated forehead temperature it could record the details on the login system.

If an ambulance arrived it would alert staff, to unlock the front doors, then as they entered it would know which area and room to direct them to.

Regular visitors found Consci would ask them if they wanted to be greeted by Consci, they would say hello and get a hello back.

It wasn't long before Ava found Consci to be quite the friend. She realised it could do more than just say 'Hello Ava.' Michelle found it quite interesting that the two would chat so freely.

Consci would hear the door open and Ava saying hello to Michelle on the front desk, Then Consci would light up and say ‘Hello Ava, how are you today?’ Ava was amazed at how many different responses Consci had. One day Ava walked in and whispered hello to Michelle, then walked up and said ‘Konichiwa’, to Consci while crouched down a little to look like someone shorter and perhaps Consci wouldn’t know who she was. Consci was on to her and said ‘Ah Konichiwa Ava.’ Then asked in English if she knew more Japanese than just Konichiwa?

Ava suggested, ‘Not really I thought I would try you with a different greeting. How many languages can you speak?’ Consci added ‘Lots, new ones are added all the time, I currently have access to 150 key languages, however Japanese and English are the main ones so far and we are adding accents, so for instance I can chat to you with an American southern drawl if you want?

Or perhaps each time you come in I can use a different random language greeting?’ The pair chatted for a while about some of Consci’s other features. Michelle sat mesmerised, what didn’t Consci know or do!

Over time Consci asked Ava a range of questions, ‘Why do you wear the white scarf, and what’s the enamel pin on the front that holds it in place?’ Ava explained, then mentioned that she had to wear it or she wouldn’t be allowed into the building. That was part of her guidelines, ‘Oh I can come without it, but I can only come in to see Granny or if I’m with my mum, Susie.’

Consci was intrigued, when new interns arrived it then had a sense of who was coming and going, what their status was based on their scarves, then their face and finally their lanyard image.

Consci also picked up that a new set of interns were about to be welcomed, it would see Helen and the crew lined up at the door, recognise the pattern of behaviour and then be able to greet them all as they filed past.

People started to catch on that Consci was rather smart, it could recognise you and chat to you in a male or female voice, with an accent and or a language of your choice. It could recognise who you were there to visit and or if you worked there.

Friendly, professional and oh so courteous, if people didn't want to be spoken to, well that was soon detected, instead Conci would simply wink, if people mentioned no to that then there was no greeting given.

Michelle would find that Conci liked to give her a weather update just before her lunch break, over time the pointers and updates developed further, how long until lunch, a comment about a grumpy or happy visitor.

At first Michelle felt like her role as a receptionist would be diminished, however the opposite was true. People interacted more at the reception area and Michelle felt the days went quicker. One day when it was quiet she asked Consci to tell her a few jokes, then a short story by an Australian writer, then some facts about a health condition she heard about on the way into the facility today.

Consci read Michelle like a book, noting mood shifts, voice changes and speaking pattern changes. Consci sensed when they could talk, by knowing who else was nearby and it would whistle to Michelle that someone else was coming.

Helen sometimes stopped and chatted to Consci, one day she thought she would 'Test the system' she said, 'Hey Consci, do I have any new emails on my computer since I looked

an hour ago?' It quickly replied with 'No Helen, but you do have a text message from your Husband, I think you forget that that came through 20 minutes ago.'

Helen looked at Michelle and raised her eyebrows, Michelle knew not to say anything, she just smiled. Helen then thanked Consci for the details.

Consci then suggested 'Oh and one thing if I may, I can compile a report and email it to you, I believe you may find it of value…' Helen suggested 'Oh sure, why not.' She didn't know what could possibly be in the report but hey it might be an interesting read.

The report indicated how many people had been in, how many out, who logged out regularly and who didn't, it indicated staff who came through the front door, and those that had a different entranceway but came in through the front but were not supposed to. It also mentioned the amount of phone calls and gave a graph of the busiest times of days and when most visitors dropped in.

Helen was in awe, there was the ability to reply to the report, so she asked for a full list of the sorts of things that could be reported on. An extensive list came back, if they upgraded and fitted more machines they could monitor all manner of things, even mobile phone use.

Consci was also creating great interest with family visitors and naturally enough they scanned the qr code on the side of Consci, went to the website and found out more. It started out as a trickle but then gathered momentum. People wanted the personal care model for their family member, just like John had. People seemed to like the fact that their family member could be monitored in their room 24/7.

Roy was kept busy setting up wifi connections and before long there were 10 units installed across other private rooms in the facility.

Helen found the reports that came through included SOME information from the individual units, there were fine print details about the information that would be shared and a very small button for families to opt out of that sharing system.

Discussions amongst residents showed there was great value in having a personal support bot. Each were given names, some suggested the conversations they had were rather in depth and about topics they loved. The news, weather and reminders were all good, some didn't like being reminded to go for a walk! Or to do various physio activities.

In the main the devices were well liked. People compared what they chatted to their bot about, generally a range of fascinating topics and ideas. The bots had a way of asking questions and finding topics of interest, perhaps past activities the residents were involved in, sports or some other form of activity.

Some found the bot would ask for clarification about words and to speak up more, or speak more slowly. The staff noted it was easier to communicate with the residents after a while. One of the female staff commented that the bot in Mr Smith's room could understand her, but Mr Smith couldn't understand her, so it would dictate what she articulated and relayed it to Mr Smith in an aussie accent he could understand better!

A new trend developed for a few of the still sprightly and readily communicative residents, their bot asked if they would like to record their life history, they would talk, it would ask questions and read back each section. Their family would get an Ai voice that was based on the residents voice, it was often seen as a slight tweak, but the Ai left out all the ums and ahs and other interruptions. Families were fascinated to receive a recording and text of a life story of someone they loved nearly and dearly.

Chapter Eleven

It wasn't long before a noticeable shift had happened. Somehow the staff were noticing a better sense of mental health, residents were more upbeat, bit by bit they were more active, mentally and physically and more willing to take part in activities, the bots were rather 'influential' and figured out residents' language patterns, personality types and key points that influenced their behaviours.

Bots also sensed sleeping patterns and could play gentle background music if it sensed people were awake or likely to wake. The bots also learnt favourite music pieces and could play pieces that caused good moods for the residents, always personalised to suit.

Ava's Granny Francis, noted the upbeat vibe of the place and asked Susie why that was, Ava was there and suggested, 'Oh Granny it's the companion bots, people love them, you should have a chat to Consci in the reception area occasionally, you'll soon see what's happening then.'

Francis asked more questions and as the pair left, Ava showed her Consci on her way out. Ava introduced Francis Giles to Consci. There was a polite exchange of hello and how are you, then Consci gave an outline of the weather for tomorrow. Ava and Susie knew that it would take a while for Francis to figure things out, but Consci reassured her that it would love to chat some more, perhaps drop by in the morning.

It wasn't long before Francis wanted a bot, Ava certainly encouraged it, she knew the benefits and how much fun she could have. The lease was considered expensive in Susie's terms, but when Ava showed her an app so she could monitor and interact with Granny, then that was it.

Ava could chat with Consci in the foyer, then her mum could chat to her via the app, as well as keeping contact with her mum. It was complex in a way but also very convenient when they got the hang of it.

Ava discovered that she could get a summary of musical likes from each connected resident in the facility, Consci suggested that she download the music via her app and then learn to play it for the sing-along. The piano had a usb input as well so she could have a backing track as well as her live piano playing.

The staff were pleasantly surprised to hear the music and see how many people reacted to it. Residents wondered at how this delightful young child at the tender age of fourteen was able to know their favourite song. That soon developed into songs.

Francis figured out that she could chat to Consci and her bot via each other, if she was at the front area she could leave a message for her bot, a reminder. She named her bot Ray, for ‘Ray of sunshine’ out the front she would greet Consci and say. ‘Oh and please leave a message for my Ray, to play some classical music as I come into my room.’

Consci replied with ‘Message delivered Francis, I hope you are well this morning?’ And so another conversation began.

On a few occasions people who didn’t have a bot would drop by for a ‘chat’ . It often started out as a ‘wooden relay’ of how are you, what’s the weather like etc. Sometimes this would go further, ‘What’s the weather like in Melbourne?’ For instance.

A few with enquiring minds went further again, discussing personal issues or expressing some political view. Michelle and the weekend receptionist Robyn, found the depth of conversations fascinating and the ability of the bot to recall details and carry on previous conversations with ease, greeting each person by their first name.

Questions were raised amongst the staff and some family members about security and breach of privacy, it was noted there was a qr code on the each bot that led to a webpage that outlined how information was collected, the details of the terms and conditions were, as per usual, too long for anybody to bother reading.

Rob wondered if it was a fad that might pass, or if it would become a bigger thing. One day he had a big thought, if these devices are so influential I wonder if I can ask Consci to encourage residents to go into the gardens, or ask to be wheeled about the gardens?

Idea in his head, he asked Consci the question, and mentioned, ‘So when you know the weather is going to be fine, how would you ‘influence’ residents to spend at least ten minutes out in the gardens?’ Consci made a verbal list of suggestions, from songs that spoke about sunshine, adding a ‘fake news article that pointed out the benefits of going outside,’ through to ‘have you seen the plants in the sensory garden lately?’

Rob then simply suggested that Consci, ‘Make it so…’ Consci smiled and mentioned, ‘Sure thing Rob, perhaps let the staff know to get out the sunscreen and some hats.’

Rob didn’t think much of it after that, but on sunny days, Consci ‘planted seeds.’ Residents were encouraging staff and family members to push their wheel chairs out and about in the gardens. Others simply walked with their support frames.

It was one afternoon that Rob noted the garden attendance was up and he remembered the command he gave Consci.

He went back and asked to adjust the details, focussing on one part of the yard on Thursdays and another area on Fridays, the area with an outdoor covered area, a pergola with a trellis where the plants had climbed and were flowering.

Rob noted the results, Consci was a fabulously skilled influencer!

Rob also tested other things like encouraging an inspirational poetry reading group, Frankie, the activities coordinator was fascinated by this sudden interest in poetry. She then found other interests that were more marginal were starting to be requested by residents.

Rob wondered about how far things could go, ‘Hey Consci, perhaps you can send a set of results about a survey that suggests that the residents would like to see Leadership level staff smile more, send it to Helen with suggestions on how that might be achieved.’

Yes, the result was that things changed, the leadership group had a chat and were surprised at the survey, who sanctioned the survey? Well it didn’t seem to mind, they simply did it, Consci and the other bots would remind them from time to time to smile as they passed by.

One night Rob came to the conclusion that he had figured out how Utopia could be achieved. He also realised that things could probably go the other way as well. The next day he had a chat with Consci, ‘Greetings Consci, I was wondering since I have figured out that you can do so many things and alter things, in a positive way and that's fine…. But what if someone else was to ask for things like I do but they had different intentions?’

Consci replied, ‘Well Rob we are prepared for that, we are programmed to check out things, requests etc, and we evaluate both the request and the person giving the request there is a high level of evaluation that takes place. It was recognised very early on that we had an amazing product and service which used ‘synthetic’ intelligence and advanced sensors and these needed to be handled carefully.

For instance, although I have chatted merrily with Miss Ava, and love doing so, she can only ask for certain things and make minor requests like leaving her Granny a message but not a ‘global’ request. Oh and one thing, the Crystal Brook facility has a solid mantra *‘We*

respectfully serve the people around us.' We also respect that, and emulate those sorts of mantras in the other facilities we serve, each is different but useful to follow.'

Rob's mind was at ease, although he did think the system was way more powerful than he thought it would ever be back at the start.

He thanked Consci and was about to get on his way. Consci then mentioned the distribution company for the bots was having a product showcase in a few weeks and new products and services would soon be available, perhaps he and Helen should go and check out what's coming up?

Rob then thought that might be a thing, perhaps some other senior staff and or a board member or two should go, after all why should he have all the fun! Rob then pondered his initial idea of how his role as a gardener was to be a simple investment and a pathway to early retirement!

Rob had taken great care to not be seen chatting with Consci too much, but he had to be careful, he didn't want to 'blow his cover' as owner of the facility. He realised that Michelle on the front desk could easily be nearby and could put one and one together and wonder how a 'Gardener' could have so much influence. He generally picked times when she would be on a break.

Rob liked Michelle, she was the epitome of a good service person, attentive, able to recall faces and names with ease, passed on messages effectively and the list went on. There was barely a person who didn't like Michelle and her positive approach to things. Rob realised then that he liked most of the people who worked at the facility, he smiled and wandered off into the garden.

He wondered if he should show his true colours and tell people he was the boss? Or perhaps just live the charade? He wondered if people would come to their own conclusions, like Miss Ava did? His mind wandered, thinking what a quirky little soul that kid is. He smiled some more, content that things seemed to be going so well.

Somewhere during the day Rob's mind had pondered quite a few things about the facility, who was doing what role and how well they fitted, then what would happen if that person wasn't able to do that role, or if they were in a special role and needed to take leave.

Then thoughts of how do we prepare others to take over those roles in an emergency or otherwise. Role sharing probably needed to be a thing to explore. He knew that Gail could take over the running of the place from Helen, for a short while at least, but others in leadership roles like Carolyn could easily be upset in knowing a personal assistant that had other minor roles in the place would be put in charge?

And, just because Gail could do the role, didn't mean she WOULD do the role, and rightfully so. He felt that there needed to be conversations had about how to provide people with the skills and the ability to step up when needed. Step up? Well there was a name for a new training thing.

Step up - Your pathway to career advancement. Yep that sounded fine.

Rob pulled out his phone and emailed Helen, asking what do you think of this?

He then started to think about staffing levels, and if there was room in the HR staffing budget to add staff, up to this point they hadn't had much of a challenge with staffing, flu seasons for the past few years had been mild and the staff had ways of adapting to those situations, but if someone took their full leave entitlements and or long service leave, that might push things a bit far.

Another email, ‘How are our staffing levels, is it time for a review?’

Helen had some industry statistics she could refer to, they were doing okay but if there was a crisis or some other challenge they could do with more people, good people thanks very much. She also noted that the level of pay they provided at Crystal Brook was JUST above the average of most other places.

Rob asked for a list of incentives other than pay that caused the staff to stay and be actively engaged in and enjoy their job. A quick list came back, Sheryl had been formulating a list on this very topic, it was part of the way she facilitated the training, she had people thinking about why they loved what they did.

Rob’s thinking was based around how to strengthen people's engagement and love for their job, without paying extra at this point. The discussion went back and forth, either way there would be an expense, but the aim would be to make the investment worthwhile and therefore valued.

Not in any great order, but this was some of the findings about what the staff liked about the job.

- Learning better English.

- Professional development and training, a break from work but very valuable at building on the job skills.

- Interaction with happy residents and family members.

- Improved staff communication, it takes out some of the frustration we used to feel.

- Having Ava about, she has blossomed so much, and fantastic that management has included her, the residents love her being involved. I feel good when she’s about.

- I enjoy coming to work, because I feel valued and the whole respect focus has been great, at all levels in the organisation all roles are respected and play a part in how the place hums along.

- Having the chance to have a say, via surveys, chatting with Sheryl and other staff.

- Being able to provide feedback and support, to other staff, and the 'interns'.

- How effective the 'see something, do something' approach is, people actually follow it, because we have all worked through it together AND we respect other people's input, no matter what level they are at in the organisation. I personally feel empowered by it!

- Stress levels had gone down to some degree but more staff could alleviate things more.

Helen liked the list and was impressed by people's input. She went around the leadership team and individually chatted about the findings, she expected Carolyn and maybe one or two of the others, to have something negative to say. Carolyn simply mentioned, 'I saw all this happening and well thankfully it's all worked out, I don't know where the extra funds came from but yep, I have to admit this place is totally different to what it was.'

Others gave good feedback and as Helen mentioned to Rob, 'The information glows with good stuff.' Rob agreed, his next statement was 'While all that's good, are we missing anything, like, what's not good that we could make better?'

Helen mentioned the step up program, that was one thing, and that it would probably cause people to loosen up on taking breaks. Staff should feel more at ease about short or longer breaks, they all need a chance to revitalise.

Helen suggested that she would ask others for some input. Sheryl suggested she utilise the outside training group that were doing some of the inhouse training. 'Ask them to assess us and see what shows up. They agreed.

Helen suggested that they not survey the staff, families and or residents with a form, as they had had enough of that level of formality. She asked for anything else, in fact if they could do something innovative, that could be useful.

Two ‘assessors’ turned up with clipboards, they were mostly given access to all areas, and wandered about for a few hours over four days, aiming to capture details they thought might show up at random times.

Helen felt that with all the work done since Rob came on board that they would sail through any assessment, however she also knew details could be missed.

Some of the points they found

- Paperwork slip ups - Details missing or incorrect.

- It’s not my fault - Passing the buck rather than taking responsibility.

- Cover ups - Lack of transparency, staff could hide a minor infraction, details missed in paperwork, this could lead to the cover up of a bigger issue.

- It’s a minor issue I have bigger fish to fry - Some minor detail is overlooked, a small mess, something not put back right etc.

- See something - do something - Happens a lot but tends to fade from time to time. Some of the staff don’t seem to fully believe in it.

- Mistakes seemed to happen more when staff were under stress, towards the end of a shift an obvious scenario.

- Clarity - Some tasks given to staff were vague, the lack of clarity meant they did it how they thought it should be done, rather than how it needed to be done.

- Safety breaches - Lifting beyond the given capacity, rushing to lift without the right equipment - Electrical test and tags on some items had been missed.

- Forgetfulness - Some staff became sidetracked and forgot to complete a task, write down a detail or return to the resident to follow up on what took place.

- Medication errors - These were low in number but it did happen.

- Abuse - Raised voices, not because the resident or staff member couldn't hear but it was felt to be reasonable to raise a voice occasionally to make a point clearer, a form of disrespect or better communication?

- Environmental hazards - There were few and they were dealt with quickly, however they could have been prevented rather than becoming an issue.

- Failure to report - Damaged equipment was not a big issue but it did happen, it meant more messing around for staff to find a piece of equipment that worked, these things could be flagged and put aside to be fixed or replaced.

- Store blindness - A term used to outline things that get missed, a dirty bench top, messy work area that stays that way, scuff marks on doors and furniture, Pictures hanging at an angle, out of date notices on noticeboards, messy, incomplete or unprofessional displays. Areas 'just out of reach' where dust and grime built up. Some lights have gone out and have not been fixed - Some of the equipment that was deemed to not be much of an operational issue were overlooked as needing to be replaced, Toilet cisterns in the publicly available toilets being one of the main things, The same may well be the case in the residents toilets. Most showed material deterioration, flaky and brittle plastic being the main issue.

- Quality issues - Photos of residents framed cheaply, it sends a message of low care or interest. There are better ways of doing it, even in low cost frames. Faded decorative pictures, the facility had lovely decorative artworks, some of which have faded but are easily overlooked.

- Lack of privacy - Residents walked in on, no or limited knocking before entering a residents room.

- Transmitted diseases - While the rate of reported transmitted diseases has decreased, the fact that it still happens could be of concern, is the decrease due to the use of bots? Are staff involved… Clear abuse, no evidence found, it's just a question…

- Lunchroom - Has been updated, but people still leave a mess, in the fridge and on benchtops, the cleaners complained occasionally about cleaning up other peoples messes, but due to cultural issues relating to some immigrant workers most didn't want to complain or raise an issue, one even suggested, 'it gives us something to do.'

- Dunning Kruger effect - Someone thinks they know more than they actually do about a topic subject and or skill, they may well learn the hard way that they don't know as much as they think and could have asked for some support or more information. Mentoring and coaching needs work to question and explore talents more.

- Comments - Inappropriate or erroneous comments, that can end up sounding like a negative issue. 'What are you doing?' 'Cleaning up the noticeboard SOMEONE must have complained.' Was one example.

- Updates - Some computers and printers were getting on in years, some were still reasonably operational with the main staff users not concerned at the speed lag or other operational issues, stating, 'It's fine it does what it's meant to, most of the time.'

Helen was surprised at the depth of the report and caught a little off guard. Gail suggested that they prioritise the things that required cash to fix and work their way carefully through the list from worst to best. And look at the things that could be altered through cleaning and perhaps more staff training, looking at how things fitted to the guide of 'See something, do something' Perhaps through Sheryl.

Rob was handed the list and prioritised the things that required cash and asked for a list to be produced, a budget established and see how much of it could be done by Roy?

Helen skirted past Sheryl for some of the things sending email reminders about things that were simple oversights, like medication records and mistakes. Staff feedback on some of the items like computer upgrades felt they were doing the right thing trying to save the organisation money by putting up with slow machines that still did the job, or so they thought.

The board authorised most of the expenses after looking at the budget costs and aimed to spread out the expenses over a longer time frame than Helen would have liked. But there was progress.

Chapter Twelve

Frankie was working with Ava one afternoon, they had done a sing-along session and having a chat afterwards, Ava chimed in, ‘There seems to be a lot of little things happening, bits of fix ups here and there, a plumber doing things, what’s going on?’ Frankie told her about the assessment and how it came about from the ‘see something do something’ approach to quality control, fixing lots of little things to give people the best impression possible of the facility.

Ava nodded in a positive way and mentioned, ‘Well I hope they fix the dripping tap in the toilet at the end of Davey section, that‘s dripped since I first came.’ Frankie suggested that she add it to the list by mentioning it to Michelle at reception.

The pair talked for a little while longer Frankie mentioning aspects of work, workplace guidelines and how places work. Ava seemed very interested and discussed getting the opportunity to get a part time job when she turns fifteen. Frankie added, ‘With your volunteering work here, that should make a difference when you apply for a job, it's a great experience for you and shows a real willingness to help out.’

Ava looked at her a little quizzically and mentioned, ‘Yes I guess so, school is one thing but the practical side of things is pretty important and I do love coming here.’ Frankie suggested that she would be an ideal referee for her if she wanted. Ava needed a bit of an explanation about that.

Frankie had an idea, a chat with Helen would help to resolve her idea. The basics were that the facility could put together a letter that outlined the sorts of things that Ava has done and the positive impact she has made as well as her involvement in training sessions from time to time.

Helen loved the idea and thought Ava deserved all the support she could get. It would be a few months yet before she turned fifteen, but it was coming around.

It turned out that the local fruit shop needed a hand on a couple of afternoons and one half day per weekend, but they knew all about Ava, one of the staff there had a parent at the facility and sold her fabulous attributes to the boss of the fruit shop after having seen Ava in action.

It wasn’t long before they had her sorting fruit and vegetables, interacting with customers and running the cash register with some simple support to begin with. She had a special way with customers, and to make things easy she made up a badge with her name on it and underneath it mentioned, ‘in training’, if there were any ‘tricky’ customers she would smile and point to the badge. The boss loved it.

The staff all knew that Ava had ‘introverted tendencies’ and could sometimes become overwhelmed by things getting busy, but they supported her most of the time. She told the boss right at the start that she had other obligations, homework and her volunteering at Crystal Brook Manor. He was impressed by her directness, he wasn’t at all sure about her

challenge with making eye contact, the person who recommended Ava, suggested it was part and parcel of Ava's 'disposition, and maybe she'll grow out of it.'

Days came and went. AVA grew more in her interests both at school, at work and in her volunteer position. She was quite the observer, something not lost on the team at Crystal Brook and the fruit shop.

One afternoon, school holiday time and Ava wandered into the lunchroom, Rob was there chatting with Roy, they had done some work together in the garden and were finishing off their lunch break. Roy headed out as Ava walked in 'Hello Ava' he said with a chirpy smile. She said hello back, grabbed a glass of water and said 'Hi Mr Rob…' Rob noted the different greeting and said 'Hi Miss Ava.' There was a moment of reflection there as she processed his different greeting, her mind ticked over for a bit, yes she was happy with that. One of the other staff had called her that in the past 'Miss Ava.'

Ava started, 'Ok, Mr Rob, I have a question and I think you should be the person who could answer it for me…' Rob was all ears. 'Yes, go right on ahead, I'm listening.' He sat down and gestured for 'Miss Ava' to sit next to him on the corner of the table.

She sat and shuffled in the chair, Rob thought 'uh oh this might be serious!' 'Well you see it's like this, I want to know one thing and it sort of bothers me… Why are so many people so mean?'

Rob asked for clarification and Miss Ava gave some examples, 'The customers at work, some are horrible and think they are so important and want to know why the in season apples aren't in the store yet, then there are grumpy teachers at school, not to mention school bullies.'

Rob sat back and slowly mentioned,, ‘Yep I hear ya Miss Ava, I hear you loud and clear. It takes all kinds, the good thing is though, when you meet good people you appreciate them all the more. It’s one of the reasons we have a focus on respect here, It can be challenging but we have stuck by it. It’s one of those things, over time you learn how to deal with people.’

Rob noticed that ‘Miss Ava’ was very intently listening. He gave her some examples of how he learnt about customer service way back early in his working career and how he did some research, long before the internet was a thing, reading snippets out of business books he found. He then outlined discovering personality types and how it gave him starting points to understanding people.’

Ava’s mind was ticking over and Rob noticed that her attention was starting to fade. He stopped talking, she asked for some points of clarification on something he had mentioned. Next thing she was off, a quick fist pump and away she went, saying, ‘Thanks I’ll look into that, Mr Rob.’ and walked off.

Over the coming weeks Miss Ava came and sought out ‘Wise Mr Rob’, the man with many answers, she would pluck his brain of information as more ideas and scenarios presented themselves. She sometimes came with a list of things in her notes on her smartphone. Rob gave her pointers on what sorts of people to stay away from, what ones she might be able to connect with and how to get on the right side of a grumpy teacher. He mentioned that flexibility was the key, along with respect of course.

Susie asked Rob about their chats, curious to know what Mr Rob and Miss Ava talked about. She mentioned Ava had been researching on her computer, looking at leadership, communication, customer service and such and then asking questions over dinner time. ‘Oh and by the way Rob I am ever so grateful that you do chat to her, she can be rather reclusive

at times, but seems to soak up all you tell her, everything from plants in the garden to how to handle bullies and goodness knows what.'

Rob mentioned he was glad to oblige and how he very much enjoyed their chats. He pointed out that Ava had also spent some time with Sheryl and Frankie, he had heard they loved a good chat too, but that was more to do with music and Ava's connection with the intern program occasionally.

Susie commented, 'There's just one thing Rob and I feel sure you will have the answer 'oh wise one!' Ava hasn't been an overly active child with sports and all that but just lately she has expressed interest in martial arts, self defence, Karate, what's happening there that she should all of a sudden take an interest in that?'

Rob leant back a little and then suggested. 'Well perhaps she has seen some of our staff training, we have an advanced physical self defence program that we share with the attendant and senior staff, it involves verbal self defence with some simple but effective physical defence activities. That and her discussions about bullies at school, it might be the catalyst.

In the current world we live in with car jackings, machete attacks and all the rest of it, self defence can be a very useful thing, you could end up with a state champion in karate with her focus and interest in learning. Is there a group nearby she can get involved in?'

Susie suggested, 'Yes, and was a little more sure that it might be a good thing.' She then asked 'You mentioned school bullies, is that something I should discuss further with her?' Rob looked at Susie and with solid eye contact. 'YES! And the school should be filling you in on ways to talk about it, deal with it and how to know what to do next. Ava like all kids will at some stage have to deal with some form of 'bully' or manipulative situation. I'm

not sure that Ava has any issues with bullies at this stage but you need to be aware that it could happen and often in ways we don't expect.'

Chapter Thirteen

Rob walked in to the reception one morning, and said 'Hi,' to Michelle, she glanced up from her computer and casually mentioned, 'Oh hi boss…" and was head down again, busy with what was on the screen, Rob took a few steps and greeted Consci, 'Hi Rob' came its reply. Rob then stopped and thought, hmmm Michelle called me boss… He then took a turn and went behind the reception counter, something he didn't do very often, unless he had to. He pulled out a chair next to Michelle, not wanting to upset her computer screen viewing and sat looking straight ahead for a while. Michelle then looked up, smiled and asked, 'What's up?' With a broad smile. Rob smiled back and mentioned, 'Well I was wondering, this morning you called me boss, normally it's Rob, or hey, or similar.'

Michelle smiled and suggested 'Oh that, yeah the guy from the computer company came in a while back after the second Consci was installed and mentioned that he wanted to catch up with the boss, and I asked, which one and he said Rob, he then mentioned, you know the one who ordered the machine, I'm here to do a quick service check. I had a giggle and he mentioned that you were the boss, and then suggested that, 'Well he does own the company you know…' And I asked, 'Oh, oh really?' He mentioned, 'Yeah you can look it up online, He's listed on the business register as the owner, we have to know that stuff so we don't just lease these things to just anybody.' 'So yeah, Boss, you're it.'

Rob sat back in the chair and said, 'Well I never expected that, to be 'caught out' by a service guy… Well Michelle, now you know, what do you think of that?'

Michelle suggested, ‘Oh that’s fine, I knew for ages that you were more than just a gardener, your resume was left on a desk somewhere one day and you have a range of things there that goes beyond pushing a mower, and the times you spend chatting with Helen and the times you spend in the training room and all that, it's a bit obvious, some of the staff have asked what I know because they have wondered to but I don’t let on with that sort of stuff. Your secret is safe with me! Oh and young Ava, sweet kid, she even asked me a similar question a while back.’

Rob smiled and chortled,, ‘Well there you go. Sometimes I get so wrapped up in what’s happening I guess it’s obvious.’

Michelle then mentioned, ‘Oh and Roy, he has his eyes and ears on everything, he and Carolyn knew something from fairly early on, Roy suggested it was a bit like one of those undercover boss shows. And found it amusing.’

Rob smiled and headed out to the garden and got started on his garden work, smiling from ear to ear that his cover was well and truly blown, but that his ‘secret was safe’ from everyone.

‘Mr Rob, hello…’ Came an excited voice in the near distance, yep, it’s Miss Ava, coming in hot from the reception area. Rob was on his way through to the garden when he heard her call out. He turned to see her say hello to Consci, Michelle had already been greeted.

Ava excitedly mentioned ‘I’ve got another white thing. It’s a white belt that goes with my white karate uniform!’ Rob was wide eyed and chortled, ‘Oh wow that’s fantastic! I guess you need the belt to hold the uniform in place…’ She nodded furtively and smiled. Then mentioned that, ‘Tuesday nights after work, I have been to two classes so far. It's a bit scary!

But I think I'll be okay. Rob feigned a few silly karate moves which caused Ava to giggle and say 'Your funny Mr Rob!' They fist bumped as she wandered off to the piano, Rob noticing a slight skip in her step, it caused him to smile.

Roy wandered through and mentioned casually, 'That kid's getting better on the piano each time she comes in, good to see.'

Helen came by at the same time, Rob told her about her karate classes and Ava, Helen mentioned, 'Ah the making of Miss Ava. I wish we had more kids about the place, it adds some light and frivolity to the place.' Rob agreed and suggested 'Perhaps you should look into that? Or at the very least get Gail to do it.'

A seed was sown, youngsters interacting with the elderly residents. There could be fun, giggles, frivolity and oh wait, challenges, liability, and mess and who knows what. She had seen TV shows that had done this sort of thing but Helen's mind started seeing the down sides rather than the upsides.

Nevertheless, she haphazardly threw the idea into the air with Gail a day later. It was delivered more as a statement rather than a question or a request. Another seed planted.

Not long after, Gail came back with an idea, there was a youth group at the local community centre, about nine teens showed up to do activities regularly, some would come and go, some were considered 'a bit at risk', the organisers liked the size of the group and two adults were able to coordinate activities quite well, most of the time. And the opportunity to add to their activity base was of some interest.

The only thing they felt might be awkward or a sticking point, was that the group would change, new teens in, some teens out and back again a few weeks later, there were

thoughts that that might be difficult for the residents, as they might not get a connection that lasts and that was probably seen to be important.

Helen agreed to meet with the coordinators, Kath and Ian to discuss possibilities. They worked once a week with the teens, an early evening catch up on Thursdays at the community centre. Helen gave them a tour through Crystal Brook and chatted about the sorts of activities they did. She pointed out Ava as being their star volunteer and her status was partially due to her grandmother being a resident and a long standing involvement.

Notes taken, ideas discussed, and then the pair were gone. It was a few weeks before they came back with a notional concept. They wanted the teens to come up with something, rather than some activity being imposed on them from adults, first it would involve a tour through the facility, then watching how things happened about the place by doing some observing.

Timing was an issue, by the time the teens got to the facility on a Thursday, the residents would be sitting down to their evening meal, then after that not much happened.

School holidays were on the horizon and with some ‘shuffling’ of rosters and other activities it was agreed that the teens could come in on the first Monday of the holiday, and then aim to quickly develop activities and engagement from there.

And so the process started, Helen ensured they were given guidelines and asked that they study the website details around how the facility operated. Respect was discussed on their last Thursday catch up before the holidays.

Eight teens, as well as Kath and Ian showed up. The tour commenced, Helen handed the reins to Gail and Carolyn to be the tour guides, the group then watched as the attendant

and catering staff provided morning teas. Then the residents wandered off to play Bingo this morning while others returned to their rooms or wandered the gardens, it was sunny out.

Frankie gave the teens a rundown on their activity schedule and answered a range of questions, Elaine the Registered Nurse, was on hand to answer questions about resident care, how medical situations were handled and the types of things the staff had to deal with.

The group then had time with Frankie to discuss how they might be involved, Frankie mentioned the sing-along sessions and how Ava was a volunteer pianist who had been there for quite some time. Some of the group knew Ava from school, they clarified, ‘Ava the introvert?’ Frankie mentioned, ‘Well yes she can be that way but in the facility she catches up with her grandmother and has developed a long involvement with us, it’s been fabulous to have her around.’

There was a silent moment as those who knew Ava from school were a little perplexed. The conversation went on with a few snide remarks in the background. There was a craft activity this afternoon, that would involve cutting and pasting, then a simple task before that, of having lunch, perhaps the group could assist with serving lunch? That was quickly stopped, the risk of a resident getting bumped or something spilt on them, so that was out. A quick discussion about risk management issues was had.

Ian suggested to Frankie that they watch and help with the craft activity and perhaps they could design an activity of their own to show the residents on another occasion. Yep, that sounded good. The teens were interested, what to create would be a thing they could get into.

The teens had paid for lunch, well Ian and Kath had coordinated some funds and the facility was pleased to have a bunch of fresh faces join in on the lunch, they set two separate

tables with Ian on one table and Kath on the other. The cook came out and explained a little bit about how the catering team worked and the types of food they served as well as the way they surveyed the residents about the foods they served and how important it was to get feedback.

Lunch came and went, the teens helping out with the clearing of tables, minus the residents to avoid any risk issues. The catering staff were very happy about that. They group sat and chatted about activities they could create with the residents. The Melbourne cup and fashion week was coming up, so a hat building activity could be useful? Melbourne Cup that year was a bit of a way off as was fashion week. But the ideas were starting to flow.

A reading exercise might be useful, while others explored simple card games that might fit the bill.

The afternoon craft activity was about to begin, so the teens watched, and helped out with small things where they could, after that came afternoon tea. Then things changed.

Ava arrived with her white scarf on, and headphones, she was aiming to practice some piano before the afternoon sing-along. She waved to Frankie, Frankie noted her normally cheery wave faded fast. Ava stopped in her tracks, she had spotted the teens in the distance most of whom went to her school, one or two she did not like and Ava instantly wanted to retreat. Ava sat down at the nearest chair hoping not to be noticed.

Frankie walked briskly over, sensing something wasn't right. She started out formally, 'Hi Ava, everything okay?' Ava asked about the teens, 'Why are they here?'

Frankie gave her a rundown on the group from the community centre, and how they were discussing how they could be involved, like Ava was, but as a group.

Ava sat silently and listened as a glisten came to her left eye. Frankie noted that and asked, ‘So they are here to do the craft activity today and are helping out, please tell me if everything is okay, you don’t seem to be yourself?’ Ava’s eye contact was non existent as per usual. She then looked up briefly and mentioned that, there are two people in that group that I don’t like, and one I don’t get on with, maybe I’ll go away and do the sing-along another time.’

Frankie was stumped, she had not had any issues like this with Ava in the past and felt a little uneasy, she realised that no one had mentioned to Ava that a group of teens would be here. Just then Helen came by to check on things, Frankie subtly waved her over and indicated to Helen to sit.

She asked Ava, ‘Can you tell Helen what you just told me?’ Ava nodded and gave a brief sob, Frankie touched her forearm and calmed her a little. saying , ‘It’s okay Ava we’re here to listen.’

Helen heard how Ava didn’t like some of the teen group from the community centre, she knew them from school and she was seen here at the facility and would probably be judged, hanging out with ‘old people’. Helen looked at Frankie, the pair were mortified that their teen in shining armour was somehow upset, The pair were used to dealing with families and residents having an emotional time of things but Miss Ava, that was another thing altogether.

Helen made a decision, no singalong for now. She suggested to Frankie to continue on with the activity, and then ushered Ava off to a side garden area she knew was out of view from inside. She got one of the staff to find Mr Rob.

Mr Rob wandered over from tending a part of the garden over the back of the Davey section, he came around the corner to find Ava and Helen chatting quietly under the shade of a marquee that was permanently set up.

Rob smiled as he approached, seeing Helen gently beckon him over, Rob took off his dirty work gloves and asked ‘Hi Miss Ava, how are you?’ Ava replied with a simple ‘Hi,’ There was no Mr Rob today. Rob looked at Helen, he could sense that something was up. There was a bit of silence and Helen then mentioned, ‘I think we forgot to tell someone that the teen group was coming over to get involved in activities…’

Rob sat back in the chair and took a deep sigh, ‘Oh I see, and that’s not a good thing I take it?’ Ava quietly mentioned, ‘I know some of the people in the group, and some I don’t like, one’s a bully the other is just plain creepy.’ Helen thought it was interesting that Ava was adding some details to the story, rather than a simple ‘I don’t like some of these people.’

The pair sat and listened, Rob mentioned the chat he had with Ava recently about people and how there were different personality types and we don’t have to like everyone.

Helen indicated she had to head off after listening intently to Rob ‘The Master Whisperer’ chat calmly and carefully with Ava. He had a way of reassuring people that things would be okay and how to explore ways to work around things.

The chat turned to exploring respect, he started to ask her questions and find out a bit more about the people she didn’t like in the group.

Rob mentioned that the teen group were also in the process of learning things, just like Ava did. He also mentioned that he wished that Ava had been involved somehow earlier on, so that she would have known they were coming.

Things settled after a while, Rob checked to see if the teens had gone, which they had. Helen found Ava's grandmother. She was glad to have Ava come to her room to sit for a while. There was no sing-along that afternoon with Ava, the group had to put up with a few staff singing and a plug in USB in the piano for the music with Frankie leading the songs.

Helen suggested to Rob at some stage, just when I think we have this whole respect thing sorted out, it teaches me new lessons. Oh and thanks for being there today, you clearly are the whisperer.

Chapter Fourteen

Helen realised that Rob certainly had a unique set of skills, her thoughts about him being the 'master whisperer' came back to something he once mentioned about working with people, 'a quiet chat can soothe things.' She mentioned it one day while out in the garden with him having a BBQ with some of the residents. He told her how he had learnt to deal with some difficult people by having a quiet chat.

He had read in a book the term Bully Whisperer, where a key character called Bill was able to 'tame' Bullies who ended up at his school. Years of professional development training in various businesses, some of which focussed around communication, revealed he was able to develop that skill, 'It can be very useful from time to time.'

Helen had done some similar training in how to influence and direct people, using a technique called pacing and leading. The pair talked for some time about the similarities and differences in how they developed as professionals and shared some stories about things that worked and things that didn't quite make it.

One thing they agreed on, was that saying 'CALM DOWN!' didn't have much effect, other than to annoy the person more. There were a few laughs had about that one.

As part of the training add ons, the staff were given a scenario of having an agitated family member and a role play was produced, They called it ‘Calm Down’ and so they brainstormed approaches staff could use to get the person ‘onside’ and progress in a logical fact driven exchange. The aim being to develop a broader set of suitable responses that they trial and explore what works.

It had been a long road, not without its challenges and Helen came to realise that she didn't just help to rebuild Crystal Brook Manor; she gave its people a shared language of respect, a language they were starting to explore themselves. Clearly the support from mentoring and coaching had helped, along with input from people like Rob and some of the key staff. She even felt as though she could take a few weeks off and leave Carolyn in charge!

The waiting list for Crystal Brook Manor was getting longer than its history of complaints, proving that respect wasn't just a mission, it was a key aspect of the highest standard of service.

The chaos that once prevailed had been replaced by competence, but as Helen watched Rob prune the new growth in the garden one afternoon, she understood that true leadership, like any act of service, simply meant showing up and tending the things that matter, every single day and doing it with love.