

Caring Through Corona

A branch eye view

One of the most remarkable things about the remarkable times in which we are living in, is how very quickly they ceased to be remarkable and just became normal.

I distinctly remember it being the 29th of February, a bright and blustery day, and we were out as a family to celebrate my grandparent's 60th wedding anniversary. After a beautifully ordinary afternoon eating and drinking in the local pub, we bundled into my grandparent's living room, fighting for space on the sofas (as usual I was a bit slow on the uptake and left with the least desirable seat in the house ... my Grandad's commode) to gather and watch the Watford versus Liverpool game. As Troy Deeney curled a superlative third into the back of the net from the edge of the area, to end Liverpool's hopes of going the season unbeaten, my brother casually commented that it didn't matter anyway, the season would be scrapped due to corona. At which point we all looked at him like he was mad. Fair enough in Wuhan a hospital had been erected faster than a modest lego project and we had all seen the poignant scenes of Italians singing to one another from their balconies, but that was a world away wasn't it? No football ... no chance!

Yet 24 days later Boris addressed the nation and all of a sudden our lives were restricted to shopping for basic necessities and exercising once a day. The pace of change had been rapid and as the country shut down, I was left wondering what the coming days, weeks and months would have in store for our branch. We are entrusted to care for some of the most vulnerable members of our community and they needed us now more than ever.

67 days on from the commencement of lock down I look back on the most surreal time of not only my career, but my life, and I feel nothing but pride and admiration for the way our team has responded. There have been times when we have felt like screaming, a couple where we have been close to crying, but there have been far more occasions when we have laughed and come together as a team like never before.

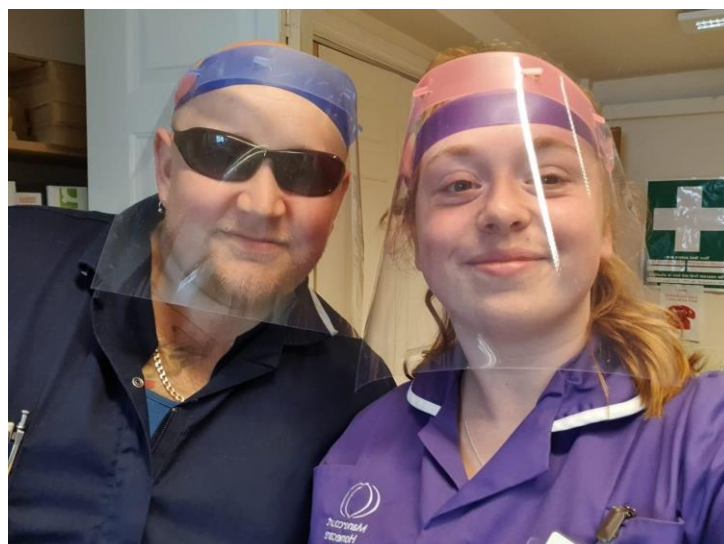
The first big challenge we faced was not the virus itself, but the monumental mission that shopping became. We shop on behalf of a number of customers who are not able to get out about themselves and securing the items they needed became a challenge our carers embraced with all the gusto of an athlete in an Olympic year (I think they probably even limbered up with a rigorous stretching regime).

As the queues at the big supermarkets grew and grew our carers became progressively more ingenious at getting their (gloved) hands on what they needed. They would be out shopping first thing in the morning and last thing at night and the lengths they would go

to to source a roll of toilet paper were remarkable. My favourite tale involved one of our carers going into a small newsagents early one morning. When the proprietor noticed her uniform he ushered her into the back with the promise of something that would be of interest, understandably intrigued she followed. Assuming it would be a fake rolex or a batch of dodgy DVDs, imagine her surprise when she was greeted by a mountain of toilet rolls, all set aside specifically for carers and their vulnerable customers. The gentleman informed her that whenever she needed toilet rolls, he was her man. Mission accomplished.



Securing PPE was also something that posed a challenge. However overall we have been and continue to be very fortunate to never have been in a position where we worried about not having what we needed. We have received very thoughtful and generous donations from the local community. The Design and Technology department of Saffron Walden County High School, designed and produced some fantastic vizors (as modelled below by the lovely Beth and Jamie).



We also received a donation of gowns from one of our employees (this time modelled by Lauren and again Jamie ... for whom a catwalk career surely awaits!) As well as a local care home kindly knitting us ear protectors to make wearing face masks much more comfortable. Knowing that we have the support of the wider community at this time has been a real boost!



Our wonderful, wonderful customers have also kept our spirits high and our Manorcourt community has never felt closer. Jenny kindly brought these lovely gifts for all her carers as a token of her appreciation and the corona edition of our monthly customer crossword was more popular than ever (well done to Edna, Sylvia and Julia for their correct entries!).



But above all these past 67 days have shown me what a phenomenally talented and dedicated team we have and how lucky I am to be their manager. As a history graduate I often pondered what would be our thing? What would be the event that defined our generation? Our grandparents had the 2nd World War, our great grandparents had the 1st, what would ours be? Then all of a sudden it was upon us and I could not be more proud of how we responded. Every single member of my team can hold their head high and know that they played their part, never shying away from what was needed, never questioning what was the right thing to do. Heroes come in all shapes and sizes, and real heroes don't wear capes ... they wear gloves and aprons!