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Darren Mugem: It really felt like a war zone every single day. It felt, with the mask and the face shield on, you're struggling to take a single breath. Imagine doing that eight hours a day, five days a week. It's gonna get to anybody, right?

My name is Darren Mugem. I am a worker, was a worker for Castleview Richwell towers from March 2020 until November 2023. And I've got a story to tell.

I had got here, right in March 2020, about a week before everything locked down. Already people were bracing for impact, but I'm not sure anybody was really expecting the magnitude of what, what, what came.

We've got like 400 to 500 residents. And at any point in time, dozens, if not hundreds of other staff in this staffing next. And we only have a team of maybe half dozen, upper management, we'll call them. And it's an impossible task, for any team of 6, 8, 10, 12 to run a home of, could at any point in time have upwards of 750 people in it. And so, it's important, when we're talking about the confusion, and, and the angst, and, and the negative emotions associated with these sorts of events, it's important to step back and look at the scenario. Right? Look at, had this been a home a 10th of the size of this, it would have been a very different story. So as far as I'm concerned, management was only doing what they were told, by head office, who was also just being, doing what they were told from the government, and so on, and so forth. And staff, who were normally working in two homes to make ends meet, now couldn't do that. And that was hard for them. That was financially stressful for them, right? We have a lot of just naturally extroverted residents in this home. Now they, they can't go outside. Now, they, they can't go up the elevator a couple of floors to see their friends. They can't really talk to the staff the way they used to 'cause, 'cause everybody's gotta stay back. And if you're 80, 85, 90 years old, you just don't have the voice to, to be yelling six feet across the room all the time. You just don't.

When all of this started in 2020, everybody was worried that it was gonna have the same mortality rate that SARS did. Which SARS had a much higher mortality rate than any COVID strain, according to my knowledge, right? And everyone's like: "Well, hold on, let's make sure that we don't face that again. Let's bam hard lockdown. Bam masks." Right off the start. Because we didn't have a whole lot of information, that was probably the move. But the more information that became available, maybe we could have altered things. Staff were working 5, 6, 7 days in a row. Staff were doing shifts that they probably didn't normally do. And it started to really take a toll. Moral was dropping weekly. If I'm not mistaken, like, like, we definitely had, had incidents where, where, where, like, staff and residents just stopped getting along in certain floors. It's crazy to think of, of, in a long term care home, where residents and staff interactions is vital to what we do, that now people just started to fall out. And the tension started to get to people, and the pressure started to show some cracks in the armour. So many staff members I know decided to just leave this profession altogether. So many people walked away from recreational therapy, from occupational therapy, from public service worker, from RPN from RN. I know a worker who stood up just bought a house like 90 minutes out of here, left and didn't say a word to anybody. True story.