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00:02

INTERVIEWER Hi, Carrie, my name is Patrick.

CARRIE: Hi!

INTERVIEWER We just met a few minutes ago and I'm just introducing myself again. I'm with the Remember Rebuild Saskatchewan project, and I'm also working with COVID in the house of old. I'm uhm doing some interviews and collecting some kind of stories about what it was like in long term care. So do you mind introducing yourself and then telling me what you do here at Sherbrooke Community Center?

CARRIE: Right, my name is Carrie. Hmm, I've worked at Sherbrooke Community Center for about 20 years, or ... Hmm, I work in recreation. So my job during COVID was definitely a lot different than what it is now, that COVID is suddenly magically gone. I ... Just uhm ... Policies, I guess, I could say. In that regard. But ya know, our job definitely turned when COVID hit. Hard parts were wearing masks, because a lot, a lot of people in long term care have a hard time hearing, and so they ... And they use your ... Read your lips. And so, I found it very hard to communicating, communicate with the elders a lot more, almost yell... Not yelling, but it... It definitely made our elders frustrated, us frustrated, because we could a lot of times can't get our point quite across because of the masks.

When COVID had first started, we... I worked in Kinsmen Village. And there's about 63 residents. And we had an outbreak. Our very first outbreak, I think, lasted 55 days.

01:35

INTERVIEWER Wow, when was that?

CARRIE: I'm trying to put like... It was like the first year of COVID, I would believe. Yeah, 'cause COVID started in March, it would have been like the following year. At first, it was scary 'cause we didn't know what was going on. So, you could just imagine, every single elder who had to stay in their bedroom. I think it was for at least 30 days, nobody could even come out to have a shower. So, during that time, my job was... I... We quickly got a lot of like trying to get technology like iPads. So, I did a lot of FaceTiming with families, because nobody was allowed in. And so, and as recreation, we rely heavily on volunteers to help us, get our jobs done because there's only one of us for approximately 40 residents. So, uhm... Yeah, no, it

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definitely made it hard. So, we very quickly learned how to try and communicate. So, I would say 70% of my job was just trying to help the residents elders, communicate with their families outside.

CARRIE: I believe we did have, during that outbreak, we had 10 people who tested positive and since it was in several houses, uhm... It was hard. We did have three pass away. I actually was with one of them when they did because their family wasn't in at the time. That was definitely hard. Hard to watch. Because, just know, like, I, in, inside of me I knew if that person had tested positive, that I didn't know if they would make it just because different issues. I, I still remember that day because when I... When it did happen, I remember I needed to get out [stressed laughter]. And... They... We're on lockdown. Like, the only way I could get out is the front door, because they didn't want, they had every other door, access door here locked. And so, I had to walk through everybody just to get outside to get a fresh, breath of fresh air. And then, I happened to see one of our, like our CEO or whatever and asked what was wrong and I, you know, I kind of lost it. But I think it was the stress of everything built up. Because for example, uhm I was gonna help someone with lunch. Well, we have to dress head to toe in PPE. So gown, glove, mask, shield. So, I get all that on and I go to help this person. I forgot a spoon. So, I have to take all of that off, to go get a spoon, and then put all the back on. The amount of waste was insane. And, uhm, I know I'm jumping all over the place but...

04:20

INTERVIEWER No it's okay, just take your time.

CARRIE: Uhm, so... Yeah, with that sense, it was like... So much waste going on. Uhm, trying to be a Rec person in this, and be the happy person, when the whole world's like, felt like it was crumbly... Was also hard. Because so, my whole day, I'm tryin' be happy, be the happy, positive person. Yet, we're trying to, you know, deal with it ourselves. Within our home life, or uhm, you know, we're just within here ... And tryin' to help the... frustrated families connect with their loved ones, because they're mad they can't come see them, and help. The fam... Or the residents are mad because they can't see their loved ones. I don't know how many of them said they'd rather sign something, and live freely, and catch it versus being locked up. Like, it felt worse than jail. Especially during that. And unfortunately, KV, I think, that one year, because of different outbreaks, we were in lockdown for 150, I think was 155 days or something.

INTERVIEWER Wow

CARRIE: It was... And so, then me, and my coworkers, were also a wreck, or... Like, we were stuck down, like there too. So, we didn't get to go to our office, we didn't get to do... Anything. We were just totally isolated.

INTERVIEWER So what's a regular day? Like? What would it be like?

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CARRIE: I would come in uhm... Tryin' to do whatever. Like if I had any paperwork to do, but, we got uhm, they gave us like a... A room with a kind of a makeshift office, and a laptop. So that we could check our things. Uhm, then I would check my iPad to see if family, uhm anyone emailed and such. So, I try and set up uhm FaceTimes for the day. Like, my coworker and I split up so we wouldn't be in the same houses. Because, they didn't want to, like... Us to both be off at the same time if we got sick, so we kind of split up. And so yeah, I would do a lot of FaceTimes. I would also wash a lot of residents' hair. Like the girls' hairs because, I mean, that's a big thing to them. And so, like I make shift, some kind of... Garbage bag and stuff to go into their sinks, because in Kingsman village they just have... Sinks and they weren't allowed out to shower. Right? They had to stay in this small bedroom. Uhm... So, I did a lot of... Like a lot of... A lot of that, a lot of one on one times and visiting and... Yeah, a lot of just... Helping the residents connect with their families.

06:37

INTERVIEWER Yeah, were you ever able to talk to anybody about that afterwards? Like, that sounds like a pretty, pretty hard to sit with somebody as they're dying or to like, be in the middle of families...

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CARRIE: I mean, I have my... Like, we... I don't know if anyone really... Came up to me and told me to do it, but I just, I, like I have my, like, I have my own private therapy, or therapists that I kind of used to talk through some, just different issues. But, yeah. No, I didn't really. I just kinda... Just kept going with the flow, right? Just, my job. My job, trying to keep everybody, trying to keep them happy. But, it was really hard to keep people happy at that time. Uhm... I found it... I found it frustrating that the people making the decisions for policies, don't even... Didn't even step foot inside a long term care facility, and treated them as if like, they would, someone would touch them and they, you know, would get sick and die. Or something like, I didn't, I didn't agree with a lot of the policies because of... After like 30 days, why are they still in their bedroom? Like, I mean, as COVID progressed and, or the pandemic progressed, some of those... Outbreaks and stuff, they changed it to try and make it easier. But, I feel that some people... Like we had huge turnover down there. I feel that a lot of people that, they passed away... Not from COVID, actual COVID, but from COVID from loneliness. Like a lot of them, they just gave up. They can't see their families. They're stuck in watching either TV or, you know, their four walls. Like, it was, yeah, it was definitely hard.

I'm definitely happy to be on the other side of it now. [stressed laughter] And to get back to what we used to be. Like, a lot of residents moved in during COVID so they didn't even know what Sherbrooke was about. Right, like they just, we... It's so, took us back to, like an institution so bad. And that's what, in

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Sherbrooke, fought for so many years to get out of that... That way. And so, it was definitely hard to go back to there, so...

INTERVIEWER So when do you think things started going back to... The new normal, I guess?

08:48

CARRIE: Probably like two years after?

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INTERVIEWER Yeah.

CARRIE: Like, towards the end and then make... Like we... Even just recently, or not recently, whenever we lost the masks only a couple months ago, in March, I think? Even before then we had to still try to social distance our people. And so we, I hated it because it's all like we were the police. Because they want to sit together, and now we're like "Well no, you can't, you have to be six feet apart." Well, why? Because somebody way up above uhm says it. Uhm, we had to always keep our masks on, like so, we will take them out to eat. It made, which made no sense. You take them out... To a restaurant, they can choose not to have a mask, all of that, and come back. Yet, we had to keep our mask on 24/7. I remember taking a resident to a concert, with 20,000 people there probably. I was like one of three people with a mask on. In 20,000 people. Yet, I'm the one that's at risk? I don't know. Or... Anyways, it was frustrating to, with some of the... Some of the policies towards the end that didn't make sense at all. Like it felt like, uhm, COVID was over in the rest of the world. Or like, society, except for long term care.

10:00

INTERVIEWER Hmm. Can you tell me a little bit like what, what your normal day to day looks like? Like you said you do, you do recreation?

CARRIE: Oh, yes. Uhm, my normal day to day, we... Usually, you know, we have different group events. So, people come in and do group, like group events. Whether it's music, whether it's... Games, and entertainment. Uhm, just different activities, art, it could any that. We try and have... It's such a, a community, especially down in the village. Like, our people are always going out. Like they're, they're going to their appointments, they're physio, their OT, we have a pool. Like none of that was going on. I mean, yes, OT, PT within the area as much as they can but it was very limited. But a regular day, yeah people, they go to there... Then they'll, they'll go to the hall, and have a coffee at the coffee group. Then uhm, they'll go into the towel, or towel center, and watch a music, or entertainment, or whatever. Uhm, their family will come in and bring them coffee, or treats, and then they all sit and they visit. And they go to different areas, like, it's just kind of like, you or I, living at home and then going out. Which we are, which we, I feel like we are kind of back as you can see, the hus and bustle of uhm Sherbrooke. And how we've had a hard time finding a quiet place to talk [laugh] but ...

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INTERVIEWER [laugh] So, what do you think makes Sherbrooke special? You mentioned earlier that you fought for many years, like to make sure, about this kind of place ...

CARRIE: Uhm... It's just like, it's resident directed care. So, we really uhm, really try and let the residents or slash elders that's... We've all, we're always changing the language too. So, that's why they now call them elders instead of residents. We always, uhm, have the elders have a say in what they want to do, in their directed care. So like, if they want to sleep in, they could sleep in. Uhm... They have a choice, uhm like kind of what they want, you know, to eat and uhm, what they want to do. We're not gonna force them to do anything they don't want to do. Uhm... We've just tried to really, uhm, help. Like so, for residents, if they have a talent, like we try and... Really encourage them to be who they are. We allow them to help us with different things to, right? Because, that's just part of human nature. Uhm... Yes, just like, it's, I guess it's just letting them, letting them direct their care. And we are, we are in their home. Like... This isn't our work. Well, this is our workplace, but this is their home. And so we kind of respect their home.

12:29

INTERVIEWER When I was speaking to some other people, some other elders, they told me how hard it was? That they felt like similar to what you were saying, that they were locked up. And some of them are saying that they're afraid... Afraid of people now.

CARRIE: I feel that there's a lot more mental health issues now. That, because society had put it out there, like so badly that this COVID was so bad, especially for our elders. And so some of them, they have so much, so much anxiety about going out in public now. Like... Uhm, yeah, it's really hard to get them past that. To be like: "No, it's okay. You're gonna be fine." Uhm, you know what I mean? They're vaccinated, everything like that, and... But yeah, it's honestly, there's, I do have a few individuals that are very, very, very scared to, kinda, move on with life. But I mean... Society bombarded us, it was like, with it, every, on every social media outlet. And, there was never the happy stories. Right? Like it was always just the bad and the dying. I was so happy when they stopped reporting how many people had caught it and how many people died every day. Like, why did we need to know that? Like, not like just here, but just, in society. Like it's... I mean, you're lock in for, your four room, your, your, your room, four walls. All you have to, all you do is watch TV.

13:55

INTERVIEWER A lot of residents were watching, or elders were watching coverage of the...

CARRIE: The news! Well, because I mean, it was probably on... 20 out of the, out of their 30 channels.

INTERVIEWER Yeah.

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CARRIE: Right? And so, that's... Yeah. And the way... The way the media twist it all the time, like they made it sound super scary, like even on the radio now: "Oh, the, the water, the wastewater is up 100 and some percent." Well, some people, that's going to be a trigger. Like there's these triggers now, that will just trigger them and then, their whole day is thrown off. Even though that means nothing, really.

14:29

INTERVIEWER So, what do you think could have been done differently?

CARRIE: I wish they would have... Actually come into our care homes more, and listened to the elders. Listen to what they wanted. Because why did... They, uhm, you know, they had to be so confined and locked up. Yet, when I left I was fine. I could go do whatever I want. Right? Like so, why was it so different, especially even after they had their vaccines. Like I think they shouldn't have been so strict on the policies. Uhm I think that would have helped. I think if whoever was making these decisions could actually come step into our role for a couple more than an, like more than half an hour. Like, come be in the thick of it and then you'll see... Why, like... Can maybe see the? What are the statistics, statistics of how many people passed away during COVID, but not from COVID? I guarantee there, that, that number would be high of people from depression. It's amazing. The will to live, right? Once you lose that will, it's... Yeah, so I don't know, it's just a lot of the policy changes like... It, none of it made sense. Like they all, so many of them counteracted, or contradicted each other.

INTERVIEWER Do you feel like the way that elders treat you or see you has changed after the

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CARRIE: I feel they're so much happier. Right? Like... I'm lucky I am the REC person, so I'm... Kind of, they like, I, I bring, I bring joy to them. So, I've been with people with dementia and stuff. They see me, they're not sure what we're doing or what they're going to do. But they know, they have that feeling that it'll bring them joy. Fun, right? So, I've been very lucky compared to, specially like the Kerrys?, they would have got the brunt of it so bad. Yeah. Like, I remember getting some of the brunt, during the outbreak. And it was hard. Because I'm like, I know that they're just projecting their anger on us. Like, they're just projecting their anger, it's not towards us. But after, after so long, it was hard not to, not to take it personally? But, I kind of totally lost track where that was going but ...

INTERVIEWER No, it's okay. I'm just asking you, if you felt like elders...

CARRIE: I do. Like I feel they are, like I feel like the morale is up like so much higher now. Because everyone can just kind of go on and do their own thing. And it's, we're back to our, like the busy hustle and bustle of what Sherbrooke is. So, no, I definitely... So many more happy people.

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17:01

INTERVIEWER Is there anything else you want to share about? It could be about pandemic, could be something personal, something... A memory that you want to share...

CARRIE: I mean, the positive thing of... The pandemic, it did, like, there's some practices now that... Worked, that were good coming. Like, one thing, it was fun. I didn't, you know, didn't realize until we do this was, for an example, we were having a marshmallow roast. Well, you know, when a marshmallow goes on fire, yeah, blow it up. Well, I go to go blow it out. And I have a mask on, I'm like "Oh!". But then what I thought, I'm like "This whole time, I've been blowing on their marshmallows." [laughs] Or, do you know what I mean? Like, just that's just, like something that you know, that we'll probably never do that again.

INTERVIEWER Yeah.

CARRIE: But... Uhm, we really learnt to... How to come together and use technology. Like, because like for Wes, our music, we couldn't, she couldn't obviously go everywhere. And so we, they set it up in here. And then we found ways to, like broadcast it to our TVs, like, so that, uhm, everyone could still watch it. So, just using that, and using technology to really connect with families. Like I found there's a lot more of that still going on. And a lot of, uhm, elders have gotten their own technology, like their own iPads. And so, it's nice to see, uhm, some of that go on. Because I mean, there's a lot of people here that their families aren't from here, right?

18:26

INTERVIEWER Yeah.

CARRIE: And so, uhm, that family connection is continued on past the pandemic.

INTERVIEWER Do you notice there's a change in the amount of families visiting?

CARRIE: Uhm, there's a lot of families that visit now.

INTERVIEWER Yeah.

CARRIE: Right? Uhm, they, especially with all of, like, every time, like a... A policy got taken away, or... You know, we got one step closer to being over the COVID, more and more families would come. And now especially that, that they can join us like, it's, they're here all the time, which is nice.

INTERVIEWER Yeah. Cool. Was there anything else you want to talk about? Or do you think that's good?

CARRIE: I think that's good.

INTERVIEWER Great. Well, thank you very much. I appreciate you sharing. I'm gonna turn the recorder off now.

CARRIE: Okay.

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