



## Saskatoon: June 1, 2023 – Story 01 Transcript

SUMMARY KEYWORDS: people, felt, pandemic, visitors, restrictions, happened, decisions, fear, family, early days, positive, professionally, masking, personally, future, unknown, pivotal moment, residents, change, ai n

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Today is June 1st 2023. So what's your name?

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My name is Kim Schmidt. I'm currently the CEO at Sherbrooke Community Center and Central Haven special care home.

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So how was your experience like when was the first time that you realize that Covid was going to be a thing and like you knew about the pandemic?

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In early March 2020, I started to hear on the news about the pandemic and was just sort of, you know, normal here until, then things started to move really quickly. And we had heard, I think there was a single case or potential case in Saskatchewan. And so our leadership team, it was, I think, a Saturday night or we just started texting each other and talked about we'd heard of another home, closing their doors to everyone. And so we made the decision that night and the next morning we came in and basically close the doors and that was the start for us, was not having any visitors or family here and just trying to figure out how to keep people safe with all the unknown.

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How do you feel that the pandemic changed your life like did it affect you professionally and like personally? How did you feel?

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Both professionally and personally. I think, professionally, I think being in a leadership position in long term care really felt like the weight of the world on your shoulders because you're caring for all these people. We have 263 people living here at Sherbrooke and, and 60 people at Central Haven, and you are dealing with a lot of unknowns and trying to make the best decisions you can but you're constantly in fear.

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And there was so much fear around, especially the early days, that you know, a wrong decision could lead to really, really significant consequences for our residents. And so I think that fear and something that I had never felt before in my career of almost 30 years, nothing like that. And so it was pretty significant. And there was I think just dealing with the unknown, and also lots of direction from our health authority, and then trying to implement that, and we had to implement things really quickly at times. So, you know, when it just wasn't straightforward. And I think professionally, one of the hardest things or, you know, as a staff member here, too, was seeing residents not be able to see their families, and loved ones, and friends. And that was probably like, that was the most heartbreaking, kind of impactful part of the pandemic, for me, was us kind of walking the strong line of safety over those relationships. And so I feel like, for me at work, that was the most difficult thing and making those, having to make those decisions about, you know, when following a SHA direction about who could come in and who couldn't, and all the restrictions around that. So, and then personally the same as everyone else dealing with not, you know, whatever restrictions were currently in place, being, you know, isolated to your immediate family, with the restrictions on numbers, who could gather and all of that, it was just such a strange time. And I think from that point of view, there were some good things that came out of that about, you know, realizing what's important and maybe slowing down a bit and spending time together. At the same time, I think was isolating and you kind of see some of the long term effects, especially on younger people happening now. So.

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Thank you so much for sharing that. So my next question will then add to that, will be, what do you think that could be done differently in the future? What do you think are things that you could have improved?

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I think the biggest thing that could be done differently is we did learn how to have visitors here safely. So you know, masking came in and different precautions and I would hope that in future that we would never do complete restriction of visitors or family members. There were months before visitors were allowed in. And I think that was just really devastating. And so I would hope that that would never happen again. That we would sort of put safety measures in place, but at the same time have people live their lives and have choice. I think the way this happened was just and I, done out of fear and unknown was just so devastating to people's lives that I think there has to be a balance in the future if there was ever another, something like this ever happened again, because it and it's, it's not a short term issue. We thought it was at the beginning, but we were three years. So.

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What are some, like three pivotal moments, that throughout the pandemic in which you were like, this is happening, like?

06:00

Pivotal moments?

Pivotal moments.

I'd say that first morning, Sunday morning, when we came here and closed the doors, and people were still coming, just expecting to visit and we had to turn them away. And then all of the systems we set up to kind of have to restrict our visitors, those, those really impacted. Those were big moments.

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I think another pivotal moment was just recently in early April, when the masking mandate was lifted. And just sort of the, the joy and the renewed energy that, that I felt in this place was just and people being able to smile at each other and see each other's faces, I think it really changed something for the better. And so those are two times that really stand out for me workwise. I think, personally, a pivotal moment was in early days being in the grocery store. And I just went in for a few things. And I noticed people keeping up their carts, just filling them. And I got sort of really panicked and started doing the same thing. And it was just interesting how that was, just that hadn't been my intention going in. But just watching people do that, how it put kind of a fear in me that I felt I needed to do that, too. So I think those were couple and I think just ongoing at work here was just the constant meetings we had. And just you know, some of them were we had to make decisions that we knew were not what we would normally do with our philosophy here is to really be in relationship and really combat loneliness, helplessness, and boredom. And it felt like the things we were doing were not in line with that. So there were a lot of moments where you just felt that your values didn't match with what was happening.

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Was there any positives that you remember, any positive experience that you had throughout the pandemic?

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Well, I think our staff are amazing at both homes. And I think they really, they step up all the time. I think with our residents without having their families here, I think our staff stepped up even more to try and fill those gaps and to try and connect people, with through FaceTime, or zoom or whatever it was to try and really help them make those connections. And so I think that was a positive. I think, here we're, we have a lot of like open community things here. But at that time, we really were sort of forced back into the smaller neighborhoods, which was hard in some ways, but I think there were some positives in that with this smaller group really feeling, like closer and more connected. And, and so I think that was a positive. I think just knowing we can get through something like this as a positive when at the beginning and through it, you're thinking, how will we ever do this? And then as we come out of it or coming out of it, it's sort of you realize, you know, we can all do hard things, and we can get through it and we can be even better after because we've been through something hard together. We've been through a really tough time. And so I think that's a positive and I think that's the same for families. If you were in a, you know, a healthy, good environment with your family that it was a time where you bonded closely. I know personally for me, my two daughters were in university, they were sort of, you know, not at home a lot anymore. They were really kind of moving on to their own lives. And then we were kind of back as a family unit of four, with them more as adults. And there were some really, really great parts of that, that I think are just meaningful and that we'll never forget. So I think those were some good things that happened.

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Thank you.

You're welcome.

Just my last question, really? What is an advice that you will give to people in the future? Like, if someone were to hear these, what would you tell them if they are experienced something similar to what you have experienced?

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I would just say that, for me, especially early days, fear played a big role. And I'm, I'm not sure if you can tell someone not to be afraid. But I would just say, you know, to have faith and trust and, and that they would, they'll get through it, that things might happen that are uncomfortable or scary, but that, you know, time passes and things change. And the way the virus has evolved is not as deadly for people as it once

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was. And so I think, you know, just to try and have faith that it's something that will pass and they'll get through and to really kind of lean on the people closest to you to get through it.

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Thank you so much. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

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I don't think so. That's good.

Thank you so much.

You're welcome.