

Why I Love Being a Social Worker with Older People

Dani Stinton, member of the BASW Special Interest Group on Social Work and Ageing, explains what being a social worker with older people means to her.

Working as an older adult social worker has never been just a job for me; it's a vocation that continues to shape who I am. Over the years, I've had the privilege of supporting people across a range of settings—community services, hospital discharge teams, and now within a specialist dementia team as part of a hospice. Each stage of my career has deepened my appreciation for the resilience, humour, and humanity of the people I work with.

One of the greatest joys of my role is meeting new people and hearing their life stories. Older people carry decades of lived experience, and when they share those memories—stories of work, family, local history, and the communities they helped build—it feels like being trusted with something valuable. These conversations aren't just pleasant moments; they help me understand who they are, what matters to them, and how best to support them as they navigate complex health and social care needs.

Although I work closely with wider families, the older person is always at the centre of everything I do. Families often come to us during times of uncertainty, stress, or grief, and part of my role is helping them understand how to support their loved one while still respecting their autonomy. This is especially important in dementia care, where decision-making can become increasingly complicated. I find real purpose in helping families understand future care planning, including the importance of lasting power of attorney and the responsibilities involved in acting as a deputy. When families feel informed and confident, the person at the heart of the situation benefits most.

The Mental Capacity Act is woven throughout my daily practice. It provides the framework that ensures people's rights, choices, and freedoms are upheld, even when they face cognitive challenges. Applying the Act isn't just a legal requirement—it's an ethical commitment. I take pride in assessing capacity carefully, explaining decisions clearly, and ensuring that every step is taken in the person's best interests. It's work that demands patience, clarity, and compassion.

Advocacy is another cornerstone of my role. Sometimes I advocate to social services for essential support, sometimes to other professionals for timely interventions, and sometimes even to families when a person's wishes need to be protected. Advocacy can be challenging, but it is also one of the most meaningful parts of my work. Standing up for someone who may not be able to stand up for themselves is a responsibility I never take lightly.

Being a social worker with older people means walking alongside people during some of the most vulnerable and profound moments of their lives. It means listening deeply, supporting thoughtfully, and always honouring the person at the centre. I love this work because it allows me to make a difference—one conversation, one family, one story at a time.