

Taking Care--Documenting the Occupational Culture of Home Care Workers
Archie Green Fellows Project, 2014-2015
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Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

April Shattuck interview, 2014-10-20 : interview conducted by Sonia De La Cruz and Nathan J. Moore

INTERVIEW LOG

Time coded logs for audio file afc2014021_01121_sr01:

00:00:01 April Shattuck lives in Northeast Portland, has lived there all her life.

00:01:07 Has degrees in Psychology and Early Childhood Education, but trained mostly on the job.

00:01:24 Works mostly with adults with developmental disabilities.

00:01:53 Other jobs—office work, representative for a produce company, stay-at-home mom, house cleaner, nanny, jobs in the “care centered arena.”

00:02:23 How is care-giving different from other jobs? Much more “person-centered.” Would not want to sit in an office all day. Job is always changing, full of problem-solving opportunities, never a dull moment.

00:03:54 Began care-giving at the age of nine for quadriplegic neighbor. Neighbor easier to care for than clients with mental disabilities. Home care workers must develop a personal sense of wanting to help others.

00:05:32 Typical duties depend on customer’s goals. Important to make sure clients are physically active. Other duties: nutritional education, helping customer volunteer in community. Customers like to go to stores, walk around neighborhood, and connect with others with disabilities.

00:07:26 Typical routine? Depends on the customer. Some live on their own and interact less with caregivers than others. One client receives one hundred hours of care per month, which is a lot, but needs help with getting dressed, preparing meals, other daily tasks.

00:09:34 Schedule mostly nine-to-five by choice. Likes to have afternoons and evenings free. Some customers do not like to go out at night.

00:10:32 Relationships with customers—you are their family. Customers sometimes get to know April's family as well. Families with developmentally disabled members become overwhelmed, and some customers have little contact with parents.

00:12:04 Important to get information from customers about how they were raised, ways in which they did not receive support.

00:13:18 Maintaining boundaries with customers is a fine line. You have to be clear with customers. Many would call every day if they could. Does become personally involved, though; includes customers in family activities.

00:14:28 Does not take job stress home. Works through scenarios with customers about how to get their needs met when they are on their own.

00:15:23 Many home care workers bring the stress home with them and that leads to burnout.

00:15:45 It has taken awhile to learn how to leave work stress at work.

00:16:52 Discusses language used when talking about customers to others (with customers present). Ways to “talk around” certain issues without making clients feel bad. Example of Portland bus company denying customer personal lift service.

00:18:35 Importance of being delicate and respectful with customers.

00:19:00 How to develop trust with customers—making clients feel valuable, encouraging independence, understanding customers' backgrounds.

00:20:55 Interacts often with other home care providers. Encouraged three close friends to become certified care providers.

00:23:21 Important to have sense of humor; you have to laugh at yourself.

00:24:22 Has kept all of the same clients since the beginning, but was fired from first job. In Oregon, customers choose care providers and type of care, which is good, but can be problematic if the right person is not helping them make decisions.

00:25:11 Being fired was devastating for a short time, but relationship was not meant to be.

00:25:22 The most challenging parts – the medical system, doctors putting customers on various pills. Customers do not always understand medical questions.

00:27:31 Important to accompany customers to medical appointments, any place where they are asked questions that affect care.

00:28:56 Talks about joining the union – made a difference in personal life. No legal representation in the past. The state government created home care position in response to a lawsuit, and Oregon is only state with a brokerage system. Before, home care workers had no legal recourse if clients complained or accused them of mistreatment.

TIME CODED LOGS FOR AUDIO FILE afc2014021_01121_sr02:

00:00:07 The union has given a voice to workers without workers having to hire lawyers. There is also healthcare through a state-run trust system. Was paying \$115.00 a month for catastrophic care before the joining the union.

00:01:17 Has taken customers to political events about home health care issues. One customer enjoys going to union rallies and wearing SEIU [Service Employees International Union] t-shirts and hats to the events.

00:02:05 Does the customer who likes to go to rallies understand the union issues? Yes, briefly. Also likes to go get out and go to Salem, thinks it's cool to talk to politicians. It's important for politicians to see people who need home care workers because the government controls their lives, money, social security benefits. If they work, the government will cut social security benefits.

00:03:16 A lot of home care workers attend political rallies and events. Many are care providers for family members, called personal support workers. Independent contractors like April have to fill out more paperwork, deal with more red tape.

00:04:13 Lots of songs and chants at political events. Several people are very enthusiastic about the songs. Bus trips to the state capitol (Salem) that include lots of chants.

00:04:48 Rallies occur when there is legislation being passed that affects home care workers. When other groups of workers in SEIU are threatened by legislation, home care workers support them too.

00:05:22 Was a delegate at the SEIU 503 General Council Meeting. Meetings happen every two years. Lots of organizational work involved. So many things to vote on. Was able to meet the

different factions in the union. Was not previously aware of the vast differences between various union factions.

00:07:15 Something surprising about the job? I get to go grocery shopping at Fred Meyer's every week (laughing). I get to go to the river on a sunny day. Many fun activities that people sitting in cubicles do not get to do.

00:08:07 Seeing people's reactions to what customers do and say is funny. You have to educate people on what it's like to have disabilities.

00:09:25 Hobbies? Hiking and gardening. Going to places where there's no water, no electricity. Getting out in the wilderness is grounding. Likes to be active.

00:10:07 Can avoid thinking about work when away, traveling. Customers will get help from family members and others in their vicinities.

00:10:35 Plan on doing this job in the future? I plan on doing this as long as I'm needed to do this. Other plans – more extensive things with the world. Involved in projects to make the world better, more sustainable. Want to help people obtain really basic necessities-water, housing, schools.

00:11:24 The need to help dates back to childhood. A personal thing. You either want to help make our world better or you're not concerned about it.

00:12:01 Hopes that people with disabilities get to lead the life that they want to live. Wants them to contribute to the world and not just be put aside. Just because you have a disability does not mean that you're not as smart as the average person. Society could really utilize disabled people.

00:13:52 An experience that floored you completely or made you want to cry? Yes, self-injurious customer has made April cry on numerous occasions. She has been on drugs that have influenced behavior. Almost like caring for daughter, definitely a parent-child relationship. Customer is on a special diet that affects behavior as well. "I don't know what I'm going to walk into every time I work into her house."

00:17:06 Has nicknames for her self-injurious customer.

00:17:17 Self-injurious customer has a supportive family. Family has had to deal with daughter being put on various diets and psychotropic drugs. Customer's brother is a personal support worker for her.

00:18:28 Used to be against drugs given to customers, but has seen helpful side of drugs too.

00:19:55 You basically are a parent to them, even though you're a support worker. They might be fully grown and bigger than you. Motivating them can be difficult.

00:21:03 Are there people who could not do this job? Yes – people who like their “ducks in a row.” Most customers are easy to work with, but it is similar to teaching preschool. Has a customer who has to be reminded to go to the bathroom every fifteen minutes.

00:22:05 Takes customers weekly to play bingo at a day center for Alzheimer's patients. Also takes one customer to volunteer with cats.

00:24:03 Very matter-of-fact with customers. Some home care workers are quiet. There many great males who work in the industry. There are customers who need a male connection. Hates going to the mall, but many customers like going there.