

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.

**Adam Christopher Riggs interview, 2014-10-29 : interview conducted by
Michael Robert Bussel**

INTERVIEW LOG

00:00:28: Name is Adam Riggs. 14 years as home care worker. Has worked with clients who are disabled and elderly.

00:01:02: Recruited into industry by a disabled person. Previously worked in food service. Found home care more engaging.

00:01:35: Likes one-on-one relationship of home care. More autonomy. More emotional labor. Must give slack to people. Allow them to be themselves. Be upbeat.

00:02:34: Need patience, good sense of humor. Pay attention to all aspects of a person's needs.

00:03:16: Learn from person you take care of. Each person has different set of objectives. Attended classes put on by Oregon Home Care Commission. Most training has been on the job.

00:04:11: Typical day: traveling by car or auto. Personal care help. Housekeeping, pharmacy visits, trips to doctor. Lots of coming and going. Not on call, but must be available based on client's needs.

00:06:26: Develop close working relationship with client. Modify your behavior to accommodate client. Can't seek too intimate a relationship. Absurd to think we are automatons who can turn our emotions on and off. Complete stoic approach would be dysfunctional.

00:08:10: Mother of one client fawns and dotes. Sometimes have multiple bosses. Nod to one person, wink to another.

00:09:35: No common jargon with such a disparate work force. Do use hospital-like acronyms. Not together enough as care givers to develop common labor jargon.

00:10:25: People might be taken aback by how people talk about burden of their work. Union meeting good place to "unburden." Cautions others not to use names given privacy concerns.

00:11:35: Discuss issues with family members who tell you what to do. Get burned out and stuck in one place. Hard to find replacement when clients get used to certain set of caregivers. Hard to get time off.

00:12:35: Work leads to lots of black humor with person you care for, if they are amenable. Callahan is cartoonist who does disability humor.

00:14:43: Trying to come up with slogan for local union. Suggested “Uptight Butt Wipes” which was rejected.

00:15:20: Gratified when people thank you at end of the day. Not too keen on personal care. Start out handing bar of soap to person in shower. Later become more hands on and “nurse oriented.”

00:16:26: Challenging because everyone gets worse. No one gets better. Strap on cheerful face and keep going.

00:17:11: Union provides outlet for something more mentally engaging. Union successful in improving wages. Hard to qualify for health insurance. Hours fluctuate.

00:18:50: Lobby days in legislature. Bring clients to talk about effectiveness of programs. Natural support from neighborhood due to familiarity. Home care cost effective when compared with care facilities.

00:20:23: Orientation for new home care workers twice a month. Union provides “political economy of scale.” Way for us to more effectively market our labor, assert our needs and our values.

00:24:06: Everybody ends up here eventually. Sooner or later, someone is dependent or has to give someone else a hand.

00:24:51: Relaxes by riding bike, taking care of dog, shooting pool, solitary things mostly.

00:25:36: Don’t be afraid to “cross Rubicon” on person care. People have more hang ups about poop and blood than they need to. Becomes more routine once you get used to it.

00:26:25: Have to put hands on people. Grow into providing more acute care. People can get frustrated over cleaning people who are messy. Can’t show slightest amount of frustration. Treat as part of your job, don’t take it personally, don’t blame individual.

00:28:27: Mother was health care professional, Eagle Scout project dealt with disability. Home care not foreign to me. Work not a calling. Would go elsewhere. Emotional labor hardest part. Must keep cheery outlook even when folks are deteriorating.

00:30:30: End of interview.