

**Domestic Workers United**  
**afc2015/027**

**DOMESTIC WORKER UNITED**

**Patricia Francois interviews Valerie Murray**

**Interview Log: afc2015027\_03420\_ms03**

00:00:00 Pat Francois introduces herself and the project. Valerie Murray currently works as a senior care provider, working with a patient in the second stages of Alzheimer's. She gets private cases by word of mouth.

00:01:00 Getting jobs through agencies. She did an Alzheimer's Association course. Private cases pay better.

00:02:30 She gets paid \$30 an hour, whereas through an agency they keep \$20, given you ten, and tax it. She lives in King's County, originally from Trinidad and Tobago. How she got into domestic work. Worked in a bakery and a customer told her about Domestic Workers United.

00:05:30 Various jobs she has had, one babysitting, mostly with elderly. In the babysitting job there was tension around the child calling her Mommy.

00:07:00 She retained relationship with this boy. Now tenth grade.

00:08:00 Valerie describes a typical day doing elder care. Her biggest elder care job was with two patients in Manhattan. She had total responsibility. She had to pay rent, bills, buy groceries and personal items. They ran out of money. Worked for three weeks without pay. No need to go to foreign countries for charity work, it was right there. Signed them up for Medicaid.

00:10:00 How patients were in denial about running out of money and she had to leave because she wasn't getting paid.

00:10:30 Difficulty of signing them up for Medicaid. She cried. They were helpless. They finally got help from the government.

00:11:00 Apartment was being sold while they were there but new owner agreed to let them finish their lives there. Even now Valerie still pays the man's telephone bill. He is still on her account for his cell phone.

00:12:30 They were "the worst people" before they ran out of money. The work was sometimes 24 hours.

00:13:30 She became their manager.

00:14:00 Skills for domestic work, working with Alzheimer's patients requires communication skills. Regular elderly like to talk. You learn their life story. Special skills for bedridden patients.

00:17:00 Sociology might be helpful for people to deal properly with the elderly. You have to be a people person. Usefulness of training, especially CPR, can save a life.

**Domestic Workers United**  
**afc2015/027**

00:19:00 How her patient was hospitalized because he fell down. Danger of bruising when blood doesn't clot properly. Herbal remedies and eating right are important. Importance of protein and iron. She pureed food for her client.

Day by day he ate a bit more after getting out of hospital. Gradually she added more foods to his diet. Used coconut oil on him. 00:22:00 Made sure her client took his medications. He regained his strength and is still alive today, four years after that hospitalization. Domestic work is real work if you take it to heart.

00:23:00 She expects to be treated nicely. She treated him well and he was not obnoxious to her as he was to other workers.

00:24:00 Ways to help elderly fall asleep. Be quiet, put TV on, leave them alone, they will doze off.

00:25:00 How talking about his mother calms him down. Remedies she uses: coconut oil and turmeric. Turmeric has helped his wife with sciatica. You can add it to eggs, tea, oats.

00:27:00 More skills for elder care. Making sure patient is not on a wet bed, to avoid bed sores.

00:27:30 Best part of the job. Being trusted, and not watched like a thief, so she felt at home.

00:28:00 Worst part of the job. Patient screaming and cursing at the other workers. He made his first three million at 23, and the next minute could barely buy a loaf of bread. That can be frustrating. It was not dementia.

00:29:30 Current job, the gentleman has Alzheimer's. He and his wife are respectful and they trust her.

00:30:00 Wife trusts her enough to leave her credit card with her to buy food. Another job she had in Mount Vernon. They went to the Hamptons and wanted her to come but she didn't want to go there. That was a memorable job. Knowing when to talk and when to be quiet. Difficulty of working with some of the client's relatives. Sometimes there is jealousy over the role of the caregiver. 00:33:00 How one day her client called bank and suggested they give Valerie power of attorney. She talked him out of this, to give it to a family member.

00:34:00 Work and holidays: Valerie didn't take holidays. Only took sick time off. At first she worked seven days a week. She had to cut down.

00:35:00 She and another woman were threatened due to their immigration status. Her friend from DWU reassured her.

00:37:30 Personal and work life balance, how does Valerie do this? The work breaks the mother child bond unless you bring the child with you. She started domestic work when her son was older. She managed to be there when he was home from school and was there to help him

**Domestic Workers United**  
**afc2015/027**

with his homework, so there was balance.

00:39:00 Women who work long hours have to worry about where their children are.

00:39:30 Getting phonecalls that a son is trouble and being stuck at the job, especially hard for single parents.

00:40:30 Young children need their parents there. Her being there for her son paid off. He never got in trouble. He is 22 now.

00:41:00 Valerie only belongs to DWU, no other organizations. Feels she belongs at DWU meetings.

00:42:30 She tried to be there for her son in high school as well, not going here and there, elsewhere.

00:43:00 Now that he is busy with his life she is making use of this time. The Bill of Rights is good because it's scary not to know you have rights.

00:43:30 Valeries shares a story of a worker whose employer came to an event at her house, decided she had too nice a lifestyle, and fired her. This is why DWU is important.

00:45:00 She respects DWU for letting people know they have rights. That situation was a form of discrimination, an employer deciding an employee had too nice a home. This woman did not know about DWU.

00:46:30 Valerie would like to see the Bill of Rights being enforced more, sick days, real vacation time, not everyone gets these. People are still threatened with firings. DWU is the only group standing up for domestic workers.

00:47:30 Without DWU the bill would not be in place. The bill is not really being enforced. People still treated unjustly. Pat provides examples of the low wages she has been offered, such as \$5 an hour. Importance of not working under minimum wage.

00:50:00 Women take it because they have to pay rent and bills, and feed their children. Women take what they can get. How employers don't view workers as real people with real lives. Sharing stories makes workers stronger.

00:51:30 What skills would Valerie like to gain: sociology, to deal better with people. DWU taught Valerie to stand up for herself.

00:52:30 People can feel less alone and less subject to abuse, that's what it gave Valerie. DWU is a refuge.

00:53:00 Parting words: Valerie would like to know that the dream of DWU will live on, that more people find out about it, it becomes more widespread, a household name, like a brand

**Domestic Workers United**  
**afc2015/027**

name, that domestic workers can always turn to to make their lives easier.

00:54:00 If people know they can lean on DWU, their lives will be easier.

00:54:30 What Valerie has learned from the elderly: many lessons, but mainly that money does not bring happiness or peace. Being a good person and being spiritual brings peace. Being at peace with yourself, loving yourself, and being as good a person as you can be are most important.

00:56:00 Pat thanks and commends Valerie for her work.