



Family Carer: Trudy Compton
Age: 80
Cared For: Gareth
Situation: Lives at home with Trudy
Age: 41
Other Children: 2 sons who live in Zimbabwe, 1 daughter who lives locally

Years of Caring: 41

Life Long Caring "I am doing a pretty good job and I would do it all over again"

Trudy was born in Holland but moved at an early age to Zimbabwe with her family. After her husband's death, in 2009 and at the age of 70, with the help of the Red Cross she moved with her son Gareth to the UK. They were some of the last people to move to the UK from Zimbabwe through the resettlement scheme. Trudy came to live in Oxfordshire to be near her daughter who had moved here several years earlier.

Despite such a big move Gareth coped incredibly well and has now settled in to his life here in the UK. Trudy has seen a change in him and feels he has grown up and is now more like a teenager. She has tried twice to encourage him to move in to supported living but it has not worked and as he finds having an assessment very stressful she has decided to put it on hold although she knows she needs to plan ahead. She says he is a 'happy soul', he is good company and she enjoys having him around.

Trudy does not think there are many negatives to being a family carer. She gets on so well with Gareth and enjoys his company. Her frustrations are more with the statutory agencies and the lack of communication and unresponsiveness when trying to sort out an issue which makes her think 'Why bother – but at the back of my mind I have to bother because I don't know what's going to happen to him'.

In the beginning she worried about Gareth and people not understanding him. She was worried that people would find him menacing yet when they walk round the local town together, everyone says hello to him. She gets "Peace of mind" from that. He enjoys his routine and is well protected living where he does.

Her biggest worry is what is going to happen when she is no longer around. Having a familiar place is so important to Gareth as he likes his routine but he needs someone to keep an eye on him to make sure he is doing the right thing. The hardest thing about being a family carer is the uncertainty and the unknown. Nobody knows him like she does. As a family carer Trudy is very tuned in to Gareth's ways and knows that when he brings her a cup of coffee in bed and sits down that there is something he needs to discuss.

Trudy loves his smile, his happiness, his companionship and his friendliness – 'everything' 'he is just a super lad.'

When they realized that Gareth had a problem Trudy felt it united the family more – everybody started to care for him and it was just like a big family unit. Everybody sort of came together. 'They were marvelous that way'. They try to have family reunions in South Africa to ensure that the brothers get to meet up but due to the unrest in Zimbabwe some of Trudy's family are unable to leave in case they cannot get back in to the country. She hasn't seen her other two sons since 2010.

When in Zimbabwe Trudy did work for a while as all the children were doing their own thing and it was only Gareth who needed some support. He went to a special school until he was 18 and then went to work with his Dad. He lived in a small independent flat on his parent's property as he had no option but to stay with the family as there were no specialist facilities for people with learning disabilities. One family tried three times to set up a house for people with learning disabilities to live in but had to give up in the end. Consequently, Gareth has spent all of his life with Trudy.

She is very proud of Gareth's achievement and his involvement with the Special Olympics where he earned 10 medals for swimming. He still loves to go swimming.

Trudy's advice to her younger self would be that you have to 'accept it' & 'enjoy it'. When Gareth was born, before Trudy was aware that Gareth had a problem she wanted him to stay small, 'I wanted him to stay a baby ...and in a sense that is what has happened'. 'I wouldn't change it, I would never change the outcome, because he has actually bought me a lot of joy, especially now'. "I don't regret it".

Yet even now she is seeing changes in Gareth which she has not seen before – he is more compassionate, he is hugging Trudy more, and 'it's a pleasure to see'. At one stage he wouldn't do that. 'Other people wouldn't maybe notice that'. 'In an ordinary family it wouldn't matter but it's just beautiful to see.' 'I think he is going to grow even more. This has all happened within the last six months or so'.

The side of things that Trudy wouldn't necessarily expect to be dealing with is Gareth's love life. He has decided that he wants to move in with someone and like any 'teenager' is messaging his girlfriend every day. Whilst this is a big step forward and something he would not have done before, for Trudy it is a reflection that Gareth has grown mentally.

She has got enormous pleasure from him giving and receiving his first valentine card and present and also enjoys the stories that Gareth shares with her – something she feels her other children wouldn't necessarily do. After eating pasta with 3 cheeses one night the next morning he told her "Oh Mummy I've had such a night" "such a bad night" – 'Mummy I mustn't have so much cheese'.

Her hopes for Gareth are for him to be supported to live as independently as possible in a home where he is happy and relaxed but knows that it is not always possible.

When Gareth was small Trudy was told to put Gareth in a home and forget about him. She would love to go back to that lady now so she could see how well he has done. When she thinks back she wonders whether it was her way of making Trudy 'do something about it'. Did she really mean it that way or was she psychologically challenging Trudy knowing that a mother would not do that? 'Maybe that was her way of saying shape up and sort it out!'

Gareth was given a lot of support in the special school but after the age of 18 he had to leave as there was nothing else for him even though he had a mental age of 3 – 4.

The move to the UK has been good for Gareth. Trudy does not know where she would be today if she had not moved here.

She also can't thank David Cameron enough as he instigated the resettlement scheme for British people over 70 in Zimbabwe. She had the opportunity to personally thank him when she met him at an event.

"I do consider myself a family carer and I think I am doing a pretty good job and I would do it all over again. You get to the stage where if you have a problem you sort it out and except it. In your mind you know you've got to do it and you can't stop it."