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HOME CARE ASSOCIATION
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Category: Home Care Hero



SHAUNAE PHAIRE

VNSNY Home Health Aide Shaunae Phaire knows that one of the most important things she does with the elders in her care, especially those on hospice, is help them get up in the morning to start their day. That was as true during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in New York City as it is any day, and Shaunae was so dedicated to those in her care that she vowed to show up no matter what, day after day, despite the stories she heard on the news.

“Once your feet hit the floor, you sit up and think, ‘thank God, I got up this morning and I can move.'” Shaunae says this is a realization held by those in her care — a sentiment she works to reinforce.

When she first started caring for a 101-year-old nursing home patient last November, her client was in bed all day. But with Shaunae’s help, the patient soon found her days full of light and life.

Shaunae's daily greeting — "Hello gorgeous, hello beautiful" — roused her client from bed and helped her face each day. Shaunae visited daily, suiting up in an N95 respirator and gown and using so much Purell that the protective routine became second nature to her. Though the client was isolated in her room, Shaunae still made sure she received a radiant greeting and faced each day in a positive, upbeat way.

"We laughed together, and I told her, 'you're getting out of that bed and walking to that chair,'" Shaunae says. "'I'll do your nails, and we'll converse.'" Shaunae also called her client's family every day, so they could video-chat. Instead of isolation, the client's room became a temporary salon or other destination manifested through conversation.

Shaunae met her client's family in February, before COVID-19 hit the U.S., when they came for a very special celebration of their relative's 101st birthday. The entire family was effusive in thanking her for the care she was providing. "Everyone said, 'Oh, you're the one taking care of Grandma. Thank you! You're doing such a wonderful job, everyone's talking about you,'" she recalls.

When "Grandma" passed away this summer, the family once again expressed their gratitude for Shaunae's care and commitment during these trying times. "They said, 'Not everyone would come to the nursing home when there was COVID,'" Shaunae says. "But if I didn't come in, who would take care of her? I promised to stay as long as I possibly could. That's just me."

Shaunae embodies the mission of both VNSNY and of hospice care — to elevate a person's quality of life at the end of life. "It feels good, knowing that you're making the rest of their days easier," Shaunae says of her clients on hospice.