

# Challenges facing new dementia care providers

By **PAULINE SHAW**, director of care and service development for The Royal Star & Garter Homes, who is on a journey learning about quality dementia care.



The Royal Star & Garter charity has provided nursing care to those who have Served in HM Armed Forces since 1916. In 2004 the charity announced proposals to build three care facilities; the first, with one wing providing dementia care, opened in Solihull, West Midlands in 2008.

Neither myself nor any other member of the executive team had experience of care facility commissioning or development, or indeed experience of dementia care. With our limitations in mind, we appointed architects with a reputation for care home design, consulted with Bradford and Stirling Universities for expert dementia advice, and appointed an RMN qualified home manager.

The new home has certainly caused a stir, not only with health professionals but with residents and relatives who unanimously agree that it is 'fabulous!' This was reinforced when we won the 'Best Large Care Home' category of the national Pinders Design Awards 2009. So what, if anything, could possibly go wrong?

Despite our best efforts, which included staff dementia training and a desire to provide an exemplary dementia service, in this area of the home we instead experienced high employee turn over, reliance on agency staff, staff and team problems, inappropriate admissions, relatives' complaints and other issues.

In December 2009, as I watched the BBC documentary 'Can Gerry Robinson Fix Dementia Care Homes', I resolved to contact David Sheard, founder of Dementia Care Matters, for advice. Thousands of other people were also trying to speak with David following the documentaries and when I made contact, it felt cathartic to share our issues with him and arrange to quantify my concerns with a Quality Audit of our dementia service by him. Overall, the audit feedback wasn't positive and indicated a need to take urgent steps. This prompted a complete shift in our thinking about what dementia care should look, sound and feel like.

The Solihull home manager and I were inspired to promote change, be brave and move from the shadows of average dementia care and create an inspiring, quality person-centred service. Initial changes included staff wearing casual clothes not uniforms, and staff eating with residents and in a more relaxing atmosphere.

This is only the start of our journey as we embark on Dementia Care Matters' 'Butterfly Project' and 'Being a Star' courses. We hope that by sharing our experiences we can help others on their journey into improving the lives of people living with dementia.

