

With over three generations under one roof, Merse House residential home, like its surrounding countryside, is delightful. You first went to meet the residents and staff at their home in the beautiful Scottish community of Kirkcudbright.

Service manager Helen Cruickshanks grew up in the small town of Kirkcudbright she has known many of the residents since she was a child.

"I used to work with resident Jean Murray in our local shop when I was just 14," she explains. "I remember being nervous as it was my first job - but Jean really looked out for me."

"Also, resident Jack Gillespie was my dad's best friend when I was a child. Jack and Dad grew up together" explains Helen. "I have known him all my life. It's a privilege that I am now supporting Jean and Jack at such an important time in both their lives."

Helen has worked at Merse House for over 15 years. With such an obvious passion for her work it is easy to understand why this home to 31 older residents, is such a success.

"I think it's this sense of community which really makes Merse House unique" says Helen. "And it's not just me, most of my colleagues, new and old, are from Kirkcudbright - so each one has their own connection with the residents in some way."

Eileen Benson, newly appointed assistant service manager, has been working at Merse House for over 10 years. "There is a good mix of ages within the team and that's why we all work so well together" she explains. "There is a combination of expertise and fresh young workers who are keen to learn - the mix is perfect."

Helen agrees "There is so much enthusiasm from the team, there is a strong rapport and we have lots of confidence in each of them."

Nine support workers at the home have recently passed their SVQ 2 in social care and many of the team are currently undertaking a palliative care course through the local Primary Care Trust. "This is a vital part of our care." Helen explains. "Many of the younger staff find



dealing with the death of a resident difficult - so this type of training combined with support from more experienced staff is a key part of our working ethos."



to visit as part of their project" explains Helen. "They spent the day here, chatting with residents and playing games - it was a great success and we are looking forward to them visiting again soon." she adds.

With so much involvement and support for the home it is obvious that Merse House is at the heart of its community. "I want this home to continue to be really

successful," says Helen. "And I want, however modestly, to provide a place where friends and family choose to come to be cared for in the future".

Family friend Jack supports Helen's ambition. "I used to come and visit Merse House when I was younger. I was in the local choir and we would come and visit the residents to sing and entertain them - it has always been a lovely home but it's even better now!" he adds smiling at Helen.



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Home ... from home

The attitude and the optimism of Helen and her colleagues is evident as you walk around the home. Each room has a very personal feel; lively communal lounges compliment quieter sitting areas, all with fantastic views over the Scottish countryside. With books filling the shelves and music filtering throughout the home, Merse House is the epitome of a homely environment.

"This should be a home where you would want to live" says Helen. "I always highlight to colleagues that we are in someone's home. It is so important that this attitude is at the forefront of our support." She adds.

Helen makes sure the longstanding reputation of Merse House within the community continues. "We throw open our doors on the last Thursday of each month for a big games night" Helen explains. "Residents and colleagues are joined by friends and we always have a great night. The support we get locally is immense." She adds.

The younger generation recently visited Merse House. Children from local school Kirkcudbright Academy came to visit the home in March as part of their social studies project. "The children identified Merse House as a place they would like

