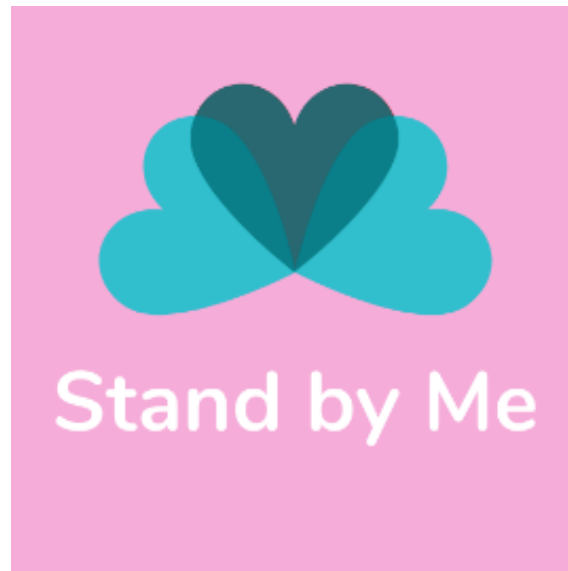


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Story 3: Laura and David

This is one of eight anonymised stories of couples with a learning disability after one of the partners received a diagnosis of dementia. Each story is available to read or download and listen to [here](#). The stories include both happy and sad events. You may wish to read, or listen, with someone you can talk to about dementia.

Stand by Me is a collaborative research project between University of Stirling, University of Edinburgh, Key and Community Lifestyles and Alzheimer Scotland. This research was supported by Dunhill Medical Trust.

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Laura and David

Laura and David live in Scotland.

They attended the same day services and activity groups when they were young adults and have known each other a long time.

“We used to go to a day centre, that’s where I met him. He’s nice and he’s kind. He got a cute smile, everybody likes his smile. And his laugh.”

(Laura)

They were friends at first, but then became a couple when they moved into the same supported living service. This was over 20 years ago.

“They did everything together.” (Key worker)

“They did meet in the service, yes. But they’ve known each other for longer than that. They went to day centres and things like that together. That’s where they knew each other, but then the relationship blossomed when they came to our service.” (Service manager)

At first Laura and David lived together in a big house with other people with a learning disability, where people shared a kitchen and other living areas.

“The main base holds 15 people. We’ve got 15 residents here and we’ve got 12 flats and they’re within a mile radius of the main base, so then if they’re needing something you can go straightaway.” (Service manager)

When they became a couple, they told staff that they wanted to move in together. The staff supported the idea and Laura and David moved into one of the flats supported by the service.

“We used to live in the big house that we used to have. We asked if we could move in together, and they said, yeah. He used to share with

somebody else, but now me and him share everything. Different beds though. And we go on holidays and that together.” (Laura)

Their families were also supportive.

*“My mum and dad like David. He’s a quiet man and mum and dad like that. My mum and dad liked him and all my other family liked him.”
(Laura)*

Laura and David got some support with preparing meals and helped each other with household tasks.

“Well, he can’t cook. He’s not allowed near the cooker. But he’ll help me with dishes and laundry.” (Laura)

David is a big football fan and often went to matches or watched them on TV. Together they enjoyed going to town and going dancing.

“On a Saturday if he didn’t have a football match on, we used to go out to town. We used to go to the cinema, we used to go bowling. We used to go the arcade together. (...) Went to Queens Hotel and we went to discos. And he used to get up and dance and that all the time. But you couldn’t get him off the dance floor when he got on the dance floor.” (Laura)

During the week they used to attend a day centre, before it closed down, and David worked at a furniture making company.

They enjoyed going on holidays with staff and other people supported by the service.

About five years ago staff at the service noticed that David started to forget things.

“Forgetting the days of the week. Just small basic things to begin with. If he was out of his house, he wasn’t comfortable.” (Service manager)

David went to see a psychologist who did some tests.

“I took him for the tests and the first one he went to, he did quite well. But then he got another one six months later and they even noticed quite a deterioration in him in the six months.” (Key worker)

Staff talked to David and Laura after each appointment about what was happening. They explained that David had dementia. They used picture cards to explain what dementia is and Laura watched a video called ‘*Supporting Derek*’, which shows the story of a man with a learning disability who has dementia.

“That gave Laura a lot of understanding of what dementia was. I think in the early stages David had a little understanding of dementia. He knew what dementia was and he knew that he was forgetting things.” (Service manager)

The staff feel that now it is more difficult for David to remember what dementia is and talk about.

Because of his dementia, David does not like to go out as much and he stopped working.

Laura now does more activities by herself. She works at an advocacy organisation for people with a learning disability. She goes to town, sometimes she meets a friend or visits her sister.

She encourages David to continue to help at home and to keep going.

“Now you’ve got remind him twice, keep reminding him, David, you’ve got to do that.” (Laura)

It can be difficult when David wants to do things by himself, and he gets frustrated because he can’t do some things.

“I’m trying to help him and he wants to be independent. I say’, ‘David, want me to help?’, but he says no, he wants to do it properly all on his own.

(Laura)

They still enjoy time together, watching Emmerdale, EastEnders and Coronation Street and look after each other.

“When he goes out in the morning, he never forgets to give her a kiss. He’ll give her a kiss and she’ll cuddle up. He’s very loving. Bye, darling, he’ll say.” (Service manager)

It can be difficult for Laura when David gets frustrated and starts blaming her. During the day he now spends more time with staff at the big house to give Laura some space.

Staff ask Laura how she is doing and explain to her that it is not her or David’s fault when he gets frustrated, but that it is because of dementia.

“She knows that she can phone down here and if she’s not managing, one of us will go up.” (Service manager)

Laura also talks to her sister and friend about how she is feeling.

“My friend’s dad had dementia. When we’re out together we talk about it a lot. With a coffee we sit and talk about it.” (Laura)

David is getting more support from staff and the service has made some changes to Laura and David’s flat that make it easier for him to do things.

“We put a walk-in shower because he couldn’t manage the bath. We’ve moved all the rugs out of the house The floors are all the same. We did a fair bit of work in the flat to make it easier for David.” (Service manager)

Laura now understands that it is not her fault when David gets frustrated or confused. She now walks away and spends some time in her room on her iPad. David does jigsaws to help himself relax.

Staff have started to support Laura more and talk to her about how she is feeling.

“I feel sometimes it’s the person, the partner that’s not got the dementia that needs a wee bit more support. So, we recognise that now.” (Service manager)

Laura sometimes worries about the future. For now, she wants to continue to live together with David.

“Maybe sometime we’ll talk about it. We know in the future he could get fairly bad that way. ‘Cause I don’t want to see him like that. And I think my mum had it, but they didn’t talk to me about my mum.” (Laura)

Staff want to support Laura and David to live together as long as possible and as long as that’s what Laura and David want.

“Even at one point we talked about moving them down to the main base down at the villa, but Laura wasn’t for that. They get more support now because we try and keep them together as long as we can.” (Service manager)

For the future staff want to continue to support David at the service. They want Laura to be involved in his care and to be a part of his life.

Laura and David like to remember all the special moments of their relationship.

"I just love him so much." (Laura)