# Episode 1 – Why spiritual well-being is important – Transcript

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| Colin Gray: | Welcome to our first audio podcast episode of the course. I'm Colin Gray and along with Lesley Greenaway, we'll both be presenting these podcasts. Now today we want to explore what we mean by spiritual well-being and why your spiritual well-being matters. So let's get started. |
|  | We know that people working in caring roles face emotional demands in their day to day work. This might be when providing personal care or when comforting someone at the end of their life or it may be supporting families or simply dealing with the stresses and strains of a busy workplace. |
|  | Just as it is important to support the spiritual needs of the people you care for, it is also important to look after your own spiritual well-being. Let’s start by looking at what we mean by “spiritual well-being” and why it matters. |
|  | First off, for many people, “spiritual” probably means religious beliefs or different faiths and whilst that’s certainly true, “spiritual” has a wider meaning such as our purpose in life, the relationships we build and our connectedness to the things that are important to us. You could think about spirituality as the things that motivate us or the things that “get us out of bed in the morning”. Spiritual well-being involves how we look after these things. Looking after our spiritual well-being helps us provide better support for the people we care for. It also makes for a happier workforce and an organisation that does its job well.  Let’s hear from Donald Macaskill. Donald works for Scottish Care, it’s an organisation that ensures that the voice of those receiving care and those who provide services are at the heart of national debate. |
| Interviewer: | Welcome Donald, maybe you could start by telling us a bit about your role and the organisation you work for? |
| Donald Macaskill: | My name is Donald Macaskill. I’m the Chief Executive of an organisation called Scottish Care and Scottish Care is a representative body of providers of older people’s care and support across Scotland, at numbering around about a thousand different services and my role is both to speak on behalf of those who work and who deliver care at home and home care and care home provision in Scotland. And importantly to put at the heart of our debate as a society, the concerns of older people who use care services. |
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| Interviewer: | So maybe you could tell us a little bit about what you mean by spiritual? And why is it important that staff look after their spiritual well-being? |
| Donald Macaskill: | I think the word “spiritual” means different things to different people and it means different things to me on different days. So some days for me “spiritual” and “spirituality” has to do of being inspired, moved, encouraged, invigorated by the piece of music that I’m listening to, or by the sunset and the walk that I’m engaged in, or by the experience with playing with my 3-year-old daughter. So it’s different everyday and sometimes it means for different people, their faith tradition or the experience of the divine or the upper or the different, or it is to do with human experience and the interactions that you have with another person.  So for a staff who worked in care in particular, the job of care is very demanding emotionally and physically but it’s also demanding spiritually and I mean by that, that we give of the essence of who we are as a person when we care for an individual. Especially if that individual is in a palliative or end of life stage of their life.  So in that giving of ourselves, we need to be aware that, that is not without cause and part of the way the individuals renew themselves, give themselves energy is to think about their own spirituality. So what is it, that for me as a carer gives me that same sort of renewal. Is it the walk along the beach? Is it spending time with children or grandchildren? Is it watching my favourite programme on television or listening to my favourite piece of music? Or is it simply about being still? Having space and time to reflect. |
| Interviewer: | Well that’s very helpful but I wonder if there are examples that you can give to show what you mean? Are there good examples of where or how staffs are taking care over themselves? |
| Donald Macaskill: | I think it’s really important that we recognised that for many people spirituality means having time and having space and having opportunity to attend to yourself and look after yourself. So a lot of care staff in Scotland today will be supporting individuals who are at the point of the end of their life and we need to think about how do we support those staff to have that time to reflect. And so I can think of one group of staff who when somebody who they have cared for has died, spent time having a memory \_05:40\_, and what do you mean by that is that they sit down, think about the person, share a memory of that person, good, bad, humorous and serious, and for 5 minutes of their time together that person is at the centre.  What makes that spiritual is that they also give each other space to express emotion, to cry if they want to, to laugh as they need to and to give space to listen to one another. That’s not just a coping mechanism, it’s a way of being spiritual in the moment around the person. |
| Interviewer: | So I’m wondering, is it difficult for staff to look after themselves in such a busy care environment and how are these challenges resolved? |
| Donald Macaskill: | I think the simple answer is... it is extremely difficult to look after yourself when your whole job is about caring for other people. In a care home environment, sometimes there are spaces so after particular challenges you might know that you need to take a break, have a cup of tea. Some care homes have quiet rooms which will encourage and be there for staff to just to collect their thoughts and reconsider what has happened or what is happening on a day shift. Because often it is the constancy of issues and challenges that cause particular difficulties.  I think it’s even more difficult for staff who worked in our communities, who worked in care home, housing support. Often you are required to engage in a lot of practical activities and you have a 15 or 20-minute period of time. And you might have somebody who is faced with real difficulty or upset in their own life. It is very important for those staff to give themselves some space, even if it means parking up in a lay-by and turning on the radio, opening the window, having a cigarette, doing whatever takes time for you and gives you space. And it is very important for employers of those individuals to try as much as possible in a frenetic caring day to building space so that the carer can care for themselves. |
| Colin Gray: | Listening to Donald, did you notice how he emphasised the individual.  It’s about you and the things that make you tick as a person and that help you to cope with the demands of a frenetic caring day.  And it’s not so difficult, he gives us some practical examples of how we can look after ourselves like going for a walk, spending time with family or listening to music. You might already be aware of how important these things are to you. But again, Donald is keen to point out that this is an individual preference. It’s about what works for you.  Donald also recognises that there are some big challenges for care workers. The pressure on time to complete practical tasks makes it difficult to find time for the carer to take care of their own needs. This is especially true for staff who worked in communities like care at home services.  So, try to recognise and value your own needs as a carer and the things that help to renew your emotional energy, make sure that you create time, space and opportunity to reflect on your day, no matter how small.  Now it's your turn. As you go about your work today see if you notice any moments when you felt that you needed some time out or some space? What did you do, if anything, to look after your needs? Think about why it is important to look after yourself. Keep a notebook handy to jot down your observations. It will be useful later for gaining an open badge for your learning on this course.  Becoming more aware of your own spiritual needs will help you to support the spiritual needs of older people. And that's day 1 done. In the next episode, we’ll learn more about the practical things that you can do to look after your spiritual well-being. |