

3.2 Story 2: Alison Fitzgerald, Manager, Hill House Nursing Home

Hill House Care and Nursing home is a purpose built nursing and care home based in Brixham providing accommodation for 44 residents. Hill House provides nursing and residential care for older people with physical health needs and in some cases memory loss.

Alison has been working at Hill House as the manager for the past two years, having previously worked for the NHS. Finding the work challenging and demanding at times Alison was keen to get involved in the leadership programme to help support and develop her practice as manager.

Alison's Story

I'd been working in the NHS for 30 years and I began thinking *what can I do now?* So I applied for the post here. I've been here for two years, at first I thought it's not for me and then somehow it was. Coming here was a bit of a shock initially! It's been a *steep learning curve* for me.

I hoped the programme would really help me look at *different ways of leading*. I haven't really reflected on my *leadership style* or thought about how people see me as a leader.

I had no idea what a creative strategy could *mean* in the care home context. I'm not a creative person at all but I'm always looking to improve myself, particularly in this environment because it can be quite challenging.

Taking part in the project helped me *discover for myself who I am* and to think about how I do things. It made me think about the *little things* and how to make time for the more *important things*. Some of the tasks made me feel uncomfortable but I gained a confidence from that, and from having to put myself forward at times. I don't think I'm assertive enough; sometimes I shy away from tackling difficult things. It helped me realise that it's part of my role to tackle problems head on. That felt invaluable to me.



I think I reflect a lot more now and try things differently. I've become more open. I definitely learnt to listen better; you can get so wrapped up in the busy environment that *you stop listening properly* to someone when they are talking. I learnt to really think about how you deal with something and to ask the question *was that the best way?* I gained a much better understanding of how to *see* things from *different viewpoints*...that's a big change for me.

Taking time away in an environment that felt safe and confidential was really good for my confidence. The *experience* of coming together with other care managers and listening to them helped me realise there are lots of *shared and common* things we all experience. I feel much more supported, we were talking the same language which was really nice.

I've taken some important things away; not to be too hard on myself, be open and make time to praise staff. I still sometimes question if I'm in the right job but I certainly feel this programme has *boosted my confidence* in my ability to do it!¹

¹ *The mini commissions offered opportunities for exploring how 'change' might be attended to in the home by working with artists. In this setting there were particular challenges for both Alison and the artist around how the mini commission might meaningfully address the 'change' Alison had identified, within the tight timescale. It is not within the scope of this report to discuss the details of this but it does highlight some of the complexities of testing new approaches to change through arts 'at the coal face' as part of this programme.*