A Living-Theory of Care-Giving

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http://youtu.be/6kSM87sW2lA

Introduction

In this paper I am offering an explanation of the educational influence of authentic leadership as a Chief Executive of a Care Givers' Centre in relation to the invention and re-invention of knowledge through an action research process that could have significance across the Americas. I will look at where my values come from by sharing my story and then sharing my research into my practice and how understanding where my values come from enables me to improve my practice as an authentic leader.

Rationale and Theoretical Framework

Authentic Leadership requires vulnerability to be self-aware and be transparent in relationships with those you lead (Gardiner, 2011). My action-research, self-study inquiry explores my journey to identify where my values come from professionally as I explore the influences of my education and my career and personally as I explore my personal story from being taken into care to care giver of my biological mother. Rather than being a self-indulgent process this has been something that has been I have used to improve my practice. I hope this has been for both the benefit of the care givers I work to support and empower and to influence change in the social formations within which I work locally, nationally and now internationally. I have chosen action research because what I am trying to achieve is not just continuing professional development, although this has been an important aspect for me, but rather I am interested in developing a body of knowledge which can improve society beyond my own learning. What makes the action research, research, is the production of a validated explanation of the educational influence in our own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live and work (Whitehead, 1989, 1999, 2008)

I am expanding my 'living theory of mindfulness and learning' (Hutchison, 2011) which includes my explanatory principle (Whitehead, 1989; Barry, 2012) of dynamic flowing energy. I am developing my understanding of concepts from around the world within which to frame my enquiry. Mindfulness is the concept of being in the moment which comes from the Eastern Buddhist philosophy originally but is a way of being rather than a religious observance.

'Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non judgementally ... And if we're not fully present for many of those moments, you may not only miss what is most valuable in our lives but also fail to realise the richness and the depth of our possibilities for growth and transformation.' (Kabat Zinn 1994, p. 4)

Ubuntu is an African philosophy which is about the quality of being human and is summarised by the phrase Africans use to summarise the essence of ubuntu which is translated as 'A person is a person through other people'. Nelson Mandella a truly inspirational leader talks about Ubuntu in this clip:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HED4h00xPPA

To me, Nelson Mandella is describing Ubuntu as meaning we cannot be what we truly want to be without a loving concern and connection with other people. This is especially so of leaders and is why my values of participation which I will explore in this paper are so important to me as a leader which as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, another inspirational leader, said:

'You might have much of the world's riches, and you might hold a portion of authority, but if you have no ubuntu, you do not amount to much.' http://tenthltr2u.wordpress.com/2012/02/06/ubuntu-applying-african-philosophy-in-building-community/

I have also been inspired by the video clips from around the world sending greetings to ARNA. Camilo Manchola's 51 second greeting below to ARNA. Camilo is a Master's of Education student, at Universidad Militar Nueva Granada (http://www.umng.edu.co) in Bogotá, Colombia, South America. He is currently writing his thesis dissertation with a living theory methodology.

Camilo refers to Paulo Freire and the contribution of this inaugural conference as a starting point for ARNA to make a contribution to enhancing freedom, love and peace throughout the world. In advocating that each one of us generates and shares our living theory in which we hold ourselves accountable for living our values and understandings as fully as we can. This resonates with my living theory research as I am hoping to enhance freedom, love and peace within my practice and my research.

Approach to Inquiry

Living theory action research methodology has enabled me to effectively research my authenticity as a leader. Using 'methodological inventiveness' (Dadds and Hart, 2001) I draw upon the cutting edge of living theory research, multi-media approaches, ethno-autobiographical narrative and reflective diaries. I explore where I find evidence and validation that I am an authentic leader for the staff, trustees, volunteers and care givers I lead and also explore where I find myself a 'living contradiction' (Whitehead, 1989; Barry, 2012) and how I use this to improve my practice.

I am aware that most universities throughout the world have been influenced by a Western epistemology that removes the inclusional relationship within which we exist in a mutually reciprocal relationship that can be represented as an 'i~we' relationship. Empirical methods explicitly exclude this relationship. As a result I have an enormous task in legitimating my living theory with my explanatory principles and living standards of judgment within the global Academy.

Data or Sources of Evidence

Through my use of visual data and empathetic resonance I have clarified and communicated the energy-flowing values that give meaning and purpose to my life, that distinguish my living theory of authentic leadership in care-giving and form the living standards of judgment I use to justify my claims to knowledge. Videos provide data for visual narratives that have been subjected to critical evaluation in validation groups. Evidence from visual narratives shows that I am an

authentic leader for the staff, trustees, volunteers and care givers I lead. Sources include evidence on the use of a living standard of judgement of nurturing responsiveness (Mounter, 2012), and data on the recognition of oneself as a living contradiction in a re-channelling of energy-flowing values within my meaning of authenticity as a leader (Hutchison, 2011).

I also use auto-biographical data such as written diaries, drawing diaries, and autobiographical writings. This brings ethno-autobiographical methods to my research as I look at my experiences and where I have come from to research my practice. By this I am referring to Kremer's (2003) meaning 'as a creative and evocative type of narrative healing storytelling, ethno-autobiography explores consciousness from a subjective perspective.' Whilst this is subjective I have gone back to people who know me well through videoed conversations to check the validity of my claims I make about where my values come from in my childhood to try to avoid giving an idealised perspective of my childhood and avoiding only telling 'smooth stories of self' (MacLure, 1996:283).

Findings

I begin with my journey of finding out what my values are. I have a strong sense of my value base that is based in love for the other, compassion, caring, participation and empowerment. I also have a strong sense of who I am and my story. However, I find even coming from this point the more you research from a first person perspective you are always learning more about yourself. In writing this paper I have begun taking my research back to my family.

I was fostered when I was three and a half and lived with my foster family. I remember feeling that I was very loved and that I loved them very much. I also remember feeling that although my biological parents didn't have the capacity to look after me that they loved me very much none the less. I remember feeling as a very young child that I was lucky to have two sets of parents that loved me. It wasn't until I was older that my feelings became more complex that I found the situation more painful and then worked through complicated feelings around love and pain.

I also remember as a child that I was always caring and compassionate and my ambition was to have a job that helped people and that I loved. I am fortunate enough to be achieving my ambition. I also remember always feeling that I had the right to be listened to and that I should be able to give my opinions and remember being able to give my opinions in decisions around being fostered to social workers who asked for them. This was very empowering and I remember as I grew older that I felt I had power as a foster child in terms of making a difference that I wouldn't have as a professional as I was talking from lived experience rather than assumed knowledge. I didn't realize at the time that this was because I had foster parents who valued listening to me and encouraged me to have my voice and many very empowering professionals who listened to me. In fact I was very analytical about the professionals in my life and would identify if I felt they were a 'good' professional by seeing if they listened and tried to get to know me or if they were a 'bad' professional and assumed they knew me and what the situation was, spoke to my foster parents rather than me and showed no interest in me or listening to

me.

These are my memories and I have previously only referred to my memories, diaries written by me or drawings I have done and interpreted. However I have now evolved my self-study to not only ask people about my present practice but about my past memories and validate my story as well as my research practice. This has been really helpful, validating and affirming process as well as helping me to develop my understandings of where my values come from by gaining others perspectives that I had not considered before.

The picture below shows the moment at the end of the video where my mum (foster mum) look up at my dad (foster dad) I put these deliberately in brackets as they are my mum and dad but for context it is useful to know they fostered me. I can see a real sense of love as we look up and our faces express the love we feel.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTwQ9FWxuRI&feature=youtu.be

Mum says that social workers were 'always careful to listen to you and seek your views' 1:12. This meant that from a young age I was used to being listened to by adults making decisions in my life. Also mum talks about her mum being respectful by listening, paying attention and valuing children's views and that mum had this as a role model. Therefore I was fortunate to have the experience of being listened to from the important adults in my life and I can see where my belief as a child came from to be listened to. Mum confirms that I had many opinions about things as a child (3:36) and that I was confident to articulate these.

I found having this conversation with my mum really affirming and helped me to feel I had an accurate memory of where my values came from and that the video really reflected the love I have in my family. This is something I want to now briefly explore as I think about the concept of love in research.

I have been studying for my masters at Liverpool Hope University and the Education Faculty sets out as its aim for research to contribute to the development of knowledge and understanding in all fields of education, influencing all work with values arising from hope and love and with decisions that are informed by professional judgement and wisdom (Liverpool Hope University, 2012). This is unusual to set the aim of research to include values of love. Love can be a difficult word in English as we use the same word to describe anything from sex, romance through to loving our phone. Clearly we mean quite different things when we say I love you to our partner and I love my new i-phone. However as we use the same word it is difficult to distinguish. I love the people I work with and work to support this can feel uncomfortable as it would be inappropriate to have a romantic or sexual love but it is not inappropriate to love them in a way that wants to improve their lives and well-being.

However, other languages have many more words for love and I have found it helpful to look at these meanings to help me define what I mean by the love I received as a child and the love I now have for those I work with and for as a leader of a Care Givers' Centre.

Being brought up in a Christian home meant I understand the Greek word Agape which is one of the four words they have for love. Thomas Jay Oord defined agape as "an intentional response to promote well-being when responding to that which has generated ill-being." http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agape

However, as I have researched more words for love from other languages and religions I have discovered many word for love that also define what I mean by , friendliness, benevolence, amity, friendship, good will, kindness, close mental union (on same mental wavelength), and active interest in others.' http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mett%C4%81 loving those I work with and for.

'Mettā (Pali: मेत्ता in Devanagari) or maitrī (Sanskrit: मैत्री) is loving-kindness

'Karuṇā (in both Sanskrit and Pali) is generally translated as compassion… Compassion is that which makes the heart of the good move at the pain of others. It crushes and destroys the pain of others; thus, it is called compassion. It is called compassion because it shelters and embraces the distressed. - The Buddha.' http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karu%E1%B9%87%C4%81http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karu%E1%B9%87%C4%81

'Love according to Peck (1978) is, "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of one's own or another's spiritual growth." (p. 85) … I use the term spiritual according to the definition bell hooks provides, "one who seeks to know and live according to values that promote universal well-being" (2001, p.19)' (Campbell et. al. 2013).

Campbell in giving these definitions also explores her initial discomfort with being loved by her educators and in turn trying to make her students feel comfortable about being loved. I feel as she does that these definitions of love help me to feel more comfortable with framing my research within the value of loving those I work

with and for as these meaning feel comfortable, appropriate and right.

My values of participation and empowerment come from being listened to as a child as mum describes in the video I was in the unusual position of seeing social workers who could make decisions that affected where I lived and with whom, from a very young age. At age 12 I was given a leaflet about the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). The social worker particularly pointed out Article 12, which Alexander Nurnburger, aged 9 had translated into plain English and said: 'Whenever adults make decisions that will affect you in any way, you have the right to give your opinion, and the adults have to take that seriously'. This articulated the belief I already had: that is, that my participation in decision-making processes was a right; a right I could assert in any situation, whoever my social worker was. I found being listened to throughout my childhood very empowering and despite my situation of being fostered, I was a confident child and have developed into a confident leader as an adult.

I am also working within a social policy context where key policy documents clearly show the mounting desire of recent governments to ensure people actively participate. Putting People First highlights the importance that services offer carers choice and control. The way the Department of Health sees this happening is that 'real change will only be achieved through the participation of users and carers at every stage.' (p.2)   However, it is not clear in these policy documents how this is to be achieved in practice. Therefore I believe my research can have a real impact on creating a body of knowledge to make active participation a reality, and learn what it means to authentically lead an organisation with active participation at its heart.

As a result of the values I hold I want to ensure that my leadership is authentic to my values and hold them as standards of judgement that I can be held accountable to. I have been researching my practice with those I work with to identify if they feel I am being authentic in my leadership and living my values fully. My findings have been mixed, I have found evidence both in people's words and in the dynamic loving energy that the video reflects that I am living my values. I think of this energy between people as I drew it in my art diary when I was 18. The picture below shows my representation of the dynamic flowing energy that can exist when we come together and have conscious conversations which is what I called the picture.

As my living theory has developed, I have increased the range of opportunities for carers to participate in processes central to the running of the organisation, such as recruitment, training, decision making forums, and being on the Board of Trustees. I have discovered that the more I empower carers, they express feelings that I felt as a child; that is they tell me how good it feels to have control over their lives, so that they can influence the decisions that affect them.

I am using multi-media approaches as part of the evidence I produce, as a means of researching whether I embody my values as an authentic leader. Huxtable argues, 'living educational values are dynamic and relational and are not adequately communicated through 'fixed' forms of representation' (Huxtable, 2009:12). Using multi-media approaches helps me to develop my epistemology in authentic leadership, not just theoretically but by checking the validity of my claims in my practice:

It isn't simply that I need to work with video and multimedia forms of representation to express more clearly what is being done, it is that watching the video changes the nature of knowledge itself and allows its development. (Laidlaw, 2008:17)

I have found evidence through conversations with carers, volunteers and staff that I am empowering carers, volunteers and staff. I have chosen one video clip to show an example of the evidence the videos are providing. This video is with Rosie, a carer and a trustee.

I think that the meanings of both the energy and love can be validated by others as I describe below and I think it also provides Rosie's validation that I am living my values through my authentic leadership in the embodiment of my values, through her words.

Some examples I identified, have been agreed by Rosie when she says I 'give tremendous leadership' (1:55), that I am 'very inclusive of everybody' (2:05), and that 'staff, volunteers, trustees, everybody is included' (2:16).   This demonstrates that Rosie has observed my active participation values in action in my leadership.

Later Rosie talks about my style, that 'my enthusiasm comes through but it isn't overbearing' (5:17), and that my 'sincerity comes through … honest and trustworthy because you mean what you say' (5:23). Rosie is again validating that she has seen my authenticity in action.

Rosie talks at the end about how the carer involvement work at the centre 'empowers carers to become spokespeople … you can see their confidence grow.' (15:40).   This mirrors my experience of being listened to and actively participating as a child.

As well as using video to research my leadership, I am researching with carers what impact being involved in social work education has on the students and on the carers who are involved. This project involved me asking carers who had previously been involved in social work education being invited to join an action research group. Six carers volunteered to join the group. In the first session I introduced the Teaching Actively in a Social Context (TASC) wheel (Wallace, 2004) to describe how we would use action reflection-cycles to improve our practice as we developed an teaching session on discrimination and empowerment from a carer perspective, assessing first year students readiness to practice and an introduction

to social work from a carer perspective. As a research group we came together to plan each session, review what we had learnt from each session, share what we had learnt and then use our learning to plan the next sessions and improve our practice as carer educators. At the final session as a group we discussed that we felt that having carers involved in social work student education had a significant impact on the students' learning which we were able to see from the measurements we asked the students to use to rate their understanding before and after sessions. The results for the discrimination and empowerment sessions were:

Table 1: Table showing increase across all five areas in student understanding before and after the discrimination and empowerment session

	Before	After	Increase
Employment	176	240	36%
Finance	177	232	31%
Health & wellbeing	181	247	36%
Leisure & free time	210	244	16%
Relationships with professionals/family	176	258	47%
Total	920	1221	33%

Graph 1: Graph showing increase across all five areas in student understanding before and after the discrimination and empowerment session
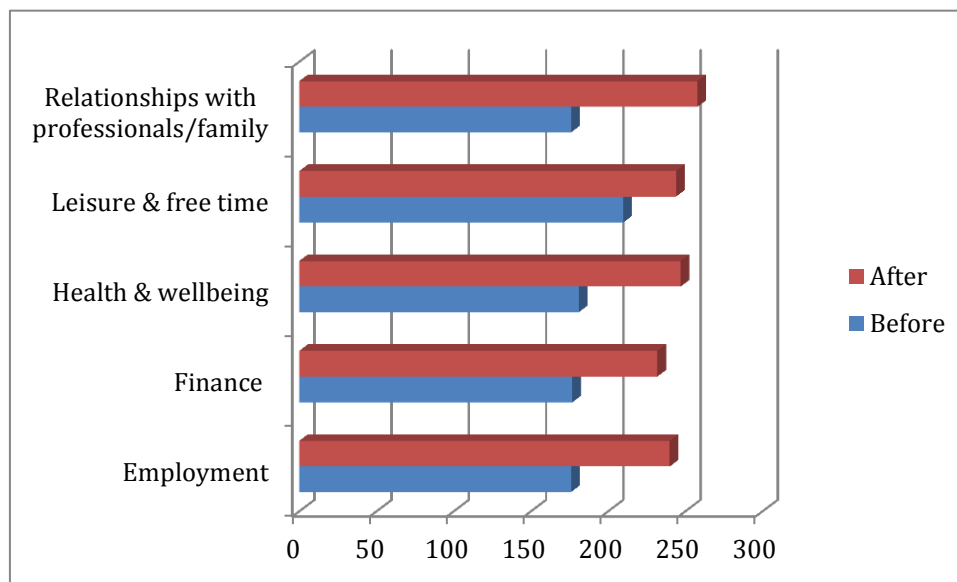

The results for the introductions to social work session were:

Table 2: Table showing increase across all five areas in student understanding before and after the introduction to social work session

	Before	After	Increase
I understand what is available for carers	138	224	62%
I understand what support carers need	180	247	37%
I understand the different roles carers have	184	249	35%
I understand the impact on the whole family including siblings	192	252	31%
Total	694	972	40%

Graph 2: Graph showing increase across all five areas in student understanding before and after the introduction to social work session
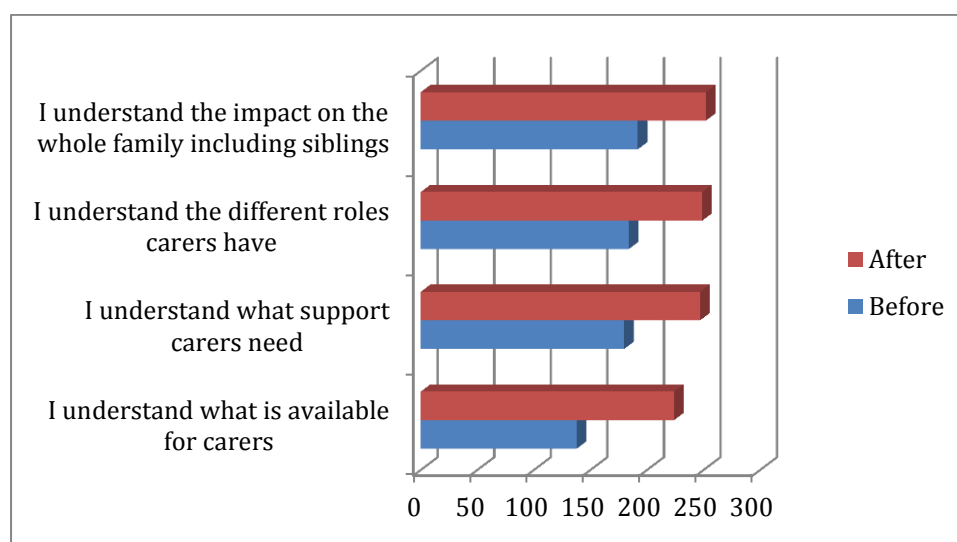
At the final session of seven when the group reflected on all the sessions I took notes of what the group said. One quote was that 'The experience is empowering and a confidence builder but think it would be a good idea to have a mentoring project for next year to bring new people in and talk about why it was scary but why it was good to do it.' When I started on this project I really hoped this would be the outcome as this is something I hope to achieve in my practice and I feel this quote shows I am living my values fully. I am also excited as rather than this being a single research project I feel the group is beginning to become more participatory in the research and are planning the future of the research. In the notes I took the group came up with some clear ideas of how to take the research forward and improve their practice as carer educators and the practice of the university staff in the social work department. The quotes from the discussion that covered this were:

'We could have reflective journals next year'

'We want to organise a workshop where we expect collaboration from the university with every member of the social work team. We want to be known and

be part of the social work department team.'

Finally the group said they felt they had 'learnt a lot about myself and others'.

This gives me a lot of hope for expanding participation to be truly carer led and I felt that by bringing action research cycles into the process we were able to make improvements as we developed the project and plan how to improve the project into the future. By now making our learning public we are offering our learning to shape social formations and will continue to make public our learning as the project develops into the future so this is offered beyond individual learning and beyond the group learning but offered as a body of knowledge for others to learn and develop from our action research.

I have a number of videos with staff, volunteers and carers. Below are some of the pictures from them at moments where I feel a love and energy are being shared.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hovy0O6qqU4

This conversation also helped me to improve my practice by enabling spaces for the staff to have time to know each other on a personal as well as professional level. I feel since I have gained this feedback the team is now a much stronger and loving team as they have got to know each other better and that they welcome new team members into the organisation by getting to know them both personally and professionally. Staff now bring their skills at organising social events which brings the team closer and I make sure we have more opportunities for social time by bringing coffee, cakes, and lunch to encourage this social time.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2vdIfyw01v0 Part one
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cxcawzeh8mg&feature=related Part two

As the video plays and I see this picture I feel the warmth and love between my Chair of the trustees who is my supervisor and has overall accountability for the organisation and also the energy flowing between us. Jill also talks about this, Jill has gone on to show this love in her actions and I remember feeling truly valued and supported at a critical time in writing a bid that would keep the Centre running by being brought soup by Jill. Jill has improved my practice through this and other conversations by reminding me to keep true to my values of participation and ensuring carers are central to everything we do at the Centre and helping me to make difficult decisions by remembering to keep carers central to my decision making.

As I see this picture from the video it evokes in me the warmth, love and energy in our conversation. Lydia's words also helped me to improve my practice by ensuring staff have time to enabling staff to be creative and have their specialisms which they can develop, having a holistic approach to maintain staff's well-being by making time for time together to talk and support each other. Remembering to show my appreciation which I try to do through team meetings and giving time to listen to people through team meetings and Forums. I have also continued to open myself up to critique and being willing to change.

I find by having these videos I can go back and review myself against what we discussed and see I have improved my practice and to keep me focused on more improvements I need to make. I also find I am challenged both by the videos and by other instances by carers, volunteers and staff and can find myself to be a 'living contradiction' (Whitehead, 1989). By encouraging people to give feedback and actively participate, means I also receive criticism when I am not fully living my values. Staff have fed back through team meetings when they feel they are not being fully involved and say they feel disempowered when this happens. I find this helps me to reflect on my practice. I have learnt that enabling people to actively participate means I need to create the time and space to listen and involve people. When I allow myself to become too busy 'doing', that is when I stop living my values fully and the impact is that we can waste time doing things carers don't want or need, and staff morale reduces. When this happens, I reflect internally that I feel uncomfortable with the way things are going.   I then use supervision, senior management meetings, team meetings, and planning meetings to explore what is going wrong, which brings me back into the processes which ensure people have time and space to fully participate, and hence remind me to live my values fully.

I find by gaining complaints and criticisms from carers I find the most growth as I have to come back to my values and realise that the person who complained or criticised what I am doing is not feeling loved, valued or listened to. I then find it helps me to re-channel my blocking emotions that have led to the living contradiction in my practice. I reflect on whether my practice is living my values. I often find that as I have become busy with the work that needs to be done I find I am not able to live my values fully as listening and valuing people takes time. I then make time and space for the team to reflect on how we will improve our practice in the light of the criticism or complaint and plan how we will put it into action. We then plan some time to review and reflect how well the change has led us to get closer to our values. I also ensure I write to the person making the criticism or complaint to make it clear what we have done in response to improve our practice.

This is not just continuing professional development, although that is an important part of what is happening. It is also action research which I think has significance for the Action Research Network of the Americas and around the world. As my learning develops the model of including all stakeholders of my organisation in my research and sharing my learning with them as well as internationally a paradigm shift takes place breaking down power dynamics and enabling a values based authentic leadership model to be shared encouraging all leaders to engage with their stories to identify their values and use them as living standards of judgement to hold themselves accountable to.

Conclusions, Reflections

In this paper I show I am an authentic leader as I live my values. My findings show how the action research contributes to an inclusional (Rayner, 2010), empowering and listening culture through nurturing responsiveness in the organization. This is shown to improve the support the organisation provides for care givers because they are able to influence change. Reflections include the challenging times my 'blocking' emotions dominated my creative and life-affirming responses. I show how I re-channelled the energy in my 'blocking' emotions' in living boundaries that supported the flow of my life-affirming energy. I do this through refocusing on my values to ensure I am being authentic and learning from my mistakes so that the organisation can support more care givers more effectively.

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