

Tina Irvine, speaking notes

I am the one who gently wakes your mom, ensures her safety. I wash the sheets, get her coffee, butter her toast. I wash her hair, paint her nails, put her make-up on, clean her toilet, wash the floor, fold the laundry. I help her walk, count her crib hand, plan an outing, pour her wine, dial a phone #. I am a Stanford Place employee.

I care for the residents who live here. They are your mothers, your fathers, your husband and your wife and maybe a sister or a brother. They were teachers, nurses, truck drivers, veterans and retired managers. Their ages range from 41 to 97 on my small unit of 30. They all have very unique and individual needs.

Some are very independent. Others are completely dependent. Some can walk, others roll, and many we push. Everyone has a unique story, unique care. All are very different and with different needs.

We are caregivers, housekeepers, dietary staff, activity aides, therapy services who deal with the unique individuals and the changing needs of your loved ones. On many days their needs are different. Some days they need more care, on good days very little. And it is our job to allow them to stay as independent as possible. We groom them, toilet them, bath them, change them, feed them, transport them – at different levels daily.

I have been a Stanford employee since it opened June 2008. It was great to be part of a brand new building. We were promised the best of the best. The family way was preached. Treat everyone like they are your brothers and sisters in this community.

We laughed, played cards, sat and listened to music and even danced silly after dinner. We had time to doll the ladies up for a special Sunday dinner, flip through pictures and reminisce about the old days.

Staff were carefree, happy, and loved to be within the walls of Stanford Place. We were proud to have been part of such a great philosophy. We were comfortable knowing we had a long future with the Ahmon family. We felt part of the community of wellness.

This all started to change about 2 years ago. The first cut happened 2 years ago when we were told the company wasn't making ends meet and they would have to cut wages by 5%, decrease benefits and our sick days.

We were assured that once the company was making money again that our wages would return to their original state. Unfortunately this was never going to be the case.

Then the train wreck happened. We ended up going to arbitration to finalize our contract and the arbitrator sided with the owners, cutting our wages by 20%, cost sharing our benefits. So in the last 2 years we have lost 25% of our wages, that's ¼ of our paycheques gone!!

With this devastating news, staff were left with having to make tough decisions about what to do. Many have left, others have 2 jobs, and many work crazy over time to make ends meet and to care for our residents.

Staff had become tired, overworked, frustrated and ultimately stuck within the four walls of Stanford Place. We are now left short-staffed, completely unable to fully staff the building. Many staff come

from Port Alberni and with high gas prices, the commute is not worth the wage.

We are having to make hard choices about our family budgets. We are juggling bills, mortgages, rent, and household needs. This 25% loss in pay is our groceries, gas, entertainment, our children's dances, hockey equipment and all the extras that we work so hard to achieve. Many of us are left with large student loans from the schooling that promised us a bright future in health care.

All of this commotion has created an unsettling feeling with the residents. They have been turned upside down – new faces, sad faces, frustrated staff, no time for the small things anymore, just the basics. With the high turnover of staff, residents don't know who will be coming to wake them up, who will take them to physio, do their bath, feed them or even give them the warm smile and hug they desperately need.

Residents' families have voiced their concerns about the staff turnover and how it is creating confusion and frustration.

I want you to imagine a frail, confused elderly woman who is lying in her bed longer than normal and scared she has been forgotten. She has complex needs that require assessment of those needs daily to ensure her safety. On come the lights and in walks a stranger. Someone she has never met to undress her, change her, brush her hair, teeth and then take her to feed her. What if she was unable to tell you she is diabetic or she wants a sweater? This is what is happening and we are trading experienced familiar staff with strangers! Don't get me wrong, these employees are highly valued. They come to work on short notice into an unfamiliar territory not knowing anyone. Many are just as

scared as the frail old lady and she doesn't understand this. She is confused, scared and just wants her friend who knows she likes her red sweater.

Residents build relationships with caregivers. In many ways we are their family and the only ones they have. These relationships are important to both residents and the employees of Stanford Place. Feeling these bonds and relationships keep us coming to work feeling like it matters, we matter to someone, and we can make a difference to someone today! We come to work not just for the paycheque but for the relationships that we develop daily and for the challenges that we face every day.

So I ask, as we move forward to begin a change in health care, that we demand better for your mother, father, husband, and wife. We demand that these last years be filled with consistent, competent, happy staff, who will keep our loved ones safe until their time to depart.

Thank you!!!!