



# Royal Star & Garter

Care with courage

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **COVID-19: Life on the Frontline - Residents and staff discuss impact of pandemic at Royal Star & Garter**

A series of accounts looking at life in Royal Star & Garter's three care homes during the COVID-19 pandemic have been published by the charity.

The COVID-19: Life on the Frontline series features first-person accounts from residents and staff from the charity's Solihull, Surbiton and High Wycombe Homes.

Among those speaking are Surbiton residents Phyllis, a 98-year-old WWII WAAF veteran, and ex-RAF Aircraftman Bernard, 92, who both overcame the virus. In Solihull, Home Manager Cheryl Harbourne discusses plans she put into place as the full extent of the pandemic's impact emerged.



*Top l-r: Phyllis and Bernard*

*Bottom l-r: Cheryl, Damian, Hayley*

Surbiton Lead Nurse Damian Walicki talks about his feeling of helplessness when forced to isolate, while High Wycombe Activities Manager Hayley Helsdown explains how she and her team have had to adapt their work, and how things in the future may pan out.

Phyllis remembers watching the news after testing COVID-19 positive. She said: "I was concerned by the high number of deaths and I was concerned I might not survive. I thought 'Well, this could happen to me'. But there was nothing I could do." However, Bernard says being told he had tested positive didn't result in such anxiety: "Having COVID-19 didn't cause me any mental upheaval. I didn't think that this could be the end of me, because at 92, you know you've got a certain proximity to the end... I live with the possibility of popping off any night."

Solihull Home Manager Cheryl Harbourne speaks of her admiration for her team, and describes keeping the residents in the Home safe and well throughout the pandemic as "a fantastic achievement". At the start of the pandemic, the Home locked-down for two weeks, with staff living on-site to minimise the risk of the virus entering the Home. "I'll never be able to thank staff enough for what they have done," Cheryl says.



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Surbiton Lead Nurse Damian Walicki describes feeling a “failure” after testing positive, and how he thought he was letting his colleagues down when isolating. He says: “This has been one of the toughest challenges of my career, because we are kind of fighting with ghosts. You couldn’t see the virus, but you knew that it was there.”

High Wycombe Activities & Volunteers Manager Hayley Helsdown explains how the job of entertaining residents is more important now than ever. She also talks about the challenges faced, and why, despite an uncertain future, there will always be “laughter, joy and singing” in the Home.

All COVID-19: Life on the Frontline blogs can be viewed here:

<https://starandgarter.org/media-centre/our-blogs/>

Royal Star & Garter provides loving compassionate care to veterans and their partners living with disability or dementia. For more on occupancy, job opportunities and general information about the charity, visit [www.starandgarter.org](http://www.starandgarter.org)

**[Ends]**

**Captions:**



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**Bernard 1-3:** Surbiton resident Bernard survived

COVID-19



**Cheryl 1-4:** Solihull

Home Manager Cheryl Harbourne



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**Damian:** Surbiton Lead Nurse Damian Walicki



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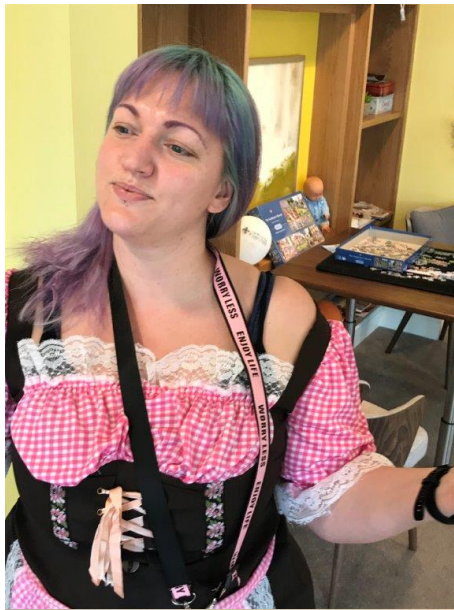
**Phyllis 1-3:** Surbiton resident Phyllis survived

COVID-19



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**Hayley 1-3:** High Wycombe Activities Manager

Hayley

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## About Royal Star & Garter

Our charity provides loving, compassionate care to veterans and their partners living with disability or dementia.

**Twitter:** @starandgarter

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**Website:** [www.starandgarter.org](http://www.starandgarter.org)



Royal Star & Garter  
is a member of the  
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