

Melissa Blackstad



"Why did you choose older adult services as a career?" Initially, when I became a nurse aide at 16 years of age, I'll be completely honest... I really didn't know what I was getting myself into. At that age, I lived in a small community. I had started out in a grocery store, came to work one day and they were going out of business. I then made my rounds around town, applying for anything that I could get into at the time. I had an interview at Luther Memorial Home, in Madelia, MN, and was hired. They sent me to nurse aide training and from then on I have spent the last 16 years in this profession. I have grown through these years learning and being able to appreciate the lives of many people, for which I am thankful. I have made a commitment and conscious decision that this is where I belong and would like to continue my career for the future.

"What do you want to do with your life and how do you hope to impact the older adult services profession?" I have always prayed that someday I could go back to school and pursue my longing to become a nurse. As a single mother of two children, I believe my children and I deserve this. I have come to a point in my life, where I really feel the need to go on and make the most of my knowledge and skills. This feeling has only become stronger and intensified as I have gotten older. I had to find a point in my life, where I knew I could make the commitment and still be able to raise my children at the same time. Though I know it will be a struggle, in the end it will be the best thing that has ever happened to us.

I believe myself, in a lot of ways; have made a mark or impact in some of the lives of those I have cared for. I would hope that throughout my career in adult services that I am able to continue to be able to do that. I value my job, and I value those I care for. I serve as not only a caregiver, but advocate and protector. With that being said, I would like to continue to strive to be all that I can be in this profession.

"Provide a specific example of when you positively impacted someone through the care or services you provided." I have taken care of a multitude of people in my 16 years, but one man that stands out specifically, passed away on my birthday last year. He spent a short period of time at Hillcrest; only a couple of years. Though I am not able to give any names, I will call him B.K. I am positively sure as I am writing; he is smiling knowing that I included him in this part of the essay.

I think of all of my experiences as a care-giver, this particular situation constantly challenged me. You see, through B.K.'s time at Hillcrest, he was diagnosed with ALS. His care continually changed as he progressed into his disease. When I say that this was my most challenging experience, I mean that. I also will tell you; this was one of the most rewarding. As B.K.'s level of care changed, communication did also. Throughout the experience I became one of the few caregivers that was aware of his personal needs, but could also continue to follow the decline in his communication. Through that we developed a trust; a friendship. I know that as B.K. declined, his trust for me was high. In all relationships we have with people, one of the greatest attributes of people is trust. To know that someone cares so fully, and to trust, is a rare quality we find in few. I know that as B.K. came to his last days, he will remember me, as I will always remember him.

"How have you positively impacted your organization and increased its effectiveness (through teaching, mentoring, serving on committees, etc.)?" Over the past 16 years, I have spent almost 6 years at Hillcrest. Through these years, I have been become a licensed TMA, and was able to take on

nursing scheduling for a short time. With all of these duties, I have become more knowledgeable and am able to experience jobs of others in my facility. I feel that sometimes, in every job, you have to walk in someone else's shoes to fully appreciate the work of those around you. I am thankful with the few experiences I have had, I have been able to do just that.