

Angela Lowe

Retirement village manager, 37, Boondall

Interview TONYA TURNER

I didn't have any grandparents growing up, but I feel like I have 100 of them now. When my son, Maxwell, had to have a major operation as a baby, I couldn't have felt more supported by the residents of the villages I look after. They would give me teddy bears to give to him and cards and blankets while he was recovering. They feel like family.

I've been working for Blue Care for 12 years. I started as a receptionist in the retirement living team. I just fell in love with the place, and then they offered to pay for me to do a Diploma of Communities and Coordination.

Over the years I worked my way up to the manager role I'm in now. I'm what they call a "roving manager" as I look after five villages in Sunnybank Hills, Deagon, Redcliffe, Kallangur and Lawnton.

Hearing the residents tell their stories and helping them with their needs is really enjoyable and satisfying work.

My son was born with sagittal craniosynostosis, which is when the skull bones fuse too early. His head was growing in the shape of a football.

He had surgery when he was eight months old. If he hadn't, he would've gone blind, had no oxygen to the brain and eventually passed away.

They had to cut his head open from ear to ear, take out the skull, break it up, put it together with wires, put it back in his head and sew it up again. It was a successful surgery and every now and then the wires come loose, so he has to have little operations to get them removed.

It was heart-breaking at the time.

My husband James and I were shattered. I didn't know what to do or how to feel. After the surgery, I was so relieved and grateful, but I was also depressed, upset and in shock. The support I got from James, my friends and my family helped get me through. The women in my mothers' group offered me breastmilk to help Maxie put on weight after the surgery when I wasn't producing enough.

My two best friends Cat and Bre physically held me up at times and sat with me quietly when I couldn't deal with people.

My mum, Diana, and James' mum, Robyn, looked after Maxie when I had to go back to work.

My brothers Danny and Peter and my sister Tracey were always there for support. One thing my parents instilled in us was to look after each other.

I was born in Redcliffe and grew up around there. I'd always been interested in counselling as some of my family and friends had been through depression.

After Maxie's surgery I wanted to help other people the way I'd been helped, so I became a volunteer counsellor for Lifeline for two years. The toughest thing about working for Blue Care is when residents pass away. My Lifeline training has really helped me talk to their families and offer support.

You'd never know Maxie's had surgery now. He's a beautiful little boy and he started school this year which was a big deal for us with everything we've been through. There was a point in our lives when we didn't know if we were going to get here.

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PICTURE: LIAM KIDSTON

