


Looking After the Invisible surrounds Margaret- a wife, mother and friend who had moved from her home, into a care home. She, like many others, found this transition challenging, and expressed her desire to return home. As a carer, I hear this, along with other very complex and hard to hear feelings, far too often.

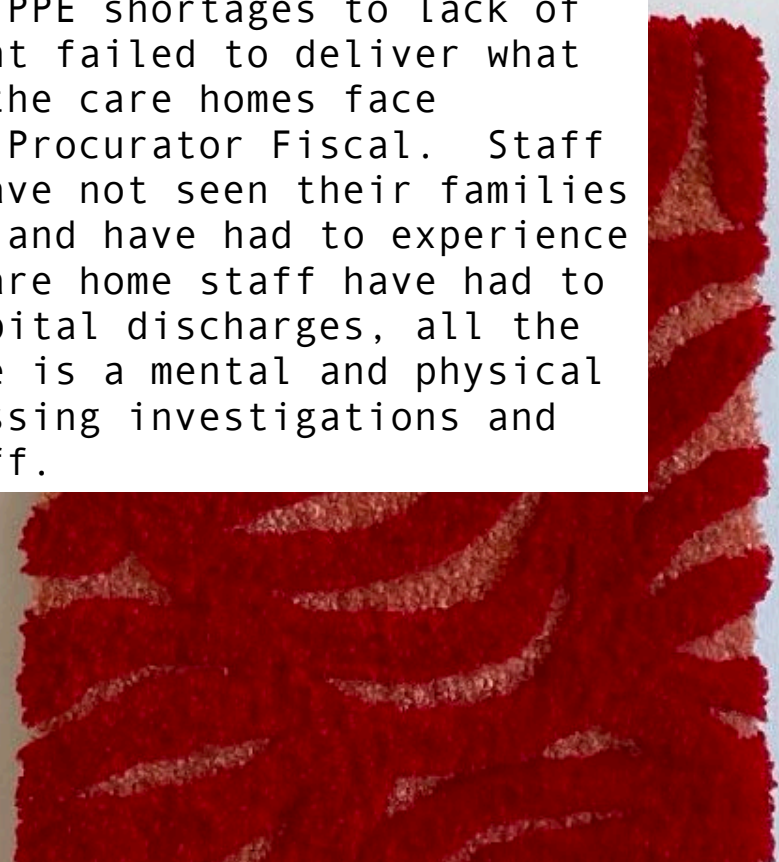
Margaret was supported by her loving family, who tried their best to help their loved one feel comfortable in her new living arrangements. Along with the care home, they created a room full of her precious, memory-filled belongings, and her own embroidery artwork created during her time as a working artist, to help Margaret feel comfortable.

Although every resident's room is different, I feel this is a good representation of the way in which both families and care homes work together in order to help the individual during this challenging transition. I have been exploring this comfort, and discomfort within my art practice. I feel although very common, it is both a complex situation, and hardly discussed in society.

However, since I started this work, the world has changed- a lot. I no longer am able to volunteer in the care home in which Margaret resided, and Margaret unfortunately passed away during the first outbreak of Covid-19.



In the words of those currently in care homes, they "have gone from being invisible and overlooked, to being in the public eye". Prior to Covid-19, there was a lack of support for care homes, and this has only become more apparent in the past year. From PPE shortages to lack of care home testing, the government failed to deliver what the care homes needed, and now the care homes face investigation by the Police and Procurator Fiscal. Staff have worked extra hours, many have not seen their families for an extended period of time, and have had to experience deaths more than ever before. Care home staff have had to withstand Covid-19 positive hospital discharges, all the while receiving criticism. There is a mental and physical cost to pay, without the distressing investigations and added pressure to exhausted staff.



Since Covid-19 reached the UK, the government and the science both stated that the elderly and those with underlying health conditions are vulnerable, indicating care homes, yet they were not prioritised. Recent data from CQC, the Care Quality Commission, show that care home deaths due to Covid-19 in the UK totalled 29,057 (from 10/04/2020 to 16/04/2021). CQC also state that this data may be an underestimation, and only includes those who died while in the care home, and not those who were transferred to hospital care. Care home deaths due to Covid-19 are thought to be a third of all Covid-19 deaths in the UK.

As of 8th April 2021, the Crown Office's data indicates there have been at least 3,400 care home deaths in Scotland since March 2020. Margaret was one of these, yet this figure does not communicate the loss that has been suffered throughout the country.

Caring cannot be done from a distance. Care homes aren't built to operate like hospitals, and they shouldn't be. I feel for the residents in care homes who have been alone, without family. I feel for the residents who have had to watch those around them struggle. We are all getting older, so I find it hard to understand why, as a society, we do not care.

A March 2021 survey has shown that out of 113 care home managers in the UK, 35%, more than one third, have said they are "considering leaving care and changing careers". Half feel "overwhelmed and overworked", 18% "are completely burned out", 63% "say they have inadequate mental health support at work" and 51% are "working 10+ hours more a week on Covid-19 tasks, on top of their workload."

As lockdown lifts and the world returns to some form of 'normal', our care homes cannot be allowed to return to being invisible and overlooked. For the wellbeing of care home staff and so that people like Margaret can live out their last days with dignity, as a society we need to support the care industry, and increase much needed funding to the homes.

To see referenced material, please see my website. For more information on how to support care homes, please see The Caring View on Youtube (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCff7qsVQ7x7HvDy_pD0oMLQ) and <https://www.carehome.co.uk/news/>, or contact your local care home.

The larger stitched pieces and painting incorporate imagery from Margaret's room, whilst the tufted pieces involve patterns and colours from a quilt that Margaret spent a decade working on. The square stitched piece is inspired by the imagery from this quilt, and the stitches used are some of those practiced with Margaret while volunteering in the care home. *Looking After the Invisible* includes two rug tufted objects: a cushion and a telephone. These evolved from the comfort provided by soft items such as dolls, and the concept of play therapy within care homes. The cushion formed from the idea that they are plentiful in care homes, and are a suggestion of comfort, whereas the telephone provides familiarity and a suggestion of home, but also is symbolic of the only contact that has been possible in care homes for the most part of the past year.



Tufted pieces: 460mm
x 260mm x 20mm

Larger stitched pieces:
460mm x 460mm x 5mm

Square stitched piece:
290mm x 290mm x 1mm



Tufted telephone:
190mm x 320mm x
250mm

Table: 630mm x
530mm x 400mm



Painting: 220mm x
320mm x 10mm

Tufted cushion: 300mm
x 300mm x 150mm

Chair: 810mm x
380mm x 360mm

