

A MESSAGE FROM HIS MAJESTY THE KING

My wife and I are delighted to welcome you here this evening as we celebrate and give thanks to those remarkable individuals who dedicate their lives to the care of others. Whether through professional commitment or through the quiet, unheralded devotion of family and friendship, you represent something profoundly valuable not just within our communities, but for humanity as a whole.

Across the United Kingdom today, there are some five million people providing unpaid care to a loved one. *Five million*. Let that number settle in your minds for a moment. That is one in every ten adults who, alongside the demands of their own lives, have taken upon their shoulders the sacred and selfless responsibility of caring for another human being. They do so not for recognition nor reward, but because their hearts compel them to.

Alongside these wonderfully altruistic individuals stand the estimated 1.6 million professionals who work in social care - the nurses, care workers, support staff and countless others who have chosen to make compassion their vocation.

Together, these two great pillars of care - and those charities and organisations which support them - form the foundation upon which so many families and society itself depends.

I have been privileged, throughout my life, to meet many individuals involved in such service. In care homes and hospices, in support groups and community centres, I have witnessed the extraordinary tenderness with which you go about your duties.

I have seen the patience required when the vulnerable person you care for is in distress. I have witnessed the tears held at bay when an elderly loved-one no longer recognises your face. I have observed the gentle humour and camaraderie of colleagues that can lighten the heaviest of days. Above all, I have been moved, time and again, by the resilience of those who give so much of themselves while asking for so little in return.

Indeed, those who devote their lives to the care of others often do so at the expense of their own health and wellbeing. Research tells us that many informal caring duties. Isolation, exhaustion and financial strain are constant companions for many. We owe it to them not merely to offer our thanks, but our practical support.

This is particularly true for those children and young people who shoulder responsibilities that would test the strongest among us. There are hundreds of thousands of them across this nation, some as young as five years old, helping to care for parents, siblings or grandparents. They prepare meals, administer medication, provide emotional support and manage household chores, all while trying to navigate the ordinary challenges of growing up.

While every carer deserves our respect, these young people merit our profound admiration. They demonstrate daily what many take a lifetime to understand: that the willingness to help others is the most noble human quality of all. It is beholden on us to ensure that their selflessness does not come at the cost of their own childhood, their education or their dreams.

As for those who receive care, I particularly want to say this: you are *not* and you will *never be* a burden. The care you require and receive is not a choice you can make, nor an imposition on others; it is in fact an expression of their devotion.

The ancient Greeks had a word for it: *agape*, meaning love in its purest, most selfless form. A love born from compassion and delivered without expectation of return. A love which, freely given and graciously received, is perhaps the greatest blessing many of us will experience in our lifetimes.

So to those who provide care - whether you wear a uniform or simply the clothes you felt able to pull on in the morning - please know that the great love you show in small ways every day is an example and an inspiration to us all. It is our duty, in return, to ensure it is never taken for granted nor forgotten.

This comes with my most heartfelt gratitude to you all.

Charles R.