

# Sweet Life

Edition 3



**SweetTree**  
Home Care Services

*“Being surrounded by a healthy, active, thriving family is a powerful thing”*

David Gibson



## In this issue:

Adjusting to care at home

Beat carer burnout

Caring conversation –  
meet the Gibsons

Benefits of brief therapy

Technology in the home

A new age of care

# Celebrating 15 years of excellence



2002 **0 clients** → 2017 **8,000 clients**

## Building long lasting relationships

**567 CARERS**  
delivering exceptional care since 2002

**OVER 25%**  
of our care team have been with us for 5 years or more.

**11 YEARS**  
of support by SweetTree for our longest standing client.

Our team is made up of a **diverse range of skills, experience, clinical experts and specialists** – but above all, good people!

Since being established in 2002 our vision has never faltered, and everything we do remains true to our original values.



### SERVICES

- Older persons care
- Specialist dementia care
- Learning disabilities
- Complex care
- Brain injury
- Neurological conditions
- End-of-life care

### FOUNDERS

Barry Sweetbaum  
Nicki Bones

### AWARDS



Sunday Times 100 Best Companies to Work for (35th)



Investors in People Gold Award

# Contents

<b>Advice:</b> Supporting families	<b>4</b>	<b>New thinking:</b> Brief therapy	<b>12</b>
<b>Spotlight on:</b> Technology in the home	<b>7</b>	<b>Reflection:</b> A new age of care	<b>14</b>
<b>Lifestyle:</b> Beat carer burnout	<b>8</b>	<b>Hot topic:</b> Goal attainment scaling	<b>16</b>
<b>Caring conversation:</b> Have the courage to ask why	<b>10</b>	<b>Community living:</b> Farm life	<b>18</b>

## Foreword

by Barry Sweetbaum

When Nicki Bones and I founded SweetTree in 2002, it was with one central idea at heart: We wanted to help our clients and their families to live happy, fulfilled, meaningful lives, and to help them realise their full potential.

For some of the people we support, this means maintaining a way of life; seeing friends, gardening, or spending time with family. For others, full potential and independence means aiming for, and achieving, a completely new set of life goals; such as getting a job or learning to cook.

Critically, the potential impact on family caregivers is as important in this dynamic as that of the people we care for. No one wants to feel they are a burden on their loved ones, and being surrounded by a healthy, active, thriving family is a powerful thing. That's why at SweetTree we bring families into the frame of all that we do, and why this issue of Sweet Life is focused on the support available to our clients' families.

As SweetTree turns 15 this year, we reflect on our own ever-growing SweetTree family, and are grateful to have such good people to share in our important work. Thank you to all of our clients and their children, parents, siblings, and friends, who work beside our team every day. In a series of minor but important daily moments, together we achieve something very special: the best possible quality of care.



**Barry**

Barry Sweetbaum  
Founder  
[barry.sweetbaum@sweettree.co.uk](mailto:barry.sweetbaum@sweettree.co.uk)

## Recognising excellence and a dear friend

In 2016, SweetTree lost a treasured family member in 62-year-old Jairo Medina, who was profiled in our 2015 issue of SweetLife. In memory of the truly exceptional humanity and warmth that Jairo exuded in his life, and together with the client Jairo had cared for and supported, we have established the Jairo Medina Award; an annual award for a SweetTree team member who has demonstrated excellence in care. Updates on nominations for the award will be added to our website, [www.sweettree.co.uk](http://www.sweettree.co.uk).



# Our family rules!



Adjusting to the arrival of carers in your home can be a challenge for the whole family – but it's not one that you face alone.



**"Here are some things we know to be true," says SweetTree co-founder and Operations Director, Nicki Bones:**

"We know you don't want to be in the position of needing care in your home. We know you don't want to have to look outside of the family for assistance. We know that your first wish – if you could have one – would be that you/your mother/son/husband/friend could get on with living a life without support; without disability, dementia, illness, injury or frailty. We also know that the reason you're inviting us into your home is because you choose to stay at home, where you can live in your own way. We know it is a privilege to be invited into your family life, and we never forget that your home is your castle."

**"Strangers are just family you have yet to come to know." – Mitch Albom, author**

"When a builder comes into your home, you change out of your pyjamas," says consultant clinical neuropsychologist, Sonja Soeterik. "You tidy up a little, you make them a cup of tea, show them the bathroom, and generally stay out of the way. We all know how to behave with builders. But paid carers and support workers? Are they staff? Visitors? Friends who help your wife shower? I think it's perfectly normal for this relationship to feel unfamiliar in the beginning. Suddenly you are sharing your home with people you never chose to live with. But over time, relationships and roles do realign. Supporting families through this adjustment is part of SweetTree's role."

**"Home is where my habits have a habitat." – Fiona Apple, singer**

"It's your home, so you make the rules," says Nicki. "Open and early communication is at the heart of a smooth home care experience. Ask questions, make requests, and express as much about your family routines and personalities as you can. Involve as many family members as you would like in the early-stage Care Plan creation – it helps us enormously to know the aspirations and expectations of family members as well as those of our clients. If you like a quiet house, let us know! If you love dogs, but hate shoes in the house, let us know. If it's a family ritual to never miss Antiques Roadshow, then this is important. It's our role to fit-in around you, not the other way around."

**"If everybody is thinking alike, then somebody isn't thinking." – George S. Patton, army general**

Family disagreements about home care, as about almost everything, are normal, says Sonja. On top of adjusting to a new diagnosis, injury, or health concern of a loved-one, you're also navigating the new and complex streets of medical treatments, care options, and funding demands. The early stages of care can be a stressful time.

"It's not uncommon to see family members champion opposing methods when it comes to care or rehabilitation," Sonja says. "One may be more risk-averse, and would prefer their mum or son to have a restful routine with a low level of challenge. Another will say the opposite; that challenge and new experiences are the better plan." Be assured that not only are these debates normal, they are probably the same ones that the care team is having, Sonja adds. In the end, your priority as a family should be to support a consistent practice of quality care. Regularity and predictability of routine can be more important than you realise. "There are many paths to the top of the hill," Sonja says.

**"I live in my own little world. But it's ok, they know me here." – Lauren Myracle, author**

The boundary between professional care and friendship is one which support workers are trained to recognise and maintain, but it is still a boundary that every team member and family navigates in its own way. "We encourage our teams to build relationships with family members, GPs, and next-door neighbours," Nicki says. "It's through these relationships that we learn more about our clients and about how to provide the best possible care." But professionalism should always come before friendship, Sonja adds. "It's good practice to take into account a daughter's wishes, or husband's wishes, but at the end of the day, the client's wellbeing is our primary concern." It helps for families to approach home care with the same outlook.

**"A house is no home unless it contains food and fire for the mind as well as for the body." – Margaret Fuller, journalist**

Is it reasonable to hope that your support worker will be someone you like? Absolutely, Nicki says. SweetTree makes a significant effort to match support workers with clients according to their interests and hobbies. "Good conversation about things you both enjoy – whether that's music, movies, football, or sharing photos of your grandkids – can make such a difference," she says. Wherever time allows, prospective SweetTree clients are sent profiles of possible support workers to choose between, and will meet their support worker for pre-approval before their service begins.

**"Will you still need me, will you still feed me?" – Lennon and McCartney, musicians**

Inviting a support worker into your home can be particularly challenging for family members who prefer to do some care tasks themselves. "And this is absolutely fine," Nicki says. "Discuss this with your support workers, and, provided that you can perform the activity safely and within the best practice and best interest of the client,

then you are encouraged to continue to do whatever has meaning and value for you." If you would like to shower your mother, and that is her preference too, then do. If your father prefers that you feed him, then do this. But if your loved-one would get more out of sharing a cup of tea in the garden with you, or your help with their finances and admin, then let SweetTree do the washing and meal, and invest your time in the ways that are most meaningful to you both.



Nicki Bones  
[nicki.bones@sweettree.co.uk](mailto:nicki.bones@sweettree.co.uk)



## Supporting the smaller ones

SweetTree's dedication to support for families means children are always considered in our care. All of our staff hold certificates in safeguarding children and adults, and we work with other leading bodies to help young people adjust to the disability or deterioration of a member of their family.

Our Admiral Nurse, Rikki Lorenti, recommends *The Dementia Diaries* for teens who are experiencing dementia in their family ([dementiafriendlykent.org.uk](http://dementiafriendlykent.org.uk)), and *The Memory Journeys* by Charlie Draper and Caroline Blanchette for children aged six to nine whose loved-one is undergoing their own dementia or mental health journey ([www.ypwd.info](http://www.ypwd.info)).

## How does SweetTree understand what families need? We research.



Sonja Soeterik

Neuropsychologist Sonja Soeterik has been a consultant to the SweetTree team since 2009 and is a current member of the SweetTree Clinical Advisory Board. In addition to her advisory and clinical work, Sonja's PhD research explores how to best support families and healthcare professionals through their experiences of caregiving.

"The government recognises that there are huge amounts of informal care contributed by families for free," she says. "But there are few funds or resources to support these people. Understanding what their experience looks like is an area of profound importance."

Much of Sonja's research focuses on the family members of people who have prolonged disorders of consciousness, such as people in a vegetative or minimally conscious state. "These caregivers are dealing with a loss that has no name," she says. "They are unsure if they should remain hopeful – or allow themselves to grieve. Unable to look back or forward, they are caught in a twilight between life and death."

Sonja is also leading a new research project at SweetTree that will look at families' experiences of having intensive care services in their homes. "The aim of the project is to find tips and coping strategies that we can pass on to other families," she says. "And to identify common problems and pitfalls of the experience. As a training tool for SweetTree staff, this knowledge will be invaluable."



### Top Tips for Families

- Distribute care calendars and rotas to everyone who might appreciate knowing the care schedule. If friends and extended family can see a week's plan, they can work visits and their own days around it.
- Secure any emotionally or financially valuable items in a safe or with a friend. When a person opens their house to home care, they are at other times opening it to tradespeople, delivery people, and medical professionals. It helps everybody in the house, and the family, to know that the security of valuables is not a concern.
- Designate an off-limits space in your home if it makes you more comfortable. If you would prefer that support workers did not enter your private study or back bedroom, then flag this for the Care Plan. Sometimes it's comforting to designate an area that's for your eyes only.

### Did you know?

Emergency care can be available at late notice for SweetTree clients. If your family has a sudden crisis, call us. We'll do our very best to help.



## Because technology beats guesswork

### To maintain or reclaim your independence at home, reach for innovation, says Barry Sweetbaum.

"Many people come to SweetTree because they feel that they or their loved-one might be in need of support to maintain or achieve their independence," says SweetTree's founder, Barry Sweetbaum. "People say, 'I think my mother, who is elderly and at home on her own, might not be sleeping, or might not be taking her medication'. Or, 'My son, who has a learning disability, wants to take responsibility for making his own meals, but I worry he might forget.'"

In scenarios such as this, where a lack of visibility is problematic, it is likely that SweetTree will send a team member to spend evenings or meal times with clients, often as much to reassure families as to support the client themselves with socialisation and engagement.

"But we realise that not everyone wants a support worker sleeping in their guest room 'just in case,'" Barry says. "And not everyone needs a home visit to remember their pills or cook a meal. Many people only need a little help, and hugely value their independence."

### Enter SweetTree Connect

SweetTree Connect is a flexible, bespoke service that uses cutting-edge sensor and communications technology to give insights and support to people living in their own homes. A new generation of what is commonly called 'telecare', SweetTree Connect brings together SweetTree's 15 years of home care experience and the latest thinking in smart home and 'Internet of Things' devices.

As part of a SweetTree Connect package, simple infrared sensors and telecare alert systems can be applied to many parts of the home and daily routine. For example, different SweetTree Connect sensors can:

- Report on sleeping patterns and quality of rest.
- Monitor the use of home electronics such as a fridge, kettle, microwave, or television.
- Show that daily routines such as taking pills or making breakfast are maintained.
- Automatically adjust lighting and room temperature to suit preferences and ensure wellbeing.
- Alert carers if a client has not returned to bed after a mid-night break.
- Send alerts if a client has forgotten to shut their windows or a door.

Data is reviewed by specialist teams at SweetTree, who bring any concerns to the attention of the client, families, or authorised care professionals. Over time, powerful patterns of activity emerge that can have far-reaching influence on how a person's health and wellbeing might be enhanced. SweetTree Connect can, for instance, tell if a client is starting to take longer to perform daily routines, or is demonstrating the signs of a possible urinary tract infection.

"For some, SweetTree Connect might be a diagnostic tool –" Barry says, "– helping us to answer questions such as, 'What can we do to make a really positive impact on a client's life?' For others, it is a safety net – a way of ensuring that forgetfulness, accidents, or misadventures are swiftly attended to."

For yet others, SweetTree Connect is a handrail for personal development and growth; helping people to focus their energies on developing new skills and independence."

### Who is it for?

Anyone can take advantage of SweetTree Connect and its possibilities. You don't have to be a SweetTree Home Care Services client to access the service. Call us on **0207 644 9506** to get a conversation started about your situation and how we can help.

### How much does it cost?

For most, a comprehensive SweetTree Connect package starts at £120 to £150 per month.

### What are the considerations?

"Technology on its own can come with risks," Barry says.

"At SweetTree we always remember that care is all about people. With telecare, there's a risk that it might be used too heavily, so that holistic, person-centred care takes a back seat; there's a risk that it accidentally replaces the incidental human interactions that are immensely valuable to wellbeing. Privacy, data scrutiny, and security are all key to getting it right. We think carefully about all of these things."

"SweetTree Connect is so much more than off-the-shelf telecare. It's not technology for technology sake; it's technology in the hands of experienced caregivers whose priority is the best possible quality of life for our clients. SweetTree Connect is a tool for caring, as much as for living."



# Beat carer burnout



*A healthy carer is a good carer:  
Get the support you need to keep flying*

Caring for a loved-one can be emotionally, physically, and financially demanding. Prioritising your own wellbeing might seem like an unnecessary afterthought, but it could be your most critical care task. Think of an airline safety briefing: Secure your own oxygen mask first, before helping others with theirs.

Every day, some 6,000 people in the UK begin caring for a family member or friend, and for many, the outlook for their own health and wellbeing isn't sunny.

According to Carers UK, 60 per cent of carers are pushed to breaking point, while 46 per cent have fallen ill and have had to carry on caring regardless. Put support measures in place early to prevent exhaustion from undermining your care.

### Don't do it all yourself

Consider regular or occasional paid respite care. It's important to have mental relief from the emotional costs of being a caregiver. A home care provider can deliver additional support and give you a much-needed break.

"Don't forget how helpful it can be to involve a family member or close friend when doing your home care research," adds SweetTree Operations Director, Nicki Bones. "It can be invaluable to have someone to talk things over with, and they may come up with questions you hadn't thought of."

### Talk to others who understand

Don't carry emotional burdens alone. Christina Macdonald, who cared for her mother for nine years, says: "Make sure you can offload now and then to others who have been in, or are currently in, a similar situation. Colleagues and friends may be sympathetic, but it's only when you experience the challenges of being a carer first-hand that you can fully understand what other carers are going through. My friends meant well, but many told me to simply 'get on' with my life. That wasn't possible - mum needed me, and I needed help coping with the demands of providing care."

Find out what other help and support is available in your area. If you're caring for a person with dementia, for example, there may be a local 'memory café' where you can meet and talk to others in similar situations. Alternatively, Age UK may provide a local befriending service in your area. SweetTree can direct you to a wide range of social support networks.

### Get practical support

Discussing the emotional challenges of being a caregiver can be helpful, but make sure your nearest and dearest are doing their fair share and supporting you in practical ways. Having a friend who can pop in on the person needing care on their way home from work, or a neighbour who can go in and cook them a meal while you focus on other tasks, will help everyone.

"I arranged for a professional care worker to collect mum's medication from the GP on days when the surgery closed before I could get there," Christina says. "I also arranged for a home cleaner through Age UK and a local handyman whom I could trust. All of these individual extra resources added up to make a real difference."

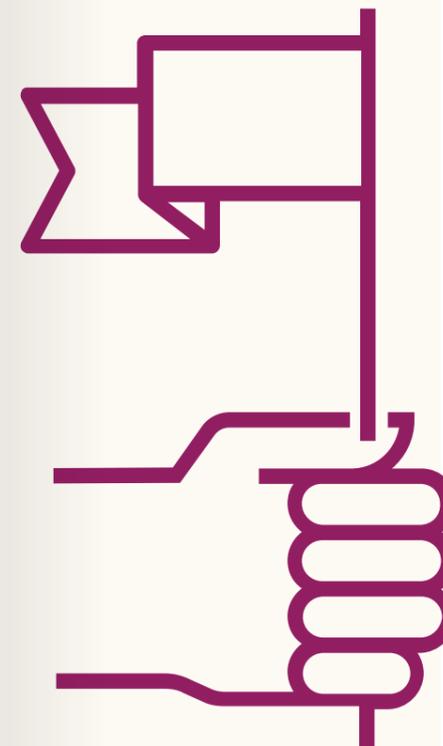
*"For many people, looking after an ill, older, or disabled loved one doesn't have a name, it is 'just something you do'. However, not recognising that you are carrying out a caring role can be a barrier to accessing vital support."*

*- Heléna Herklots,  
Chief Executive of  
Carers UK.*

## Know your carer rights

Did you know you might be entitled to:

- **A carer's assessment:** Contact social services and tell them you are caring for someone and ask what help and support is available in your area.
- **A benefits check:** Find out what you're entitled to as soon as possible. Call the Carers UK advice on [0808 808 7777](tel:0808 808 7777) or visit [www.ageuk.org.uk/benefitscheck](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/benefitscheck).
- **A needs assessment:** The person you care for may be offered a needs assessment if they are considered to have a need for support.
- **Carer's Allowance:** If you are caring for someone for 35 hours a week or more, you may be entitled to a Carer's Allowance. To apply, visit [www.gov.uk/carers-allowance-unit](http://www.gov.uk/carers-allowance-unit).
- **Flexible working:** If you're in paid employment, talk to your employer and request flexible working hours. Regardless of the amount of hours you spend caring for someone, you have a legal entitlement to request flexible working hours. Your employer can only refuse your request if they have a specific reason for doing so, and should deal with your request in a reasonable manner.
- **Time off in emergencies:** You have a right to ask your employer for time-off in emergencies, but also for situations where there may be a disruption or breakdown in care arrangements. Your employer can choose whether this is paid or unpaid.



# Have the courage to ask why

In 2010, Julie and David Gibson had their sights set on retirement, travel, and seaside living, when Julie suffered a debilitating brain injury in a road traffic accident. Now, after seven years of daily involvement in his wife's neuro-rehabilitation at the specialist residential centre where she lives, David shares his learnings for other families facing similar unexpected journeys into the unknown.

"In the weeks and months following Julie's accident, people would ask, 'How are you?'" says David Gibson. "I'd say, 'Ok. I'm doing ok.' But occasionally, a friend would reply, 'No, you're not - not really.' And even though I didn't know it at the time, they were right. I suppose I did the typical blokey thing and hoped that saying I was alright meant I would be alright."

Eventually, Julie's case manager suggested to David semi-regular sessions with a clinical psychologist who specialises in cases of brain injury.

"Talking to someone who was not immediately associated with our family or the accident was immediately relieving," David says. "It helped me front up to the fact that I had to take better care of myself. She set me challenges, such as 'go out', or 'phone a friend', and eventually, to learn how to not feel guilty about taking a day away from Julie's bedside. I'll be eternally grateful for the help the psychologist gave me, and us."

"Nothing about this journey has been easy, and nobody else will ever really understand what our family has been through -" David says, "- but I am determined that some of our learning should help others."

## Here, four hard-earned messages from the Gibsons:

### 1. Don't be intimidated by the medical or other professionals in the room

It was very early in Julie's care story that I realised I had a very important choice to make: I could leave her to the mercy of a healthcare system that sometimes finds it difficult to recognise the individual situations of patients and their families amidst protocol and policy, or; I could take control of the decisions that were being made on behalf of my wife, and take an active role in shaping her path.

It's quite natural to defer to the professionalism and seniority of people who have expertise that you don't, but if there's anything I've learned through my career in commercial real estate development, it's that highly skilled professionals in foreign fields are still people. Everyone is an individual and has pressure at work and within organisations, so it's fine to question and ask if their decisions are right for you and your family. Don't be intimidated.

### 2. Speak up and ask questions

'Why?' is a very powerful question. If you don't understand a decision or plan for your loved-one, ask for it to be explained to you in plain language. When I first started asking 'Why?' or calmly saying 'No' to Julie's rehabilitation and care teams, I wasn't particularly well-liked for it; I think some of the doctors were a little shocked. But over time, I was more included in conversations that mattered, and fewer decisions were made on Julie's behalf that didn't involve our family - myself and our children.

*"It is possible to both respect someone's expertise and to reasonably ask them to justify their thinking."*

### 3. Develop relationships

There are a lot of well-worn roles that people play in the medical field: There are therapist/patient relationships, senior doctor/junior doctor dynamics, and husband-of-patient/authoritarian-professional relationships. My advice to families is to break free of these expected role plays and grow your own dialogues with the people involved in the care at the heart of your family. Talk to people; find out who they are and why they care.

Today, I value very precious the relationships I now have with many of the people involved in Julie's care. They ask after our children, and we know their calendars and holiday news. Critically, I also know that they will call me at any time of the day or night if Julie has a problem. While it's not possible to build relationships with everybody, it does pay to try.

### 4. Listen, learn, and weigh up options yourself

When we first began this journey, my knowledge of medicine extended as far as the first aid training I had completed when I was in the Boy Scouts. If you have a willingness to understand medical details, and if you actively listen to the conversations around you, it's amazing how quickly you can become well-educated in your loved-one's condition, treatments, and options.

My advice to others is not only to ask questions, but also to actively listen to answers - carefully - and learn something new every day. The more knowledge you have, the better position you are in to make good judgements about the choices facing you and your family.

*"Talk to people; find out who they are and why they care."*



*SweetTree has been working with the Gibson family for four years. Our support workers visit Julie every day at The Jacobs Neurological Centre in Sawbridgeworth, and David has been involved in training for the SweetTree team.*

*"I believe that Barry and the SweetTree team are genuinely interested in us as a family," David says of why the Gibsons choose SweetTree.*

# Dementia caregivers: Water your flowers, not your weeds.



*SweetTree's Admiral Nursing service is implementing an approach that empowers family caregivers of people with dementia to have the tools and support to manage at home.*

Over time, as a person's dementia progresses, demands on family caregivers change and they may need different coping strategies and skills" says neuropsychologist, Sonja Soeterik.

Families often have creative ideas and skills and just need a chance to talk about how things are, in order to then plan how they will rise to meet new challenges.

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy is one tool that helps family carers manage these challenges.

"It encourages reflection on what is tough, but also on what is working and recognises the knowledge and skills the carer already has" Sonja says. "This can better equip people to cope and keep their family together at home."

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (or simply 'Brief Therapy') is an approach to helping individuals work towards what they want to achieve. Developed in the USA in the 1980s, it is used widely in a range of contexts around the world, and in the UK is taught to NHS professionals, local authorities, education bodies, private sector professionals, and now, SweetTree's own Admiral Nursing Service.

"I've been SweetTree's Admiral Nurse for two years now," says Rikki Lorenti, whose role as Admiral Nurse is to specifically support families of people living with dementia. "About six months ago we paused to reflect on the different ways that SweetTree families were interacting with me, and the feedback we received suggested that they most appreciated occasional conversations, help finding coping and management strategies, and devising concrete plans of action for them to use independently."

"It didn't take long to see that what we were already doing well, was delivering Solution-Focused Brief Therapy.



Rikki Lorenti  
[rikki.lorenti@sweettree.co.uk](mailto:rikki.lorenti@sweettree.co.uk)

So we set about formalising this and knitting the method into our existing service." Rikki is now completing a Certificate in Resource Based Therapies, approved by the British Psychological Society.

In a meeting with Rikki, he will ask a family member how things are for them at the moment, and how they want their future to work. The questions are designed to help people identify and call upon resources that are available to them, but which they

may not have previously considered as useful tools. These might be internal resources – such as their own skills, strengths, qualities, or beliefs – or external resources, such as partners, family, friends, faith groups, or other support groups.

Questions might include; "What are you doing to manage things at the moment?", "On a scale of one to 10, how are you coping with John wandering about at night?", "What are the things that help relieve your worry about this wandering?", or "What was your best moment this week?".

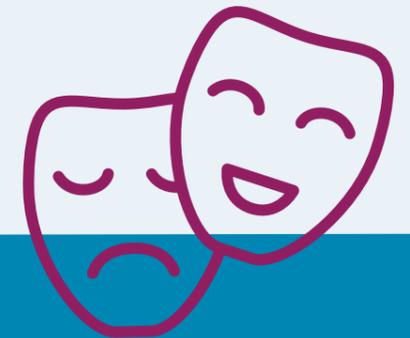
Resources and strategies identified in the meeting with Rikki are written into a Self-Management Plan, which family members can use as a map over coming months.

One great strength of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy is that it encourages people to notice the ways in which they are already coping.

By encouraging people to identify positive realities and potential changes in their life, the approach helps family caregivers construct a vision of a preferred or better future, and a sense of being able to cope.

## Benefits of Brief Therapy ripple beyond SweetTree

Thanks to his training and experience with Brief Therapy, our Admiral Nurse Rikki Lorenti has also been delivering this approach with the Younger People with Dementia (Berkshire) Service, where family-members of people aged under 65 and with a diagnosis of dementia can access support. On the back of his project's success, additional Brief Therapy programmes are being developed at the service.



## Support through drama

In addition to offering Brief Therapy, Admiral Nurse home visits, and support groups for families experiencing dementia, for the summer of 2017 SweetTree has also commissioned two readings of a new UK play, Don't Leave Me Now: One for an audience of its own team members, and another for families, clients, and friends.

Written by London playwright Brian Daniels, the play explores both the functionality and dysfunctionality of family in the context of dementia. Endorsed by a host of leaders in the dementia space, including Dementia UK and the National Council for Palliative Care, Don't Leave Me Now has hit chords with families and professionals who experience the daily rollercoaster highs and lows of dementia.

"Dementia is a life-limiting illness with a debilitating impact on family life," says Daniels. "But there's also love, acceptance, and humour – and I wanted to balance the two by portraying this journey into the unknown – showing how people comprehend and cope."



# A new age of care is in all our hands

*The future of social care, how it is funded, and what it will look like, is on the table for discussion – the family table, that is.*



Brexit bureaucracy, election expectations, NHS naysaying, and anxieties about ageing – there's a lot of grey news to cloud the outlook of people wondering what care will look like for themselves and their loved ones in coming decades.

At SweetTree, we've spent 15 years adapting to the changing needs of society and increased demand for great quality home care, and we're in a good position to now reflect

on what the future might hold, and how families can step up to meet coming changes, head-on.

**First, let us all recognise that ageing is not an illness.**

Getting older and wanting more support in your 80s is as inevitable as getting older and wanting less support in your 20s. Through our lives we continually adapt our homes and lifestyles according to our age. Installing home telecare sensors in your older years is just as much a part of life as installing the latest surround-sound speakers in your middle age. (Why not do both?). As a society, it would do us

good to reframe older age as another life chapter through which we can thrive, rather than something to be prevented or bemoaned. The sooner we embrace this, the sooner our markets and homes will fill with lifestyle-enhancing products and services designed for enjoying health and wellness in older age.

**Be realistic.**

In 1951 – the year that The Archers first graced our airwaves – only 25.5 out of every 100 Britons made the ripe old age of 80. With today's figures showing roughly 66 in every 100 striding into their 80s with golf clubs and yoga mats

over shoulders, we are faced with a completely blank canvas when it comes to what history can show us about supporting so many at such an age. It's hardly surprising then that the social care sector is going through a turbulent transition into this brave new world. As a nation we are awakening to the reality that the state does not have the capacity to cover all of our projected social care costs, and it's increasingly clear that completely new solutions will be required to meet future needs.

**Think of care as 'pick-n-mix'.**

Gone is the one-size-fits-all approach to caring for individuals with support needs, but the expectation that this is how to shop for care remains. The types and levels of support available to maintain independence in our own homes are increasingly diverse, often complementary, and available through many different federal, local authority, private, and charity services. Once people start thinking of their care experience as being built with many different and interchangeable blocks, rather than unrealistically hoping for a service that will provide 'the lot', the more they will take advantage of what is available.

**Accept that finding and choosing the best care is hard work.**

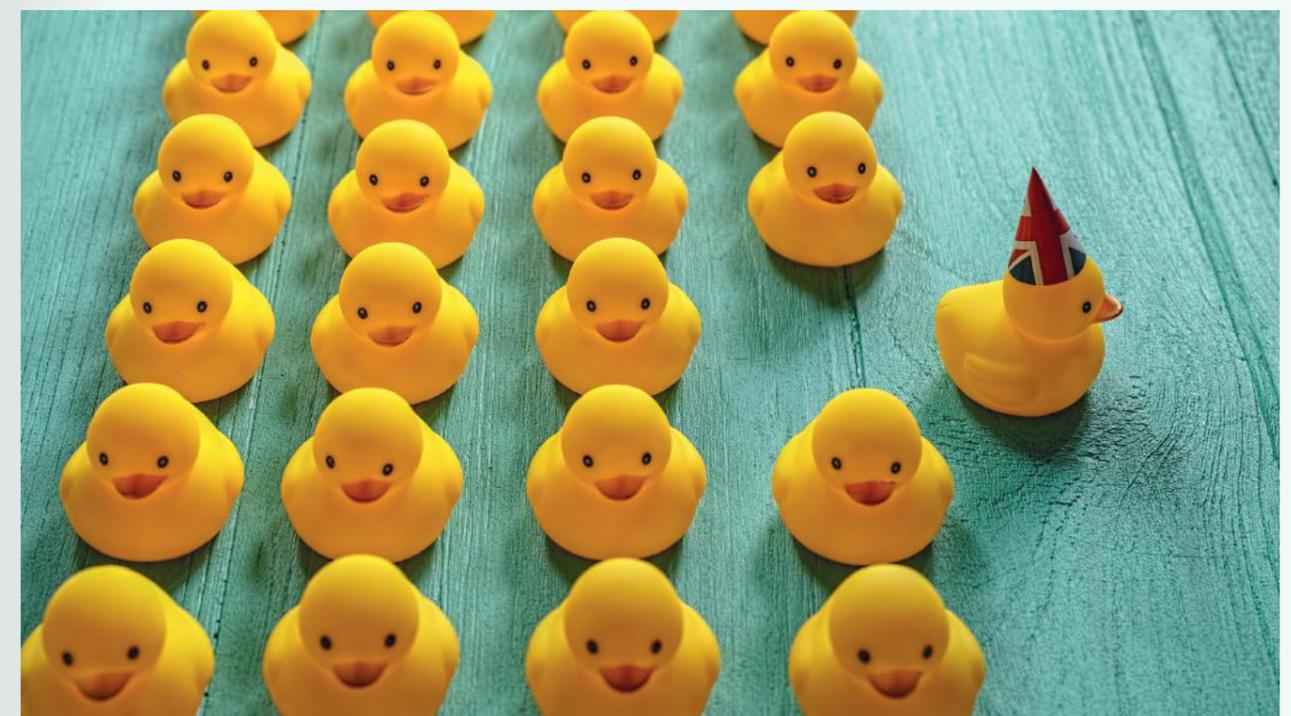
There was a time when people were faced with very few choices about their social care, and we are all happy to have left those days behind. However, choosing from a suite of options and funding opportunities – while liberating – takes time and effort.

Services like SweetTree can help to some extent, in that we are well-connected to the sector and can inform clients and prospective clients of resources they may not be aware of, but most of the necessary research falls at the feet of families and Google. Our advice on this is: Get stuck in, and do it now.

In a few years' time, when you definitely need to engage home support or therapies for you or a family member, be ready. Be smart. The Internet might be a big and sometimes overwhelming place, but it's an extraordinary resource that was unimaginable only 30 years ago. Start conversations with care services, as well as within your family, early.

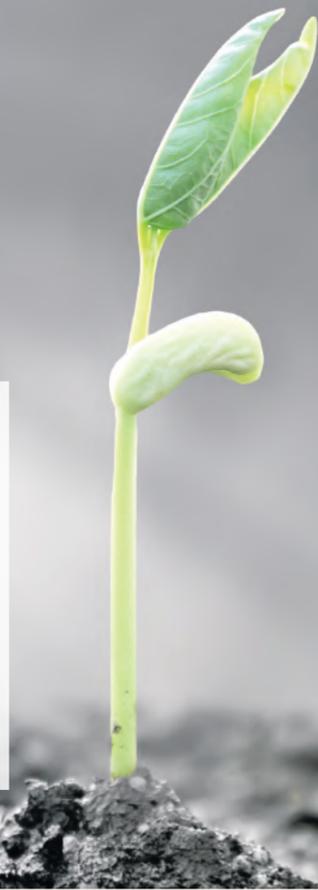
The care sector is changing. The government is putting its hands in the air. It's those of us who accept this, step up, and get proactive that will win the day.

*"Once people start thinking of their care experience as being built with many different and interchangeable blocks, rather than unrealistically hoping for a service that will provide 'the lot', the more they will take advantage of what is available."*



# The wins of own goals

SweetTree's focus on service improvement continues apace. The long-trusted method of goal-setting and attainment routinely used by treating clinicians, is now being implemented with our clients living with brain injuries and neurological conditions.



“Goal Attainment Scaling is a win-win,” says Erika Turner, Director of SweetTree’s Brain Injury and Neurological Conditions Service. “It works for clients, it works for clinicians, it works for families and carers, and it works for funders. We’re all speaking the same language, and we’re all moving towards the same goals that are set with our client. It’s more than a good idea; it’s best practice.”

Goal Attainment Scaling (GAS) is an evidence-based rehabilitation technique that is effectively applied in a range of clinical settings, including in the management of chronic pain, cognitive rehabilitation, mental health management, and amputee rehabilitation.

As an outcome measure of rehabilitation progress, it is celebrated for concreting a person’s position at the centre of their own care, for stimulating goal achievement, and for increasing collaboration and communication within a person’s network of carers, clinicians, family, and community. The goal setting process empowers individuals by focussing on their values, Erika says, which is crucial to why the process can be so meaningful.

“And yet, SweetTree is the first UK home care provider that I know of to implement GAS for its brain injury and neurological clients and workforce,” she adds. “All of our support managers and supervisors are trained in GAS.”

We recently facilitated a workshop with two of our clients to help us embed the training within the office team. We asked our clients to participate in a role-play to demonstrate a GAS conversation: Its benefits were immediately clear.”

## What is GAS?

Goal Attainment Scaling (GAS) is a method of goal-setting and scoring that encourages individuals to create their own definitions of success. It asks; ‘What are your objectives?’, ‘How important are these to you?’ and ‘How challenging do you expect these to be?’.

With the guidance of a support manager, clients articulate their own set of goals in areas such as wellbeing and self-care, thinking skills and memory, mood, communication, social and community life, relationships, independent living skills, and work and education. SMART goals – specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound – are key to GAS and form the basis of the conversation.

SMART goals are regularly revisited as a tool for assessing not only client improvements and obstacles, but also the efficacy of care and rehabilitation techniques. Incremental movement towards goals is rated ‘As expected’, ‘Better than expected’, ‘Much better than expected’, ‘Partially achieved’, or ‘Worse than expected’.

Both responses and scores across all goals – calculated by the support team – are strong indicators of what is working well, and what area of a client’s life could benefit from more or a different kind of support or plan.

Feedback from SweetTree Support Managers who are at the early stages of implementing GAS has been very positive. The use of our Goal Setting Thermometer in early goal identification conversations is proving enormously beneficial during reviews with clients to help reset or renew support plans, and GAS is bringing structure to actively define progress and measure outcomes with clients who already have established goals.

In addition to giving support workers, primary caregivers, clinicians, and friends a client-created vision for the future, the use of a standard set of figures helps enormously whenever a new specialist or service joins a client’s life.

Client goals and progress are also equally important metrics for providing transparency to funders and other resource providers.

“GAS also helps support workers maximise their professional impact,” Erika says. “Where in an unstructured care scenario, support workers will help maintain an individual’s existing quality of life, with GAS, they are actively working to improve it. Every day is a new opportunity to help their client move closer to achieving their goals – making the very most of their time and skills.”

GAS is implemented in most brain injury and neurological conditions care at SweetTree, wherever it is appropriate and practical. For more information, talk to us on [020 7644 9554](tel:02076449554).

You should meet:  
Erika Turner



In April 2016, Erika was appointed director of SweetTree’s Brain Injury and Neurological Conditions service, to which she brought many years of experience in case management, government support for children and families, policy development, quality assurance, and service review. Under Erika’s leadership, SweetTree is increasingly being recognised as the best of the UK’s specialist brain and neuro rehabilitation community care providers.

[erika.turner@sweettree.co.uk](mailto:erika.turner@sweettree.co.uk)



## Anyone can create SMART goals:

Now summer is here, take a reflective look at your own New Year’s goals. Did you make them SMART goals? There’s still time!

Identify your goal:	To get fitter
Make it specific:	I want to be fit enough to finish a 15-mile walk.
Make it measurable:	Every month I will complete a walk that is one mile longer than the month before.
Make it attainable:	I have time for two walks every week, so I estimate six months to reach my goal.
Make it realistic:	But I do have to take it easy on my bad knee, and we have a holiday coming up... so eight months
Make it time-bound:	I will achieve my goal by February 1.

# Get a taste for farm life

Client numbers, carrots, confidence, and new lambs are all growing at SweetTree Fields Farm in London's Mill Hill, and Taster Days are free for all SweetTree clients.

**"It changed his life," says Daniel's mother of her son's experience at SweetTree Fields.**

**"It changed his wellbeing, and that of our whole family. The fact that someone was there to help - the support was just what he needed."**

Twenty-one and living with autism, differing behaviours, and moderate to severe learning difficulties, Daniel is a SweetTree client who attends SweetTree's Care Farm four days a week during holidays from school.

"It has helped him to develop, learn and grow," his mother says. "It has been a very happy experience." Daniel receives one-on-one support from his SweetTree support worker during his time at the farm, and follows a day plan that includes feeding the sheep, going for walks, and woodwork projects.

"The beauty of the farm is that it offers a wide range of environments for people to make their own," says Jessica Monaghan, SweetTree Positive Behaviour Support and Autism Support Manager.

"There are quiet and safe spaces in the woods or gardens, busier social environments in the greenhouses or chicken coup, and different areas for people to find whatever makes them most comfortable."



"Daniel seemed to enjoy the peace and open spaces of the farm from the first day," says Gemma Johnson, Project Leader at the farm. "He has a gentle nature and it was clear how important it was for us to give him time to adapt at his own pace."

These days, he often chooses to spend time with the donkeys and sheep. Initially, his interaction with them was peripheral - over the fences and gates - but this quickly progressed to being in their spaces; filling water troughs and attending to their needs.

"Daniel is increasingly working with saws and drills, and is helping prepare ingredients for his lunches. Alongside all of this he is also building relationships with other clients and is beginning to work as part of a team. Everyone is inspired by his courage to try new things and to be in the present moment."

"Some people don't like mud or animals - but they still love being at the farm," Jessica says. "When you get there, the atmosphere is instantly therapeutic."

**"The people are always friendly and understanding."**

Jude Allen, SweetTree Farming For All Director and Founder, has worked in Care Farming for more than 16 years, and established SweetTree Fields Farm with the same ethos that accompanies all SweetTree Farming For All projects: that engaging in meaningful activities in outdoor settings is simply therapeutic by nature. "Our programmes are tailored to fit every individual," Jude says.

## Another year at the farm

Since our last issue of Sweet Life, the Mill Hill farm has welcomed two goats, two donkeys, a new brood of chickens, a team of ducks, three rabbits, 12 sheep, and 12 new lambs! It's been a busy spring and the summer will be abundant with bulbs, beetroots, and beans. We look forward to seeing you here. [www.sweettreefarmingforall.org.uk](http://www.sweettreefarmingforall.org.uk).



"After a Taster Day, if a client has expressed a willingness to return, we work with their support workers, parents, and networks to tailor a plan that best meets their hopes and needs."

"Our motto is 'Cultivating Confidence', so our aim is to build self-esteem and self-worth for all our clients," she says. "This could be helping someone gain more life skills, like learning how to cook for themselves, or even just helping someone fix and paint a bench so that it looks brand new."

These tasks not only practise life skills, fine and gross motor skills, and team work, but they give people the rewards of achieving things they might not have realised they could do."

The therapeutic pay-offs of farm living are appreciated by anyone who visits the Mill Hill Care Farm, Jude says. "We feel them every day! Mums, dads, siblings, friends and grandparents - everyone feels the benefits of Care Farming; it's very much farming for all."

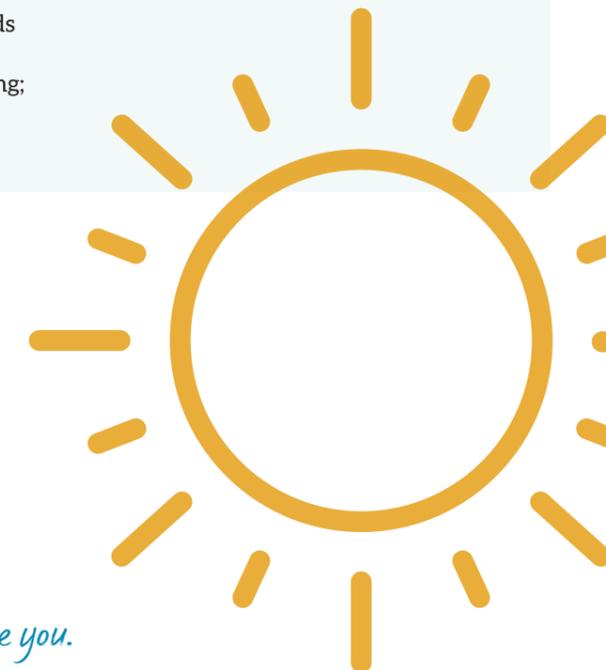
### How does it work?

You don't have to be a SweetTree client to access SweetTree Farming For All services.

Call us on **020 7644 9505** to organise a free Taster Day, and we'll let things grow from there.

*Sitting here looking around, wildlife surrounds me  
Birds in the sky, sheep rushing by  
Rabbits in their cages and pigs in the sty.  
I take in deep fresh air  
I look above at the sky, sun shining through  
A beautiful day to be with friends that are just like you.  
I smile and breathe  
Even though the smell of compost makes me heave!  
Hearing people around me, laughing and joking and knowing they care  
These memories are moments you want to share.*

By Rosie Palmer, London





Coleridge House  
1 Coleridge Gardens  
London NW6 3QH  
T 020 7624 9944  
E [info@sweettree.co.uk](mailto:info@sweettree.co.uk)

[sweettree.co.uk](http://sweettree.co.uk)

