

# HEROES KEEPING BRITAIN RUNNING IN TOUGH TIMES



**CUTS** Are a false economy, says Louise

## We work so hard but fear for our pupils

**LOUISE ATKINSON, 42**  
Teacher, President of National Education Union

THE primary school teacher, of Carlisle, is taking a year's secondment to work as the National Education Union president.

"I had my children in my early twenties, that's when I decided to take a course as a teaching assistant through the Workers' Educational Association, which provided a creche.

"I studied part-time with the Open University, then did a PGCE so I could work as a teacher, and qualified in 2014. In recent years the workload intensity has increased, there's more expected and that's down to the lack of funding.

"Crucially, the support networks like special advisory teachers, educational psychologists, adolescent mental health services, social services - all of those are really stretched, which impacts what we're doing in the classroom.

"Now with the cost of living, many, many more children are living in poverty, and the impact of all that makes it very difficult within schools. I know of teachers who are providing food and extra supplies from their own pocket to children in need.

"It's heartbreaking when you're going to work every single day, giving it your all to make the difference for those children.

"As one person, there's only so far you can stretch yourself. It is very emotionally difficult knowing there's children missing out, no matter how hard you work.

"One of my proudest moments was as a TA, giving intervention for one child over six to eight months, and seeing what a huge positive difference it made to that child's future.

"I look at other children who no longer receive that support, it's such a false economy, their issues only become more profound as they progress in school."

# Wonder women

**EXCLUSIVE**  
BY EMMELINE SAUNDERS

WE'VE had three years of an unprecedented pandemic, stagnated wages and the highest inflation seen in decades, leading to a ruinous cost of living crisis. But on

International Women's Day, which champions women's achievements across the world, we speak to some making a difference in Britain.

They have helped keep the country running in largely female-led industries. Today we celebrate the example they set...  
**VOICE OF MIRROR: PAGE 8**

## What a reward to bring comfort at end of a life

**MAARIYAH RAZAQ, 32**  
Hospice patient assessor

THE patient assessor works for Sobell House Hospice, which provides at-home end-of-life care for patients in Oxfordshire.

"My job is very rewarding, but it can be morbid. Death is always on my mind.

"The greatest reward is being there for family members, so they can take a step back from being an unpaid carer.

"It allows the patient to be in control in their own environment, because hospital isn't always the best place for somebody in their final days.

"Predominantly I work with the elderly, but in the last six months the demographic has changed - we've had a 27-year-old and a 33-year-old, we're getting more people in their forties and fifties who have kids, and I find that's the hardest to get to grips with. Sometimes my patients have

only just received a terminal diagnosis, and already they're at the end-of-life stage. You do take the job home with you.

"My mum is only 52 but I nag her about power of attorney, wills and whether she wants a Do Not Resuscitate order. We have to be prepared about these things!

"I experienced grief when I was 11, when I lost someone very close to me, so I can completely empathise with the families.

"Everybody wants a good death. Being able to do this job means patients can choose their favourite duvet to snuggle in, they can have music in the background and they can choose who they see in their final minutes.

"One patient had an ornament near her bed. Her family said it had always brought her joy, so they'd put it next to her and it made her smile. It means a lot that I can help provide that level of comfort to someone at the end of their life."



**RIGHT ROLE**  
Pertunia makes a difference



**EMPATHY** Pertunia offers comfort to patients in need

## Least we can do is be kind in last moments

**PERTUNIA GRIFFITH, 47**  
Hospice healthcare assistant

SINCE 2010, Pertunia has worked at Marie Curie's West Midlands Hospice in Solihull.

"If you haven't been to a hospice, you might not know the vital difference we make to people's lives. I see it every day.

"We make sure no one dies alone, even if they have no family or relatives live far away and can't be there. Ensuring a patient is not in pain, holding their hands and talking kindly to them in their last moments is the very least we can do.

"When a patient's loved ones are close, they can be very distressed after their last goodbyes. We look after them too.

"It's amazing the difference a cup of tea or a comforting chat makes. Having time for people is essential but far too often overlooked. We want to take their worries away. When a new life enters this world mums and their babies naturally get lots

of support. We believe exactly the same should happen when a life nears its end. Final moments are always remembered.

"My job is emotionally tough sometimes, especially when someone leaves small children. Marie Curie nursing teams are experts in their field. We have special attributes of kindness, empathy and understanding and know when a patient is close to death.

"We know when a family needs extra support. That's why, even though there are easier roles out there, we know we're in the right job.

"Perhaps no one likes to think about dying too much. But working in your community, in hospices and homes up across Britain, nursing teams like ours are quietly working hard to make sure people have the best end of life care possible. I feel glad and privileged to do my job."

■ To support Marie Curie's Great Daffodil Appeal visit [mariecurie.org.uk/daffodil](http://mariecurie.org.uk/daffodil)

## Being a carer for 39 years is a privilege

**KARINA WARNER, 55**  
Home care team leader

KARINA works with Upward Care, which provides services to people in their homes in Wolverhampton.

"I left school at 16 to work in care, and I've been doing this for 39 years now. I worked my way up to manager level.

"When the pandemic hit in 2020 I was working in supported living accommodation, and that was really difficult. I got away lightly - I only caught Covid once - but talking to my staff, a lot of us worked horrendously long hours to enable our service users and residents to have the care that they needed.

"For quite some time, our accommodation was locked down and the residents weren't allowed to see their families. It was horrendous. We could rarely get a doctor out, unless they were there to give out vaccines. We had to keep a lid on our own fears and keep it light for the

residents. You couldn't cry, you just had to get on with it. Because they couldn't see their loved ones, we used to take them out of their rooms to the corridor for socially distanced painting and quizzes to keep their brains stimulated.

"Now I work for Upward Care in people's own homes, and the highlight of my day is going in in the morning and seeing a smiley face. It brings me joy to tell them what we're going to be doing today, to take them on holiday.

"The Government doesn't recognise what we carers do. They seem to be in denial that many of us will need carers ourselves when we get older.

"Being there at the end of someone's life is a privilege. Them knowing you're there, you're telling them, 'don't worry, you're not going to die alone, we're going to be with you'. 'And even though it's tough, there's a reason I've been doing this for 39 years, I'm passionate about my work."



**HONOUR** Carmel is busy but loves job

## Wise soul said to put my big girl pants on, so I did

THE nurse practitioner, who lives in Merseyside, works in an NHS walk-in centre and is mum to her 16-year-old son. She's also the chair of the North West Regional Board for the Royal College of Nursing.

"It's been a really, really busy winter. We open the clinic at 8am and there's usually a queue before you get your coat off. Throughout the day we're triaging people to make sure they're safe. But we're always trying to catch

**CARMELO'BOYLE, 42**  
Nurse & Chair, NW Regional Board, RCN

up. This is one of the worst winters I've seen in my 20-odd years of working in the NHS, and colleagues across all the different sectors have really struggled.

"There's more patients and not enough staff to deal with them. We've got an ageing, diverse population and we just don't have the healthcare professionals to keep up with demand. I've

been a nurse for the past six years and before that I was working as a healthcare assistant.

"I was adamant I wouldn't do my nurse training - the pay to responsibility ratio was too great - but a very wise lady said to me, 'If your house was on fire, you wouldn't stand in the garden with an empty bucket.

"So put your big girl pants on and go and get involved'. I still have quite vivid nightmares about things at the

beginning of the pandemic, which I'm not sure will go away. I think there's a certain amount of PTSD for everybody who has done this work, and I don't think any of us will be the same again.

"When I see queues of people outside my clinic, I feel panic.

"Some people are coming to get dressings changed, but others might be really unwell, but can't be seen in other places because of overwhelming demand. I had a patient the other day

who needed an ambulance and then you have to explain to everyone else waiting that someone else needs to be seen as a priority.

"It is difficult at the moment, and I can understand why younger people might be put off going into nursing.

"But I'll say it's an honour doing this job. There's a nurse there for you every moment in your life, from birth until the very end, and all those bits in between where you need somebody."



with Nicola Methven & Mark Jefferies



**It's pure TV Gold**

Remember the very amusing mockumentary **The Kems: All True?** Well filming has started on a follow-up - and here's the proof. Posting a pic, Gary said: "And so it begins. Day 1 filming." It'll be on BBC2 later this year.

## Jam role-y-Holly

**JAMELIA has gone from singer to full-time soap Superstar, after landing a role in Hollyoaks.**

She will be playing Sharon Bailey on the E4 and Channel 4 show from March 20. Jamelia, right, has been filming since January and features in a plot with Richard Blackwood (who plays Felix Westwood) and Jennifer Metcalfe (Mercedes McQueen).



Kind-hearted Sharon learns her can-do attitude from her mother Pearl, but her optimism can get her into trouble, partic-

ularly in her love life. Jamelia first made a guest appearance on the show in 2021.

The 42-year-old said: "I can't tell you how happy I am to be back at Hollyoaks. We've been having the best time.

"Sharon's big arrival unsettles the family dynamic. She hasn't always prioritised her daughter and her mum is stuck in the middle.

"It's complicated. There's a lot for them to work through."

Jamelia - whose hits include Superstar and Thank You - has also had guest roles in Doctors, Death in Paradise and has appeared on Loose Women and Strictly Come Dancing.



## Top of the world

Emma Willis, Oti Mabuse and Rylan Clark's trek up Cairngorm Mountain in the Scottish Highlands for Red Nose Day has been made into a film. The one-hour documentary called **Emma, Oti and Rylan's Big Red Nose Day Challenge** will air next Tuesday on BBC1 at 9pm.

Emma said: "I felt pains in places I didn't know I could feel pain! But there was no way I could say no." Rylan added: "I couldn't have done this without Oti and Emma either side of me."

## Sir David's so Wild

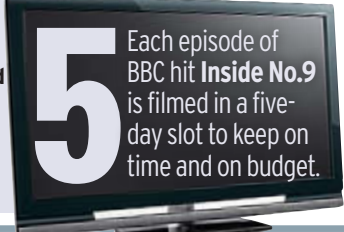
Sir David Attenborough is nearly 97 but he attended six filming locations for new series **Wild Isles**, about British wildlife, which starts on Sunday on BBC1.

Did it leave him worn out? Not a bit of it. Series producer Alastair Fothergill, who has worked with Sir David since 1986, says the veteran broadcaster still loves his job.

"He's never made a series in the UK. He said afterwards that he'd really enjoyed last summer, which was when we filmed it all." Hurrah!

Spencer Matthews' new Disney+ documentary, **Finding Michael**, in which he searches for his dead brother's body on Mount Everest, has now been released after a slight delay.

Disney axed Friday's launch, reportedly due to clips of dead bodies of climbers - some of which have now been edited out. Michael, 22, vanished in 1999 and is thought to be one of hundreds to die there.



**5** Each episode of BBC hit **Inside No.9** is filmed in a five-day slot to keep on time and on budget.