**Oral History Transcription - Peter – Heatherley**

**Rewind – Leonard Cheshire Disability, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund**

**Filmed - 2016**

**Start of transcription**

[Text on screen: How did you get involved at Heatherley?]

[Peter]

00:00:10 - …I couldn't get a job. And I went to job... uh, job sessions with the unemployment people. One day, they said, "Oh, yes, yes. We've got a social..." I forget how it was couched, but it was social... Social care... support. Or something of that sort. And they said, "Well, you can go to here in Crawley, "there in Burgess Hill, there in... "Or Heatherley Cheshire Home." Oh, yes. Cheshire. Bing! Cheshire. VC, OM, DSO, all this, I thought. This is a 1950s schoolboy, you see. In the '50s, when I read comics, Leonard Cheshire... Everybody knew who Leonard Cheshire was. And Stan Hollis and Guy Gibson and all these people... Everybody knew, because most of the adult world had been through the Second World War and they knew of these people, because they were famous. Any nation under stress, you know, elevates its heroes - quite rightly. Anyway, I came here. And I was... And the deal was, you're a full-time jobseeker, but you're allowed to come here for three mornings a week and you can do whatever the volunteers do, you see. So that's how I came, at the beginning of 1995.

[Text on screen: What did you do in your early days at Heatherley?]

00:01:38 - Computer room. I was sitting with residents and helping them on the computer program. There was a flipper program, they called it, and it was... It was a cursor, which... There was a screen, and it had A to Z and then 1 to 9, and it'd do other things. And the cursor went, "Bonk. Bonk. Bonk. Bonk." And the user, every time it went past the letter or symbol they wanted, they ponked a... whatever they could. And there's one girl who ponked it with her heel. She was very good at it. And consequently, they were able to build sentences. They could write. And I loved that. But then they said I might go into the activities. Yeah, oh. So I used to go and help with the art classes.

[Text on screen: What memories do you have of Heatherley?]

00:02:29 - The first thing I wondered when I'd been here a few hours, I thought, "Where are all the retired RAF officers?" Because I thought it was Cheshire Home for... (Laughs) But, um, no, I soon got the hang of it, and there were some very interesting people here. I mean, there was a lady who'd been here — Rosa — who'd been here since 1962, pretty well, almost, since it started. And she had Parkinson's disease, so she was in a wheelchair, but her brain was as focused and bright as a new pin, and... She'd size everybody up and nobody got anything past Rosa, I tell you, she was... She used to run the residents' shop. There was Roy Weeks. I mean, anybody who'd been here more than about 20 years, you'll find them mentioning Roy Weeks... who... An amazing family, because there was a sister and two brothers. But they were lovely people, and then they were the sort of people you remember. Roy... Ah, he was good. A good man. Um... But, you know, he's the thing that memories are made of, that sort of thing.

[Text on screen: Peter then started working for Heatherley as the administrator]

00:03:46 - Well, I'm so grateful. I really am. Oh, I really am. I mean, how it came about... Coincidence? Well, I don't know... I mean, I was involved in the health service, obviously, so I'm familiar with caring environments. But Heatherley's special. And I've been to other Cheshire Homes, I'm sure they are as well. But Heatherley really is special. I know that from having been here. I mean, I'm so thankful... to these folk here. Particularly the residents, who are so cheerful. And when I think through it, well, I've known some wonderful people, I mean... I mean, Frances Lynn comes to mind. I mean, Pam Farrell is obviously one. Frances Lynn is another. She was the housekeeper here. And I remember her so well, 'cause she was, um... She was one of the sort of people that you always remember. Always. And be grateful for the fact that you worked with her.

[Text on screen: What else is special about Heatherley?]

00:04:46 - One of the things, which is a big thing about Heatherley, is the Rowland Close. I mean, Princess Alexandra came to open the Rowland Close bungalows, and they were quite revolutionary in their way, when they were built, 'cause it was only a few years after Heatherley was started. And they were for married couples, one of whom was disabled. That was the idea. Because Pam had known that Social Services or Local Authority didn't have that sort of housing. But as time went on, I think it was about the turn of the century, they did start to, and there was a bungalow became available, in the sense that it was empty and no-one wanted it. And Theresa came to her and said, "Mrs Olsen, I'd like to go in there." So Liz... I mean, I wasn't in on it, but she obviously thought, "Well... This is a very disabled lady. I mean, how do we... How would she cope in there?" But, you know, we were proved wrong, as it were. And triumphantly proved wrong. And so that's why there are half a dozen of our residents over there at the moment... you know, having a fuller life because they have their own place and they can influence how it's... furnished and, you know, what they do... All that sort of thing. And that... I think was a great move... you know, for Heatherley. I think it was a good piece of progress, as it were.

**End of transcription**