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Day to day as a CNA

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Before she became a mentor at NextStep, Amanda Harvey spent six years working as a Certified Nursing Assistant. She can tell you firsthand about the daily challenges — and rewards — of being a CNA and what you might expect on your first assignment.

Classroom vs. reality

“The weight of responsibility as a CNA can feel very intimidating at first,” she says. “No amount of training can one-hundred-percent prepare you.”

One of the difficulties, Amanda explains, is leaving the textbook-perfect scenarios of a classroom “to work with real individuals who have their own quirks and needs. Once you get settled into your role, though, everything starts to flow much more easily.”

You need patience and a willingness to learn, agrees Kiana Martinez, who was a CNA for three-and-a-half years before becoming a NextStep mentor in 2019. “Things don’t always come quickly,” she says, “especially when you’re learning the flow of a new facility.”

Daily CNA duties

A CNA’s daily routine can vary depending on whether you’re working at a care facility, a nursing home or in an individual’s home, but the core responsibilities remain essentially the same.

Kiana’s typical day at a care facility in Boulder, CO, included clocking in, checking her floor assignment, consulting with the CNA from the previous shift, then starting her morning rounds. These would include making sure each resident was up, bathed, dressed, groomed and given breakfast. More rounds followed and included toileting, changing clothes, updating charts and serving lunch.

At the end of the day, Kiana turned in her reports, wished each resident goodbye and let them know the next time she would see them. “Knowing they could always rely on me felt great!” she says.

Amanda shares similar feelings. “There is a nice amount of routine to caring for individuals on a day-to-day basis,” she says, “especially when you are providing care and assistance to the same individuals every day.”

“It’s amazing how quickly you can bond with and become attached to the people you care for. They become so important to you so quickly!”

With challenges come rewards

After six years as a CNA, Kylie Whittle is the first to admit the job can be hectic, demanding, and long — she would regularly log 40–60 hours per week practicing long-term care in nursing homes. But while the work could be hard, it was also **“very rewarding**, eye-opening, and inspiring.”

“You learn a lot about humans in this line of work,” Kylie says. “There’s not a day that goes by where something new and surprising doesn’t come up.”

“The unexpected is always around the corner,” confirms Amanda, “and you must be quick on your feet and adaptable.” That can lead to daily challenges with not only your residents but your fellow care team members.

The overriding mission, however — helping individuals live their lives with the independence and normalcy they deserve — keeps everything else in perspective. “Without CNAs to help them throughout the day,” Amanda explains, “many of the things they enjoy and the simple pleasures of life would be out of reach.”

The value of self care

Although caring for individuals is a CNA’s top priority, it’s important not to forget taking care of yourself, as well.

“As hard as the job gets,” says Kylie, “you have to prioritize self-care in and outside of the job. Don’t lose yourself.”

That includes remaining as organized as possible.

“Learn time management,” cautions long-time caregiver Stacey Bretches. “CNA burnout is real.”

In the end, though, a good part of success as a CNA comes down to attitude.

“Keep your heart and your mind open,” counsels Amanda. “Being a CNA is all about patience, care, and understanding. Through these values, you’ll build connections with others and become the reliable support the individuals you care for need in their lives!”

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