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THERE was high excitement this week as Springdene made the pages of the national press. The *Daily Mail*, *The Times* and other newspapers on Saturday featured a visit by the clown duo Mad Etiquette, who performed through the windows of Spring Lane, bringing some delightful pre-Christmas entertainment to the residents.

Braving the cold to spread festive cheer, clowns visit a nursing home

By Kumall Jaffer

HER face beaming with glee, Catherine Kelly reaches out towards the flower held up by an entertainer in a bowler hat - with a pane of glass between them to ensure Covid safety.

This was the scene yesterday morning at Spring Lane nursing home in Harlingey, north London, where clown duo Mad Etiquette were bringing a little pre-Christmas entertainment to Miss Kelly and her fellow residents.

Although Tier Three restrictions means theatres in London are closed, performers Dan Lees and Neil Frost could still put on their show outdoors with the residents and staff watching through the closed windows. The pair,

'Watching through closed windows'

known as 'masters of the absurd', visited Spring Lane as part of the Little Window Therapies programme run by Alexandra Palace, which brings artists to care homes across London in a bid to increase face-to-face contact in a secure manner.

The charity hopes to put on dance, acrobatic and comedy performances for residents and staff to enjoy at a safe distance through the windows of their homes, according to its website.

The Government announced this month that outside visits to care homes at Christmas would be allowed if visitors test negative for the virus.



Front row seat. Catherine Kelly watches clown duo Dan Lees and Neil Frost at Spring Lane nursing home yesterday

Although Tier Four restrictions mean theatres in London are closed, performers Dan Lees and Neil Frost could still put on their show outdoors with the residents and staff watching through the closed windows.

The pair, known as “masters of the absurd”, visited Spring Lane as part of the Little Window Therapies programme run by Alexandra Palace, which brings artists to care homes across London in a bid to increase face-to-face contact in a secure manner. Our residents, including Catherine Kelly (pictured in the clipping from the *Daily Mail*, above) were enchanted.

Who would have thought, as we looked forward to Christmas this time a year ago, that our world would suddenly change – turned upside down by a deadly illness that appeared, seemingly out of the blue, to afflict all our lives?

Here at Springdene – like everywhere around the globe – we’ve had to face up to the massive challenges posed by Covid-19, not least in protecting our residents from a virus that hits the elderly especially hard. Now we have to confront the risks from a so-called “mutant strain” of the virus, which is even more infectious.

This, we regret, means that we must pause visiting to the homes for the time being. We know this is disappointing, but our executive team deems it to be a necessary precaution. We will review as we get more evidence from PHE and the local authorities.

However, armed with a mountain of personal protective equipment, cleaning materials, and gallons of sanitising gel, we continue to provide essential protection, and our homes are currently Covid-free. For this we have to thank the immense hard work of our staff over the year – especially our managers, Mark, James, Lori, Sony, and Tamas who have gone so many extra miles to keep all our residents safe and well looked after, and the homes running so efficiently.

Now, as we sit on the cusp of 2021, we have tentative hope that things may change. There was a momentous occasion for us last week when Lori, the Spring Lane manager, became the first member of our staff to receive the new vaccine. Lori visited the Royal Free Hospital in Hampstead to receive the first of two shots of the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine.

It was very straightforward, said Lori, who felt fine afterwards. “I really do urge everybody to come forward for these vital vaccinations,” she says. (See picture below.) All care home staff are entitled to immediate vaccination and other staff in the homes have been following in her footsteps, taking slots as soon as they become available.

Residents are also at the top of the priority list but may have to wait a little longer because of the tricky logistics in transferring the vaccine (which must be kept at a temperature of minus 70 degrees) out of hospitals.



Although some residents at Scottish care homes have received their vaccinations, those in England may have to wait for the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine, whose approval is expected before too long. This can be stored at normal temperature and is easier to transport. We'll let you know as soon as we have information on this. We hope it won't take very long to get it sorted out.

In all this gargantuan effort, we'd like to thank you, the next-of-kin and friends, for your unfailing support over the year. Not only have you shown understanding and patience, but you have showered our residents and staff with gifts and

treats and boosted our supplies of personal protective equipment. Your letters and cards have been a great lift to morale.

We're grateful for everything, no matter how small – from the local folk who have sewn face masks for us to relatives such as composer Jennie Musket, who set up the marvellous Artists 'n' Residents concerts which are ever-popular each week.

There were two superbly generous gestures only last week. At Spring Lane, a local company sent us some delicious cones of sweets, which were devoured eagerly by residents and staff.

Also at Spring Lane, two local ladies, Helen Hunt and her daughter Abby, supported by manager Lori, made up boxes of treats and gifts for residents who have no visitors and thus receive fewer presents. Abby also painted some charming pictures for each of the residents.

The look on the faces of our folk when they opened their hampers was a joy to behold. Thank you, Helen and Abby, and everyone else who has been so kind and supportive over the year.



We know some of you are considering giving presents or gratuities to individual staff. But we'd just like to remind you this is contrary to Springdene policy. Any gifts should be sent to the home manager, who will place them in a raffle for the benefit of all. Please continue to praise staff for what you feel is excellent work and then we can consider them for an "employee of the month" award. Thank you for your understanding.

On other fronts, everyone is full of anticipation for Christmas itself. It's been party time for all – an especial privilege, since while there are no office or other parties permitted for the rest of us this year, it is great that care homes are allowed to have a good old knees-up of their own. Spring Grove had a fabulous Hannukah party last week, complete with doughnuts, potato latkes and music. The candles looked lovely when they were lit.

The Christmas celebrations at the homes have been going with a swing, too, with music, pass-the-parcel and dancing with the staff joining in, wearing their Santa hats. There were glasses of bubbly to put even more fizz in the proceedings. Presents were distributed and it was a delight to see everyone having so much fun. At the heart of it all, there was yummy food, and some residents made their own mince pies to add to the feast. Meanwhile, folk did an elegant job icing the Christmas cakes they made back in October.

There's been some fantastic live-streamed entertainment, too. Top of the bill was a performance of Dickens's classic, *A Christmas Carol*, live from the stage of the Old Vic theatre in London. It was an absolutely spellbinding occasion, featuring Scrooge, Bob Cratchit and Co. The Ghost of Christmas Past really came to life – and you could almost smell the greasepaint!

Artists 'n' Residents are spoiling us this week with three "Christmas Box" concerts on consecutive days in the run-up to Christmas Eve. The first comes from students of the World Heartbeat Music Academy in London, with a youthful choice of repertoire. The second features the Morena Band, specialising in the delightful folk music of Slovakia. Lastly, to get us in the mood, Natalie Williams, one of the UK's leading jazz and soul artists will be singing some of the greatest Christmas songs ever written, while we all relax to her smooth, soothing voice.

And we're all looking forward to the big day itself on Friday, when folk will be treated to a delicious Christmas lunch with all the trimmings. And there are even rumours that Saint Nicholas himself will be coming down the metaphorical chimneys at Springview on Christmas morning!

Meanwhile, the directors of Springdene send our best wishes for as serene and relaxing a Christmas as is possible in these difficult times. We'll look forward to catching up with you again in 2021, which we sincerely hope will be a better year than its predecessor.

Stay safe and stay well!



Jeremy Balcombe
CEO Springdene Group
