

Shelly Hughes, CNA

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Shelly has worked as a certified nursing assistant at a nursing home in Washington State for 15 years, and is an active member of SEIU 775's executive board of frontline healthcare workers. Shelly decided to become a caregiver after watching her mother work as an aide in nursing homes and as an in-home caregiver while she was growing up. Shelly says her mother supported her family and kept them afloat when her father was unable to continue working as an attorney.

While she saw the love and respect her mother had for her residents and coworkers, Shelly also saw how physically demanding and draining the job was. When she began her career, she experienced the same issues her mother did. Short staffing, poverty wages, a lack of benefits and training opportunities, inadequate COVID-19 protections, and so much more have made nursing home jobs we love impossible to do. Too many nursing home workers don't have the opportunity to unite together in a union. As a leader in her union, Shelly has heard from countless nursing home workers citing the same issues, no matter where they live.

Shelly works nights, starting her shift at 9 p.m. Because of short staffing, she frequently works for 12 hours a day caring for 20+ residents on her own without a break. Shelly says some of the hardest times of her life have been knowing she wasn't able to take care of the people she cares about because there isn't enough time or staff to give residents the care they deserve.

Shelly says she continues working not only because she is the sole provider for her family, but because the work she does in my nursing home matters. "Helping people is the most natural thing in the world and I'm pretty good at it after 15 years."

Shelly wishes more people understood that nursing homes can be wonderful places full of life and happiness, if only our country invested in the proper resources — including wages, benefits and protections for workers, and safe staffing standards.

"Some of us have given so much. Caregivers and nurses and doctors have lost their lives. It's a lot to ask people who are scared, but it's just so important. I believe our industry will be better when we come out of this. Everyone has seen what the problems are in this industry and we might finally have a chance to fix the systemic problems in nursing homes."