

## Remarkable women

Meet a grandmum who has overcome heart-breaking tragedy to win a top award for nursery carers

# 'Cuddles ease my grief'

By Melissa Murphy

It's the news every mother dreads – Carole-Anne Warner's daughter had died aged just 23. For many of us dealing with such a tragedy would have left little time to think of others, but that wasn't the case for Carole-Anne. For despite her loss, the 56-year-old nursery nurse has continued dedicating her life to looking after little ones at a day nursery – and they've helped her too.

Carole-Anne explains: "Every time I felt sad, they would give me a cuddle. The parents were so friendly too – it was like being in an extended family. I don't think I could have got through without their support."

Yet even this source of happiness was threatened when in August 2005 the nursery went into receivership.

"There was no way I was going to let down the children or their parents," says Carole-Anne. So, with colleagues, she worked unpaid for six weeks while parents found alternative nursery places.

Her dedication has now been recognised by the National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) Carer of the Year Award. Carole-Anne was nominated by parents at her new nursery, Sunflower Day Nursery, in Shropshire. The parents – some of whom followed her from the old nursery – said: "The dedication and love shown by Carole-Anne is phenomenal. Her love for the other children never diminished, even after her

daughter's death. She has a heart of gold."

All this is a far cry from that tragic day in November 2004 when Carole-Anne's world changed forever. Until then, life had kept her and husband Tony, now 58, busy bringing up a son Michael, now 32, and twin daughters who arrived on August 22, 1981. The girls, Carole and Sandra, were born with cystic fibrosis. Despite this, Carole-Anne encouraged both girls to live life to the full.

## 'Her love for the nursery children never diminished even after her daughter's death'

Carole eventually became a nursery nurse at Caretaker's Day Nursery, also in Shropshire, and suggested Carole-Anne apply for a job there. Tragedy struck just as she was nearing qualification. While at work on a Wednesday in November 2004, Carole complained of feeling tired and had a high temperature. "This was common with cystic fibrosis, so we weren't too worried," Carole-Anne recalls. But by Sunday morning Carole could hardly breathe and was rushed to hospital. She died next day from multiple organ failure as a result of cystic fibrosis.

The condition causes organs to become clogged with mucus, making it difficult to breathe

and digest food. People with cystic fibrosis have an average life expectancy of about 31 years. Carole was aged just 23 and left behind partner Dan Ashley and a daughter, Shannon, who was then only two years old.

"Shannon says that Mum is twinkling in heaven," says Carole-Anne. "She talks about her all the time and so do we because we never want Shannon to forget her."

The shock of Carole's death still feels immense two years on and at times Carole-Anne finds the emotional pain unbearable. "It still hasn't sunk in, and I don't think it ever will. Some days I'm fine, but other days I'm a complete mess."

It's the little things that she misses. "Carole had a great sense of humour. She would play jokes at work by taking things out of the fridge and leaving a note in their place," she says. Carole-Anne took two weeks off work after Carole's death but was desperate to return. "It was wonderful to be back with the children," she remembers.

She now worries most about Sandra, who is waiting for a lung transplant. "She has lost her twin and her closest friend. I don't know how she copes without her."

Despite her NDNA Carer of the Year Award, Carole-Anne doesn't think of herself as brave or special. "I'm shocked at getting the award. I'm just doing my job."

In fact she can't imagine life without her work. She says: "Children are my life – they keep you young and I have no plans to retire for a long time."

// Find out more about the awards at: [www.ndna.org.uk](http://www.ndna.org.uk)

