

Christian and Sally Wilse



"Making money was never a big enough inspiration for me," Christian Wilse admits.

"I have always loved my work. I've had fancy titles and good salaries but it's never been enough. I craved real purpose. I've always wanted to do something that really mattered to people. With hindsight, I can say Seniors Helping Seniors® came at the right time for me. Seniors Helping Seniors® in-home services is in the right place at the right time. People love everything about it. Hearing 'thank you' all the time and running a thriving local service is thrilling. It's utterly fulfilling because it has all the elements of business I enjoy most . . . and it uses my skills to do good."

In 2013 Christian turned his business and community building skills into positive action by opening the first Seniors Helping Seniors® in-home care service in Kent. "My wife and I bought a master franchise and we set about repeating the American success in the UK.

"The straight forward, honourable and joyful approach to ageing is refreshing and the social impact of our business is our power. It is everything I could have hoped for," Christian says. "We made a big investment for the master franchise. We are well on track and the franchise I started is making great money. We re-invest but as a standalone venture, we'd live well. The pride that comes from making money while doing the right thing by carers and clients is amazing."

Points of difference are the mature carers, the focus on wellbeing – not nursing, the same person carrying out visits and a fully managed, flexible care service that has a flat fee so people can feel comfortable with the costs and rely on it.

Christian is a keen Rotarian. He has worked for charity, the Football League, film and broadcast, technology and software. Building and rolling out business concepts is his skill. Sensible things like working from home, helping other people to do well, keeping things simple, resonate well with his Scandinavian ethical business values and people seem to appreciate it. "This is my legacy" he says.

Born in Norway and raised in Sweden he moved to the UK in 1990 after meeting his wife Sally and he has called England home ever since. They have four children and recently became proud grandparents.

Sally was born in Kent and has a degree in comparative healthcare systems. It was Sally who first found out about the great work Seniors Helping Seniors® had been doing for 20 years in America. The service is unique.

Sally says: "Seniors Helping Seniors® tackles two of the biggest social problems in the UK today, elderly care and employment opportunities for people as they age. Christian went to meet the founders in America and he was astounded by the passion and innovation. The chemistry was there and after all the due diligence, we bought the franchise rights."

After training in America, taking UK courses and consulting stakeholders in the sector locally and nationally, Christian launched Seniors Helping Seniors® Canterbury and Thanet. He found his core group of carers and his first clients and never looked back. It's a management franchise, so technically he didn't need to do care courses but "I wanted to educate myself so I could be hands on when needed and to support my carers to be

the best of the best," Christian says. "I enjoyed the courses and I've met very skilled trainers doing exceptional things."

Sally met the founders and several franchisees in America on a separate occasion but she waited to join the team when Canterbury and Thanet was fully established. "Seniors Helping Seniors® has been a life changing experience for us," she says. "It's rewarding and challenging, and you can really feel that we are driving new standards in elderly care and local employment for people."

Christian adds: "Joy and strength comes from receiving help from people who are fascinated by the same things in life. Like all the best ideas, this is a simple idea. The cleverness is in the systems that make it robust. Seniors Helping Seniors® home care has hundreds of cases where family members say that the hours spent in our company literally changed lives.

"Our focus has been consistency. We knew we were providing outstanding elderly care from day one, but to do that continually and consistently is the challenge. We had 20 years' of success in the US, but it took three years of amazing service for Seniors Helping Seniors® UK to be taken seriously here. Since then it's about repetition, every person is different and every family and community teaches us something new, but the processes are solid" Christian says. "We are BFA members and Sally and I are excited to further the Seniors Helping Seniors® brand. Our early franchisees are doing really well on the back the trust and relationships we built here and the brand America built. They are loving being part of our team and the team work is key."

Sally adds: "We are now in our fifth year with several key awards under our belts. And we have proved the concept is teachable and repeatable. Our local CCG refers to us as "perfect primary care"; doctors and pharmacists take our leaflets, referrals come from customers, care co-ordinators and charities and we are signposted throughout the community. It shows we adapted what works in America to the UK properly and we are trusted providers in the UK"

Christian again: "The best part is having no shortage of amazing carers. Professional carers and people we call 'experts-by-experience' love to work for us because this is the caring they want to do. We put our carers at the centre of our operations so that they can work flexibly and locally and they feel like they are volunteering. They are paid well but the pay does not drive them. Customers love what we do because we understand what they need too. We regard customers as the people we care for, their friends, their families and their support network." Seniors Helping Seniors® won the Customer Services award for fully managing elderly care in this way.

Seniors Helping Seniors® has already won the Top Ten and Top Twenty most recommended care agency groups in UK two years running. Also a BBC news feature on the benefits and prospects of the unique care service has been aired. "So, with a 9.910 customer rating, we have a lot of pride in what we do day to day" Christian says, "and I have never been happier or more excited about what I do."