Our visit at Mary and Joseph House

**….so you want to manage a care home, do you?**

I have always been impressed by those who pay attention to detail. It would perhaps explain my life-long fascination with the intricacies of Formula One, or what makes a two Michelin star chef or a top class hotel like The Ritz. Just what is it that motivates people to be the best? On Monday we were scheduled to deliver a talk to the staff at Mary & Joseph House in Manchester. A banner strapped to the railings outside proclaims the view of the industry inspectors that this care home is ‘outstanding.’ There is a hint of this when we ring the doorbell and it is opened, and we are greeted, by two managers. We are shown the venue, offered tea or coffee, and the service manager arrives and runs us through the routine in the event of a fire. That completed, he still has time to ensure that our equipment is set up and we are happy. As we sip coffee and gather our thoughts we are offered sandwiches and we have a brief chance to sample the atmosphere. We notice that staff arrive early to take their places for our session. We have noticed, and felt, the relaxed atmosphere in the dining room where residents and staff eat together, more like the restaurant in a good department store than a care home. There is a sense here of structure. Not a pyramid where the manager sits at the top but one that is linear and interlocking. There is a total absence of hierarchy. Each person has a role to play and is as respected as the next. And you can sense it. There is an order which inspires confidence that here are people who know what they are doing and, perhaps over a long period of time, have worked out how to deliver care which is inclusive. Staff point out that the residents are integral to everything they do, including being on the interview panel for new staff. Thirty two staff attend for two and a half hours to hear what we have to say which includes the two managers.

Over the years I have viewed and worked in many care homes. As in life, there is always a gap between theory and practice. As a manager I always had a blueprint in my head of how things should be but rarely were. The managers at Mary & Joseph have found a way to integrate the staff and residents whilst taking them all on a journey together at the same time. At this care home theory and practice are the same thing. My motor racing hero was Ron Dennis who for many years ran the McLaren Formula One Team. He impressed me in an interview when he said that for McLaren, winning was the bottom line. His words came back to me at Mary & Joseph House.

There is something uplifting about excellence. Sometimes it is difficult to describe, a bit like being asked to explain what you like about art. You don’t know what it is, but you know it when you see it. A strange thing happened to Milan and me when we visited Mary & Joseph House. When we left we were three inches taller.