

Implementation of the Anam Cara Ontology providing sustained decision support in a Hong Kong nannies' context

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Abstract

This paper provides a proof of value for sustained decision support in a specific Hong Kong context: Anam Cara ("Soul friend") support for caregiver/nannies' decisions on whether to say “YES” to an offer from a family to look after the mother and her newborn baby during the post-partum confinement period. The participants were three trained post-partum helpers/nannies, and three senior family members (grandmothers). They were each considering an offer to say "Yes" to stay with the post-partum mothers' family to function as a nanny for taking care of the newborn baby and the mother, where the nanny needs to stay at home with the family for eight hours a day and work. Our findings address: Prevalence of Anam Caras ("Soul Friends") in implementing “Zouyue” (Chinese traditional concept for "taking rest totally in the post-partum month"); The helper/nanny as her own “Anam Cara”; having an Anam Cara–style identity; Unconditional positive regard and self-love; Asserting companionship between mothers and helpers; Shared vulnerability and mutual transformation; Saying “YES”: initiates inspired companionship.

Keywords Sustainable decision support, Aman Cara ontology, Positive regard, Hong Kong Post-partum Nannies

1. Introduction

In order to provide Proof of Value, in the form of sustained decision support for "Anam Cara, Implementation : a Fundamental Process Ontology" (Bedi, Brezillon and Humphreys, 2026), in a specific operational context in Hong Kong, we conducted a case study project focusing on Anam Cara ("Soul friend") support for a postpartum caregiver/nannie’s decisions on whether to say “YES” to an offer from a family in Hong Kong to join the family as a day-care nanny looking after the mother and her newborn baby during the post-partum confinement period.

The participants in this implementation were three trained postpartum helpers/nannies, and three senior family members (grandmothers), They were each considering an offer to say "Yes" to stay with the family and function as a nanny for taking care of the newborn baby and the mother, where the nanny needs to stay at home with the family for eight hours a day and work around thirty days after the mother has given birth.

Here we investigate how saying “Yes” to this offer enabled the working parents to gain release from the pressures on baby caring and help the women in postpartum with a good caring for speedy recovery. We describe how the sustained decision support provided by Anam Cara enabled the nannies to anticipate and discover how to manage everyday development of a newborn baby while gaining positive affirmation and self-love improved the mental and physical recovery of the mother in advance. This kind of decision support is considered to be an essential process that gives warm care to the mother and the newborn baby.

1.1 Context; Implementation of “Zouyue - 坐月” under Chinese Traditional Custom

In Chinese traditional contexts, the concept of "Zuoyue" (literally "taking rest totally in the post-partum month") refers to a postpartum recovery period lasting approximately one month. During this time,

new mothers focus on rest, specialized nutrition, and traditional practices to restore physical health, replenish nutrients, and adapt to motherhood. Rooted in Chinese culture, this custom emphasizes avoiding cold exposure and overexertion while utilizing dietary therapies to balance qi (vital energy) and blood. This practice is also common in Hong Kong society. The family would hire a postpartum helper/nanny to work for the family for a month to provide a dedicated person care for the mother and newborn during the confinement period, reducing stress on the whole family while safeguarding health and quality of life, like preparing meals applying traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) principles, philosophical beliefs, and social traditions. Sometimes, the grandparents may also have this kind of knowledge and experience, they would like to take an active participation in the period for taking care of their daughters or daughters-in-law during their confinement period.

2. Investigating Anam Cara support for Nannies to sustain their own passions

In order to get a good understanding of how postpartum helpers/nannies in Hong Kong could feel confident in their ability to saying “YES” and sustain self-love in challenging contexts in different living conditions and environments in the local families, we would like to explore how our implementation of the Anam Cara Ontology might enable the nannies sustain their own passion and keep a good service quality to the families. When grandparents would like to participate in newborn baby caring and taking good care of the women in their postpartum period, sometimes, they will think twice to make sure that they are able to and be fully engaged, this would a challenge to sustain what could arise because of saying “YES”.

We presumed that wherever they were: the hired nanny or the grandparents, they all would like to deliver their kindness and sense of caring to the newborn baby and the postpartum mother as well to guide the whole family to transit smoothly to a new living situation. This is vital to the development of the newborn baby in its first year to give a good message to the whole family having a good start. For the postpartum mother, this is an essential period of paying attention to her physical and mentally recovery as the mother has just come across a massive loss of energy while delivering a baby. If she can have a good recovery during the confinement period (30 days), her body would become stronger and be quicker back to its normal condition.

Since postpartum care is intensive, family members often lack professional knowledge or energy, so a professional postpartum helper can fill this gap. Dual-income parents and long working hours are common in Hong Kong, so many families struggle to take on round-the-clock newborn care on top of regular work. Nuclear families are the norm; older relatives may not live together or may have limited physical strength, making the traditional model of grandparents fully supporting “sitting the month” hard to implement.

3. Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

With each nanny and grandmother, we used an interview guide designed to explore their decision-making process regarding whether to say “YES” and the support they received (or wished to receive) from the Anam Cara throughout the whole newborn baby caring period. We used open-ended questions to invite narrative accounts – for example: 1) “Can you tell me what happened after you decided to say “YES” in that situation? 2) Anything that makes you feel happy or unhappy during the period staying with the family? 3) How did you feel and what did you do next?”, – and then explored three key domains of the Anam Cara framework to capture three different forms of support:

(i) Interactions with a living Anam Cara: Did the Nanny have any interactions with a physically present “soul friend” or mentor? We asked them to identify any friend, family member, or other person who played a guiding or supportive role, and to describe how that person helped them through the experience.

(ii) Interactions with a spiritual Anam Cara: Did the participant draw on support from a spiritual or non-present figure (for example, a deceased relative, a religious figure, or an imagined confidant)? This recognised the role of faith, ancestral guidance, or inner spiritual resources in self-love and resilience.

(iii) Community and institutional resources: We inquired about broader sources of support, such as peer groups, counsellors and online communities, or self-help resources. boundaries. Not limited to external resources for the nannies in Hong Kong, there would be some form of connection between the nanny and the postpartum mother having a close relationship, even in short term, but trust is gradually be built, ideally extended the whole family if the nanny is really showing care and delivering love for the newborn baby and the mother.

The Participants of the Study were:

- Three hired postpartum helpers: Nannies with 2 years+ practical experience years of taking care of newborn children and the after giving birth in exchange for the earnings.
- Three Grandparents willing to spend time to stay with the family and engage in taking care of their own grandchildren from day one.

We analysed the data using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Each interview lasted about 45-60 minutes and was conducted in a privileged setting chosen by the participant or some conducted via phone call or written form via What’s app. We conducted interviews in the participant’s preferred language (Cantonese). The Interviewer introduced herself as an empathetic, non-judgmental listener to build rapport and encourage participants to speak openly.

Our approach combined deductive and inductive coding. Initially, we applied a provisional coding framework based on our theoretical lenses (“positive affirmation” drawn from self-love model of Bedi, 2024) and then refined this framework iteratively as new patterns emerged from the transcripts. The researcher independently read each transcript in full to become familiar with the contents and generated initial quotes to organise the data. These quotes were then collated into broader themes based on Celtic Spiritual principle and Anam Care, which the researcher reviewed and refined through discussion with the interviewees, when needed. Related themes were merged or redefined as needed (for instance, quotes related to self-confidence and assertiveness were combined into a single theme of “Logic of Appropriateness” or “Self-love”). In the final phase of the analysis, we defined and named the themes and produced detailed analytic memos integrating participant quotes with relevant theory.

4. Research Findings

We found that all our participants had established and benefitted from interacting with anam caras (soul friends). The benefits included: supportive Anam Cara relationships in their own feelings as well as building a relationship with the postpartum mothers to stand by with them and guide them how to face the new challenges in their motherhood; investigating boundaries upon different working situations: asserting self-love through limits; applying positive affirmation and positive mindset to cope with practical problems/difficulties encountered. This would be a new beginning for the mother and the whole family to leap over and to have a new chapter for the family to welcome a newborn baby.

4.1 Prevalence of Anam Caras ("Soul friends") in implementing "Zouyue"

Every participant in the study said that they had at least one Aman Cara in mind. They received good Anam Cara care and love from their own mothers (alive or deceased). They expressed that, if they got along well with the postpartum mother or the family, an anam cara relationship would gradually develop, providing a close friend to guide and help the participant to adapt the "Zouyue" in developing mutual openness, trust, and recognition of each other's inner life, vulnerability and transformation while staying with the family. Also, an experienced nanny can influence the grandparents' mindset and thoughts on how to fulfill these responsibilities for assisting their daughters or daughters-in-law to go through this period smoothly.

The nannies/grandmothers participating in this Case Study each identified a specific context (Brezillon, P. and Pomerol J-C. (1999) in which it had been important for her to be able to decide to say "Yes" to the decision on offering the companionship with postpartum mothers during the confinement period. Those nannies shared that they had job satisfaction and gained valuable experience each time for developing their possessions and skill sets as well as their emotion or attitude had been upgraded. This led them to be confident in taking care of several types of family with multiple requirements to enhance their understanding of the mothers and babies' situations. Meanwhile, the grandmothers expressed that making decisions for this responsibility were not easy as they needed to consider their health condition and emotional adaptability when taking up a regular duty on each day for their daughters or daughters-in-law at their home. They shared their own feelings about the outcomes of saying "Yes" were sustained over time with comprehensive support and encouraged by having help from an Anam Cara.

All participants expressed that they would try their best to schedule routine duties for the postpartum mother and to work out any solutions highly based on the mother's instant condition and her desire, goal or preference. They emphasise the importance of "Good Enough" (Winnicott, following March and Olsen's (2013) Logic of Appropriateness to fit the actual situation, so their decisions on every moment was so adaptive, but with a basic concept of Chinese Traditional customs and the application of modern hygiene requirements. This shows they were making good-enough decisions aiming at finding a workable path through the beautiful, exhausting chaos of the postpartum period, but grounding it in real human limits.

4.2 The helper as her own "Anam Cara" compared to the helper as the "Anam Cara" for a postpartum mother

The interviewees shared that they faced several constraints when trying to act as their own Anam Cara. These constraints were time, energy, authority, emotions and how they worked around them in a bounded-rational, "good-enough" way to assist the mother to adapt into the changes in the family. Common constraints and workarounds were as follows:-

1. Physical limits and body pain, quotes from their sharing:-

- "Prolonged standing, frequent holding of the baby, and getting up at night—my back and waist really struggle to keep up. What should I do? I always use the most practical tools changing table at the right height, a nursing pillow, and a pull cart for grocery shopping. I never carry heavy items by herself. Also, I schedule regular bone-setting and massage sessions. This isn't a luxury, it's essential 'maintenance.'

This showed that she could not maximise care by sheer willpower; she was satisfied by using tools, rest, and treatment to keep her body good enough to continue working. Her own voice reminds her to take good care of herself after work.

2. Emotional capacity and breakdowns

There might be some mother's emotional crisis that happened; however, the helper was not a therapist, quotes from their sharing:-

- A mother shouts, "I can't take it anymore! You take him away!" and collapses in tears. How could a helper respond within her role in this situation?
- "Please take the baby to the living room first. I'll stay here with her."
- She sits on the floor beside the mother, offers tissues, and says: "Did you just feel completely drained, like nothing you did was right? That feeling must have been terrifying."
- Then proposes a concrete, feasible plan: "Tonight, I'll take care of the baby. You get a full night's sleep. Whatever happens, we can deal with it after you wake up."

In this case, she could not remove all stress from the mother herself, so she reduced the pressure to a manageable level, by separating baby for baby's safety, ensuring one night of real sleep for the mother.

3. Knowledge limits and medical boundaries

The helper is not a doctor so she would have incomplete information, they recognise the limit of their expertise and use simple decision rules (if no improvement/unusual signs, please escalate) instead of trying to optimise alone. Quotes from their sharing are as below:-

- "I haven't seen this [rash] before, and I don't want to guess."
- "Look, the jaundice readings haven't dropped in two days. Let's not wait—tomorrow we should go to the health center or see a doctor, just to be sure."
- "This is mastitis and requires immediate medical attention... Let's see a doctor now—no delay."

4. Time and energy limits

When exhausted, the helper yet work must continue till the work is completed. The helper cannot remove the night work (if they take night shift), but they try to reframe the meaning to keep going within her energy limits.

- "When I'm holding a crying baby at 3 a.m., back aching and eyelids heavy..."
- "Seeing mothers have been recovered with quiet and peaceful status which is encouraging. "I'm not just 'using myself up'; I'm investing in a family's long-term happiness."

5. Discussion

Our findings show that helpers and families face real constraints—physical, emotional, relational, and professional—and they overcome them not by perfect solutions, but by practical tools, small rules, escalation to professionals, stepping back from conflict, and reframing their work,

5.1 "Keep Going – saying Yes": enhancing the helper's role with inner values

What keeps a caregiver like this going is a mix of meaning, inner values, and small "rewarding" moments that make the emotional cost feel worthwhile. The interviewees commented that they would like to support the mother and newborn baby with heart and love. Once she has accepted this

identity, it becomes natural to keep offering the same presence to other mothers, even when the details of their problems differ. Those values can be concluded from the sharing of the interviewees as follows:-

- Deep sense of purpose: The helper/grandmother doesn't see herself as just "helping with chores," but as protecting a family at its most fragile time and walking with a woman as she becomes a mother. That vocational meaning makes new rigid cases feel like important work, not just more problems to fix.
- Empathy rooted in her own story: Because the helper/grandmother knew first-hand what fear, pain, and comparison feel like, every new mother's struggle "rings a bell" inside her rather than pushing her away. This recognition creates a hearty connection that motivates her to stand by the mother.

5.2 Having an Anam Cara–style identity

The helper carried an inner picture of herself as a soul-friend / bridge / lighthouse:

- a bridge between confusion and confidence,
- a lighthouse that stays steady in the storm,
- someone who walks *with* the mother instead of standing above her.

In each case the helper sees concrete shifts:

- a mother's eyes changing from "I'm a failure" to "I can do this,"
- a baby who finally settles to sleep,
- a father who starts to help more.

These small successes act like emotional fuel; they show her that her patience and skill genuinely change lives. Thus, they enable growing professional confidence in every demanding situation she manages, whether milk supply, emotions, or in-law tension adds to her experience. Instead of just draining her, challenges gradually build her toolkit, so she feels more able and less afraid when the next complicated case comes. She invests in her own body (rest, tools, treatment) and learns when to hand things over to doctors or family members. This self-protective boundary means she can keep giving over the long term without completely burning out, so she is still willing to meet new families. Together, these elements mean that even when every mother brings a different set of problems, the caregiver's inner stance stays the same: she is there as a steady, compassionate companion, and each new journey deepens both her professional skill and her sense of calling.

5.3 Access to Anam Cara: How to map with postpartum caregiving

Postpartum caregiving is often described in practical terms, like feeding schedules, night duty, and recovery meals. Yet the stories shared by helpers, even the grandmothers, in this study reveal something deeper taking place: a form of companionship that reaches the mother's inner life as much as her body. This depth of presence resonates strongly with the Celtic notion of Anam Cara, the "soul friend" who walks beside another person at a vulnerable threshold of life. In that tradition, Anam Cara listens without judgment, honours the sacredness of the other's fears and hopes, and offers truthful, steady companionship rather than quick fixes. Applied to the postpartum period, this perspective allows caregivers to be seen not merely as helpers who manage tasks, but as trusted companions who support a mother's transformation into her new identity. Through simple, repeated acts by holding a crying baby, sitting quietly beside a sobbing mother, co-reading growth logs to restore her confidence; the helpers provide what might be called soul-level support. Their work quietly embodies an Anam Cara style relationship at home, where professional skill and deep

human presence come together to safeguard both the wellbeing of the newborn baby and the dignity of the mother.

5.4 the Logic of appropriateness, unconditional positive regard and self-love

The logic of appropriateness (March, James G.; Olsen, Johan P., 2011) says people should act according to “What does a person like me do in a situation like this?”. The helpers follow internalised role rules and norms rather than cost-benefit calculations. They can be seen as acting from a relational logic of appropriateness by showing aspects relating to unconditional positive regard (Rogers, C.,1977)

For example:-

- Identity: “I am a soul friend / trusted companion to this mother.”
- Situation: “She is at a vulnerable life threshold.”
- Rule: “A person like me listens deeply, protects her dignity, and stays present, even when it’s tiring.”

Here the helpers are spontaneously interpreting context through norms of deep listening, dignifying the mother’s emotions, and staying present in moments of crisis. At the same time, the helpers deliberate efforts to rest, seek treatment for bodily strain, and set gentle boundaries illustrate a form of self-love that is integral—not antithetical—to this identity, (Bedi 2024) because sustaining an Anam Cara relationship requires extending compassionate regard to one’s own limits as well as to the mother’s vulnerability. Examples are stated as below:-

- “My principle is: Don’t ‘teach,’ but ‘explore together.’”
- “I’ll walk with you, learn with you, and face it all with you. My experience is your map, but the ones walking this path are you and your baby.”
- “When the baby couldn’t fall asleep and kept crying nonstop, it was really unsettling. As grandparents, only by staying patient and committed could we eventually soothe the baby to sleep.”
- “I see myself as a bridge... My responsibility is to guide her safely and steadily across.”
- “I don’t say ‘You’re overthinking’ or ‘You need to stay positive for the baby.’ Instead, I sit close, pass her a tissue, and say: ‘I know you’re exhausted...it’s okay to cry. I’m here with you.’”
- “It’s like my mother being there with me while I was in my own confinement period which was 30 years ago”
- “As a Christian, my faith gives me reliance on God’s support. Additionally, what keeps me going is the memory of my mother, because she cared for me in the same way during my own postpartum period. Now, seeing me step into her role from heaven, she would surely be very happy—and I won’t let her down.”

Self-love is defined as a balanced stance of self-kindness, acceptance, and care for one’s own physical and psychological needs, not selfishness. Celtic writers note that an Anam Cara “accepts you as you truly are”(and helps you awaken your own inner light O’Doghue, 2022; Simpson 2021). To make this kind of friendship, a person must gradually recognise their own worth; to offer it sustainably, a helper must also respect their own limits. The interviewees pointed out that they used tools, took rest when the baby slept, and sought massage or treatment for their back, set gentle boundaries (e.g., asking fathers to help, recommending seeing a doctor), reframe their work as “investing in a family’s long term happiness,” which gives meaning instead of pure self-sacrifice. That means, healthy self-love is consistent with Anam Cara: it is what allows a helper to remain a soul friend without burning out, holding both the mother’s soul and their own with compassion. Each reflects an implicit rule: "as a caregiver / soul friend, my appropriate response is to walk with, to be patient, to listen and guide, not to blame or withdraw". Examples are stated as below:-

- “Tonight, I’ll take care of the baby. You take one of the sleeping pills the doctor prescribed and get a full night’s sleep.” (protecting the mother’s rest while also planning workload realistically)
- “I learned to step back, shifting from ‘Let me do it’ to ‘Shall we try together?’ I came to understand that my worth lies not in making a family dependent on me, but in helping them reach a place where they no longer need me.”

These expressions show self-love resulting from reflective boundary setting and restorative care, which allows them to sustain an Anam Cara–style, soul friend presence rather than collapsing under emotional and physical overload. Knowing that an Anam Cara accepted them “no matter what” gave participants the courage to stay true to themselves.

5.5 Asserting companionship between mothers and helpers

Celtic Anam Cara principles can shape postpartum care into a deeper, more healing of the inner life. The soul and its inner landscape are precious and deserve reverence. The helper treats the mother’s emotions, tears, anger, and fears as meaningful, not as “overreaction” to be fixed and they would ask about the mother’s feelings and identity (“How are you inside?”), not only about the baby’s feeding and sleep. They offer steady physical and emotional presence, even when no quick fix exists, during the confinement period which means more than solutions or advice. “You’re not alone; I’m here with you,” before giving instructions, would be a workable solution when the mother feels unpleasant.

The Anam Cara relationship is free of pretense and harsh judgment; each person is seen as inherently worthy (Simpson, R, 2020). The helper avoids blaming (“You’re too emotional,” “You’re not trying hard enough with breastfeeding”) and instead validates the mother’s struggle. Using language like “Let’s try together” instead of “You should...” and respecting the family’s values while gently sharing up-to-date knowledge. This is a kind of way to show non-judgmental and mutual respect. Walking with, not leading from above, the mother and the helper are a guide and companion relationship offering expertise but honouring the mother as making the ultimate decision for her child. The helpers can co-create routines, keep shared logs, review data together, and keep saying “My experience is a map, but this journey belongs to you and your baby.”

Healing through connection and blessing, the helper consciously becomes a source of calm, hope, and encouragement, helping the mother see her own strength and goodness as a parent. The helper should highlight the mother’s successes . Examples mentioned by the interviewees are listed below:-

- “Your baby’s weight gain is your achievement”, to celebrate small milestones, and to leave the family more confident and bonded than before.
- “Shall we try together?”, “I’ll walk with you, learn with you, and face it all with you.”). This mirrors Anam Cara as a spiritual companion on a shared journey, rather than a one-way service provider.
- “I need to look into this too” and suggesting calling nurses or checking reliable sources together. The relationship is marked by truthfulness and the absence of pretense, where both people can be real and vulnerable.

Celtic writers describe Anam Cara as a source of blessing that shapes a person’s life far beyond the moments spent together. Through deep listening, shared decision-making, and honest, non-judgmental presence, postpartum caregivers can become Anam Cara - soul-friends who quietly bless a mother’s journey into her new identity.

5.6 Shared vulnerability and mutual transformation

In Celtic thought, Anam Cara relationships are not "one perfect person fixing another", but two lives enhanced by the encounter. The helpers/grandmothers shared that they acted “like a mirror,” showing a stronger, more resilient self, and that each family helps them grow in patience, empathy, and boundaries. This mutual transformation is very Anam Cara in spirit. Just ordinary acts as

sacred gestures can comfort the persons interacting with the moment, the helper/grandmothers do ordinary tasks brewing soup, adjusting a feeding position, tracking diapers, sitting beside a crying mother, into quiet rituals of protection and affirmation. This interaction becomes more like daily liturgy than mere chores.

Anam Cara friendship stretches across time: past wounds, present support, and future hope are all held together. The helper/grandparent holds a “future picture” of the mother one or two months later - calm, confident, at peace, and let this guide how they act at present. They also hold memories of their own mothers or grandmothers as inner “lighthouses”. This weaving of past, present, and hoped-for future is close to Celtic ways of seeing relationship. The Celtic tradition places weight on blessing and naming (O’ Donoghue, J, 2022), as words that call out to someone’s goodness. The helpers repeatedly named the mother’s strengths (“This weight gain is your achievement,” “You’ve been doing great”), witness her transformation, and leave her with a stronger sense of identity. That is a form of everyday blessing.

An Anam Cara helps someone remember that they belong, that they are not alone in the world. The helpers frame their presence as joining a “three-generation” bond, helping the parents and grandparents cooperate, and integrating themselves as “one of us” in the household, not just a temporary worker. This restores a sense of relational belonging, which fits the Celtic communal emphasis rather than isolation.

5.7 Positive Affirmation: Replacing Rumination with Self-Compassion

Positive Affirmation means using kind, realistic affirmations, within a soul-friend style relationship, to help the mother move from endless negative self-talk to a more forgiving, supportive way of seeing herself as a new mother. Sometime, the mothers do have emotional upset about what she cannot do for the babies, the people around her may also feel confused and frustrated if they could not do anything in such a short period of time. The helpers should use kind, realistic affirmations - within a soul-friend style relationship stop the mother attacking herself in her thoughts and start speaking to herself with kindness - like a wise, gentle soul-friend would do. Rumination increases anxiety and shame and shuts down her confidence. Rumination commonly happens when the mother keeps replaying negative thoughts. Examples mentioned by the interviewees are listed below:-

- “I’m a failure; I couldn’t breastfeed properly.”
- “Other mums cope better than me.”
- “I’m ruining my baby.”

The interviewed helpers made short, truthful statements that counter those harsh thoughts are important and the wording used should focus on mothers’ strengths, for example:

- “I am learning to care for my baby, step by step.”
- “Needing help does not mean I’m weak; it means I care.”
- “My baby is loved and safe with me.”

In this way, the helpers were able to sustain self-compassion by treating the mother in the way she would treat a close friend by recognising that struggle is normal, allowing herself rest and imperfection and speaking to herself in a warm, supportive tone instead of blaming.

5.8 Saying “YES”: initiation an inspired Companionship

The helpers took up the role of "taking care the mother in a family which is not just for practical help ", as well as accompanying the mother through fear, self-doubt, and identity change, n echoing

the Anam Cara “soul-friend” who walks alongside another in their inner journey. The helpers often absorbed intense emotions: mothers’ tears, anger, marital tension, and grandparents’ worries, while trying to stay calm and supportive. This “emotional holding”(Winnicott, D, 2005) can lead to compassion fatigue or burnout if there is no space for their own processing and rest. Even for some struggles encountered by the grandparents who took on the responsibilities of taking care of the newborn baby or a one-year-old child, there may be some inconsistencies in the way of guiding the little child, for example:

- “When the baby was almost one year old, the mother wanted to wean him off the pacifier. He refused and cried loudly. As grandparents, we found it hard to bear and sometimes had minor disagreements with our daughter-in-law, which left us feeling upset”.
- "Unexpected situations might arise, like when my daughter-in-law told me that two or three of her friends will be coming over for dinner today, and we immediately went grocery shopping and prepared the meal. As a result, we can be busy from morning till night, but she still made complaints, I think that she was feeling pretty cooped up since she could not go out for a whole month and really wanted to chat with friends."

When helpers position themselves as bridges between generations, they can be pulled into family conflicts (e.g., parenting disagreements between elders and parents) and feel pressured to take sides rather than remain neutral. So, in saying “YES” to a family, the helper must understand different contexts may apply different solutions, this would gradually inspire the young father and mother of the newborn baby with a strong companionship. The helpers are seen as emotional anchors, they may feel they must always be patient, wise, and composed, leaving no room to show their own vulnerability or ask for help. The anam cara bridges this gap by embodying both connection and differentiation: not demanding conformity but instead inviting congruence. The interviewees mentioned that seeing the relationship with the family as a kind of blessing and a legacy of love and guardianship. Celtic writers describe Anam Cara as a source of blessing that shapes a person’s life far beyond the moments spent together.

Here is a summary table of the happiness and difficulties described by the interviewed helpers/ grandmothers expressed the profound joy and meaning are tightly interwoven with significant emotional, physical, and boundary-related challenges.

Aspects	Happiness / Fulfilment	Difficulties / Strain
Meaning of work	Witnessing a new life and a new family “settle into a rhythm”; feeling the work is incomparable to any other job because it supports a family at its most fragile beginning.	Feeling mentally and physically drained; needing to stay alert day and night and sometimes questioning their own ability or doubting themselves.
Relationship with mother	Seeing a mother change from fear and self-blame to confidence (“I can do this too!”); being called an emotional anchor and trusted companion.	Holding mothers’ intense emotions, breakdowns, and tears; being present during crises (e.g., “I can’t take it anymore”) and absorbing that emotional weight.
Relationship with baby	Joy when babies grow well, relax in their arms, smile, sleep peacefully, and later call them “Auntie.”	Physical strain from prolonged standing, lifting, night feeds, and soothing unsettled babies; back and waist pain and severe fatigue.

Professional identity	Feeling proud to turn empathy and personal experience into a professional skill; confirming their own value as someone who can tangibly improve a family's life.	Pressure to "know what to do"; needing to admit "I don't know" and seek outside advice, which can feel risky for a newcomer.
Long-term bonds	Ongoing contact with families; watching children they once cared for grow, walk, and thrive; sensing a legacy of love and guardianship across generations.	Difficulty letting go at the end of a case; risk of blurred boundaries when treated "like family," making it hard to rest, say no, or end involvement.
Inner growth	Discovering unexpected resilience; learning the balance between giving and boundaries; feeling like a "bridge" or "lighthouse" for others and part of an Anam Cara-style companionship.	Living with constant responsibility; fear of making mistakes with newborn health or missing warning signs, which adds invisible stress.

Several expressions clearly show strong job satisfaction among the helpers/grandmothers:-

- "The sense of accomplishment that comes from helping a new life and a new family find their rhythm is incomparable to any other work."
- "These are lasting / enduring joys" (about keeping in touch, being called "Auntie," and watching babies grow).
- "I feel comforted knowing I've successfully built a good relationship with my grandchildren."
- "My presence can tangibly, warmly make another person's life better."
- "That 'I can do this' look in her eyes—that's my greatest reward."
- "Put simply, my greatest joy is witnessing a woman transform from a 'girl' into a 'mother'."
- "I feel comforted knowing I've successfully built a good relationship with my grandchildren. The cooperation between grandparents is important—it's about three generations connected heart-to-heart."
- The greatest joy is that we were able to live together harmoniously and happily for four months without any conflicts, leaving behind beautiful memories. That was what I hoped for, and it's what we achieved.

5.9. Interpretations of the challenges faced by the interviewed helpers and grandmothers

The challenges faced by the helpers/grandmothers truly reflected that they were deeply involved in the whole transition of the postpartum mothers not only for physical recovery as well to give care and strength to guide the mothers to be transformed for the next lifelong journey. Every moment staying with the mothers may require instant feedback and decision making even in a minor process or difficult tasks, whether any barriers would drive them to quit from the responsibility. It highly depends on each case subject to each family ties and how the helper can make a good observation to adjust their work rhythm and procedures to make decisions, whatever a straight-forward or difficult decision. The following six important aspects are shown below:-

a) Meaning of work - Care as sacred vocation

They said this work was "incomparable to any other job" and speak of supporting a family at its most fragile beginning. This mirrors Anam Cara as more than a role; it is a vocation of walking with another soul through a threshold moment, not just a service.

b) Relationship with mother - Soul-level companionship

Their biggest joy was witnessing the postpartum mother's inner transformation: from fear and self-blame to confidence and peace. In Celtic terms, an Anam Cara helps someone "remember" their own goodness and inner strength, exactly like helpers using logs, gentle words, and presence to restore the mother's sense of self.

c) Relationship with baby - Blessing through embodied presence

Helpers described babies relaxing, sleeping in their arms, and later calling them “Auntie.”. This fits the Anam Cara idea that love is carried in small, embodied gestures—holding, soothing, and staying through the night become quiet blessings, not just tasks.

d) Professional identity and honesty - Truthful, non-pretending friendship

They emphasised admitting “I don’t know”, checking with nurses, and learning together with parents. An Anam Cara relationship values truth and humility over status, allowing both sides to be vulnerable and real rather than pretending to be in control.

e) Long-term bonds - Enduring Anam Cara ties

Helpers would like to stay connected, watch children grow, and speak of a legacy of love and guardianship across generations. Celtic writers describe Anam Cara friendships as enduring connections that continue to bless a lifelong life after the shared time has passed, exactly what these ongoing relationships show.

f) Inner growth and strain - Two-way transformation

They discovered unexpected resilience and felt emotional and physical costs. The relationship changes both mother and helper. In Anam Cara theology, true soul-friendship is mutual: each life is deepened and wounded-yet-enlarged by the bond, not a one-way “helper–helped” dynamic.

6. Conclusion

The results from our case study investigation confirm that Anam Cara provides a deeply functional framework for emotional sustainability and the ability to sustain complex decisions, particularly in learning to say "Yes". Anam Caras (soul friends) successfully created a bridge between mothers and helpers to have companionship and positive affirmation. We found that all our participants had established and benefitted from interacting with anam caras. The benefits included: supportive anam cara relationships as setting boundaries: asserting self-love through limits; positive affirmation; shared vulnerability and mutual transformation, replacing rumination with self-compassion; saying “Yes” as an Inspired Companionship that opened through exaptation into a new context (Gallego and Chavez 2020) because of an anam caras’ supportive counselling activity.

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