

Our vision is a world where all care homes are great places to live, die, visit and work.

My Home Life aims to promote and enhance quality of life for older people living and dying in care homes, and for those visiting and working in them. This third briefing sets out the foundations of My Home Life, namely **Developing best practice together**, **Focusing on relationships**, **Being appreciative**, and **Having caring conversations**, and describes how they work together to support quality of life in care homes.

## Developing best practice together

Research on what older people want and what works in care homes identifies eight important themes<sup>1</sup>. The first three themes are focused on how to individualise and personalise care (Personalisation themes). The next three themes are concerned with how to support people navigate through the journey of care (Navigation themes). The last two themes are aimed at managers to help staff put the other six themes into practice (Transformation themes).

### Personalisation themes

1. Maintaining identity (*See who I am!*)
2. Sharing decision-making (*Involve me!*)
3. Creating community (*Connect with me!*)

### Navigation themes

4. Managing transitions (*Support me to adapt!*)
5. Improving health and healthcare (*Enhance my well-being!*)
6. Supporting good end-of-life (*Be with and support me to the end!*)

### Transformation themes

7. Promoting a positive culture (*Enable me to flourish!*)
8. Keeping workforce fit for purpose (*Help me to learn!*)

These evidence-based themes are derived from research on quality of life, quality of care, and quality of management. Importantly they integrate learning from health, social care and housing.

## Focusing on relationships

The My Home Life Vision is underpinned by Relationship-Centred Care<sup>2</sup> and the Senses Framework<sup>3</sup>, which is a framework for improving care for older people through promoting positive relationships. It highlights the importance of not only meeting the needs of residents, but also, addressing the needs of relatives/friends who visit and staff who work in care homes. To achieve good relationships and quality of life for all in this context, it suggests that we need to consider what gives each individual a sense of security (feel safe), belonging (feel part of things), continuity (make connections between past, present and future), purpose (have goals), achievement (moving towards their goals) and significance (matter as a person). Paying attention to these senses can help us identify the individual needs and personal outcomes for residents, relatives and staff.

In My Home Life we use the Senses Framework to help make visible the contribution that staff, residents and relatives can make to the creation of a home-like environment, directly challenging the notion of persons as either passive recipients or providers of care. Instead, we emphasise reciprocity and the need to create a care home culture in which all participants are meaningfully involved. This understanding is more far reaching than some notions of 'person-centred care' that focus (only) on the needs of the care recipient or the 'practitioner–patient' relationship.

1 NCHRD Forum (2007) *My Home Life: Quality of life in care homes – Literature review*, Help the Aged, London (currently being updated).

2 Tresolini, CP and the Pew-Fetzer Task Force. *Health Professions Education and Relationship-centered Care*. San Francisco, CA: Pew Health Professions Commission, 1994.

3 Nolan, M., Brown, J., Davies, S., Nolan, J. and J. Keady. (2006). *The Senses Framework: Improving care for older people through a relationship-centred approach*. University of Sheffield. ISBN 1-902411-44-7.



The need for positive relationships of course are not confined to work and life within the care home setting itself. For quality of life to be sustained, positive relationships are also important between care homes and their local community and the wider health and social care system. By focusing attention on relationships in everyday life and work, we find that people come to appreciate that they are part of a larger whole and see their part within it.

### Being appreciative

Opening up new ideas of what might be possible, trying things out, and valuing the contributions that each person might make requires a reflexive, appreciative and collaborative approach. With this in mind, My Home Life draws on Appreciative Inquiry<sup>4</sup> which offers a model for enacting and embedding positive change in practice, comprising four components: Discover (What is working well?), Envision (How would you like things to be?), Co-Create (How can we work together to make it happen?) and Embed (What can we do together to make it happen more of the time?).

The principles of Appreciative Inquiry include:

- What we believe to be true determines what we do
- How we talk influences how we and others act
- Storytelling is a key part of everyday life
- What we do today is guided by our image of the future
- Change is fostered through having positive relationships

In *My Home Life* we have found that these principles are equally applicable, whether taking forward a large-scale development or working with individuals in the moment.

The notion of being 'appreciative' has sometimes been misunderstood as deflecting attention from difficulties or harsh realities. This is not the case. Instead it works with and for people to change practice in a less threatening way, by focusing on what is currently working well and what more needs to be done to make it even better. It values all forms of knowledge and crucially, includes connecting with and exploring what

others value, respecting hidden stories of experience and personal narratives, demonstrating a sensitivity to feelings<sup>4</sup>. As a process for supporting change, it can be transformational through establishing trust, authentic connection and a different quality of learning.

### Having caring conversations

Developing best practice together, focusing on relationships and being appreciative depends on meaningful dialogue and interaction. The Caring Conversations<sup>5</sup> framework enables this to happen by enhancing the way we engage with each other. The framework suggests that, in order to deliver compassionate and dignified care, people need to Be Courageous, Connect Emotionally, Be Curious, Collaborate, Consider Other Perspectives, Compromise and Celebrate.

Within My Home Life we have found that the framework helps to encourage and sustain genuine curiosity for ourselves and others, deepen inquiry, explore values, articulate tacit knowledge, and acknowledge and express emotion without dispute or judgement. It also supports a different attitude to risk-taking and devising new approaches to problems. Ultimately, it enables people to acknowledge achievements, encourage better listening and so make room for more contributions to enhance quality of life for all.

### Conclusion

**Developing best practice together, Focusing on relationships, Being appreciative, and Having caring conversations** have proved effective in initiating positive culture change in care homes in challenging times. The challenges that care homes face, as described in our last briefing, are shared by many others working in related areas of professional practice. The foundational components of My Home Life may therefore find wider application in enabling positive public service reform.

4 Reed, J (2007) *Appreciative Inquiry. Research for Change*, London: Sage.

5 Dewar B and Nolan M (2013) Caring about caring: Developing a model to implement compassionate relationship centred care in an older people care setting, *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 50(9):1247-58.

