

The bulletin for care home staff

# My home life

Issue 11

Keeping Workforce Fit for Purpose

Special issue for  
**CARE HOME  
MANAGERS!**



**Supporting your staff to  
deliver a shared vision**

Education & Training of your workforce

# This is My home life

**My Home Life** is a UK-wide initiative aimed at promoting quality of life for those living, dying, visiting and working in care homes for older people, through relationship-centred care and evidence-based practice.

There are eight evidence-based themes **for My Home Life**

1. Maintaining identity
2. Sharing decision-making
3. Creating community
4. Managing transitions
5. Improving health and healthcare
6. Supporting good end-of-life
7. Promoting a positive culture
8. Keeping workforce fit for purpose

The first three themes are focused on how you approach and **personalise** care. The next three themes are concerned with how you help **navigate** residents and relatives through the journey of care. The last two themes are aimed at managers to help them support their staff, put the other six themes into practice and thus transform care.

This guide is being distributed to 18,000 care homes on behalf of My Home Life through Care Management Matters.

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## New DVD release!



Accompanying this month's bulletin is a DVD with **My Home Life's** latest films about life in care. It contains two collections of films produced for the Department of Health, in conjunction with Let's Respect and Dementia UK. The films look at the challenges of dementia and other mental health issues in residential care.

The 'Living With Dementia' films explore what it is like to live alongside dementia, and demonstrates the importance of relationships in successful care. It follows three real-life stories looking at the experiences of a young carer, two relatives and a resident. The films are aimed at the general public, as well as those working in the care sector.

The 'Experiences of...' series of films concentrate on the challenges residents face when suffering from dementia, delirium and depression. With powerful interviews from residents, relatives and staff, they aim to help carers better understand and care for residents experiencing mental health problems

We hope you enjoy the DVD and that these films serve as a tool to help staff and relatives better support their residents and loved ones.

For training purposes, there has been a workbook that accompanies the films. Both the films and the workbook are available online at [www.myhomelife.org.uk/dementia](http://www.myhomelife.org.uk/dementia).



## Introduction

In the last bulletin, we looked at driving forward change in your care home. Here we throw the spotlight on your staff. Do they have the skills to meet your residents' needs?

## How to make training work

Researchers at Sheffield University have identified that training on its own is not enough to make real change. Successful training relies on planning, offering time for reflection and feedback, and time to practice skills. But most importantly, learning should be a valued part of the care home culture. Staff should be actively encouraged to take learning forward in their daily work.

For training to work, staff must recognise the need for it. They must believe that training will result in change, and they must be able to see the benefits for themselves. A successful

training programme should involve staff in its design, content and delivery.

## Top tips

- Training should allow your staff to talk about themselves and their feelings about their work, without fear of being criticised.
- Engage everyone in training, not just your care staff. This will nurture a feeling of community and a shared sense of purpose
- The Senses Framework is a great tool for engaging residents, relatives and staff about their own needs and aspirations: [www.myhomelife.org.uk](http://www.myhomelife.org.uk)
- Think about your own development needs. Make sure you get the right support to help you lead the care home

# ‘Why do my staff never take the initiative?’



**Leadership is not about your team simply following your instruction, it is about supporting and developing leadership within your staff group. But how do you help your staff to make their own decisions and follow their own initiative? Here, Maria Marsden, from Bakewell Cottage Nursing Home, talks frankly about her challenges.**

‘In the past I would rush around being ‘mum’ to everyone – sorting out their problems, telling them what to do, and wondering why they weren’t doing it. I spent all my time checking and double-checking. It was exhausting. Then I realised that part of the problem was me! I was spending much of my time controlling my staff, giving them commands. No wonder they appeared so passive and task-focused.

Now, my management style is very different. If staff come to me with a problem, I try to help them develop a solution themselves. I get them to learn from problems or issues that have arisen, and to think for themselves. I try to model how I want them to work with

- residents – listening, giving time, asking open questions, creating relationships. And I praise them for the little things that count, particularly the special connections they make with residents.
- It does take time initially to do this. Staff will ask permission to sit with residents to talk. I answer ‘Why do you think that I might say no?’. After a while, staff grow in confidence and they need less support. They know they will be backed up if they make occasional mistakes, and they know they can come and talk freely about how they feel about their work. Most importantly, they begin to realise that, in this home, the relationships with residents is valued far more than ‘doing tasks’.
- Now, my staff seem a lot more relaxed and more connected to the residents. As a workforce they are definitely more confident. If you have a happier staff, that happiness cascades down. There’s a better atmosphere and, for me, that means less chasing around after them!



## The power of open questions

Never underestimate the importance of good communication. If staff are not engaging with you, it might say as much about your ability to communicate as it does about your staff.

Open questions are a great way to start a discussion. Using 'What', 'Who', 'Why', 'Where', 'When' and 'How', is generally a good way to get staff thinking.

### Try asking

**What would a good outcome look like?**

**Who should be involved in making this happen?**

**Why do you think that this would work?**

**Where should we best start?**

**When's the right time?**

**How do you feel about making this happen?**

**What do you believe could happen next?**

Remember, there is no point in asking an open question if you are unwilling to listen to the answer.

## Talk is work!

Increasingly, care homes are recognising the value of providing high quality time for their staff to talk about their work, to help them feel valued, supported and acknowledged. As **Morag Vaughan** of Holbrook Hall argues, staff are the most important resource and crucial to the care home's reputation.

"Staff meetings used to feel like something I had to do. Staff felt I had an agenda and I was dragging them along, and to an extent, I was! Now, we are going back to basics. Sometimes, you get so bogged down in other things you forget the importance of nurturing staff.

The My Home Life programme introduced me to the concept of 'Action Learning.' This recognises that individuals learn best when they learn with and from each other, by working on real problems and reflecting on their own experiences.

It's a simple formula. Each individual is given uninterrupted time to air an issue and consider appropriate solutions, while colleagues support through active listening and helpful, open questioning.

I decided to bring an 'Action Learning' style to our team meetings. It wasn't easy as some staff felt uncomfortable speaking out, and others found it difficult not to interrupt. But we persevered and gradually it became less awkward. Staff began to take more responsibility for their problems and ownership of solutions, which were often surprisingly imaginative.

We have dealt with all sorts of topics in this way – from laundry labelling to improving our end-of-life care. Our meetings now are much more positive, productive and enjoyable. And my role has changed from a problem-solver and to a facilitator, which is less stressful and far more rewarding."

# How am I doing?

## Reflecting upon your own practice

### 1. As you walk into the care home lounge, do your staff...

- a) carry on with tasks, not speaking to anyone?
- b) immediately get up from their seats and try to look busy even if they have been talking to residents?
- c) acknowledge you but continue their conversations with residents?

### 2. Staff want to talk to you but it's a busy time, do you...

- a) race busily past them, ignoring their request?
- b) feel irritated with them for not just getting on with their job?
- c) welcome the opportunity to talk and negotiate a specific time to give them your full undivided attention?

### 3) You want to improve the quality of practice, do you...

- a) focus on the problems and tell staff what needs to change?
- b) ask residents, relatives and staff to come to a meeting to discuss new ways of working?
- c) actively get out of the office, catch people doing things right and praise them immediately and specifically for it?

### 4) Staff want to try out a new idea, do you...

- a) consider it not their place to make suggestions for change?
- b) worry in case something goes wrong, so best just to keep things as they are?
- c) listen attentively, help them assess the risk and encourage them to try it out, even if you think it might not be the best idea?

### 5) You are running your team meeting, do you...

- a) avoid thinking about the meeting till the last minute then quickly throw together an agenda of problems that you want to raise?
- b) use the meeting to discuss with staff new policies and procedures?
- c) prepare a meeting structure which supports staff to create the agenda and raise issues, without fear of criticism?

### 6) On a normal day at work, are you....

- a) tearing your hair out with stress, feeling cross and burnt out?
- b) going to work to do a job and then go home?
- c) role modelling to others how you would like relationships to be in the care home?

## How did you rate?

Did you score mainly A's, B's or C's? Does this say something about your leadership style? Would you wish to change in any way?

Our management and leadership style clearly needs to be flexible to each and every situation. There may be times when it is appropriate for managers to enforce standards and policies, while at others, a more enabling approach is probably better for you, your staff and ultimately your residents and relatives.

Learn to reflect on your strengths and weaknesses, be open to new ways of working and encourage your staff to do the same.

# Meeting the skills challenge



**There is no doubt that the role and skills required of care home staff has changed over time. Residents now are more physically and mentally frail, and may have a range of health and social-care needs. These might include any combination of dementia, depression, arthritis, heart disease, incontinence, sensory impairment and social isolation. Many residents will also be approaching their end of life.**

How do we ensure that our staff have the skills to respond to or prevent health

- problems? How can we pick up on social, emotional and psychological problems that need referral to others?
- Equipping people with the necessary skills to respond to health and social care problems is a challenge. However, care homes are rising to that challenge. They are playing a hugely valuable role in responding to the changing needs of residents - both through the right training and through creating a good learning atmosphere in which residents, relatives and staff can flourish.

## TOP TEN TIPS!

# Keeping Your Staff Fit for Purpose

### 1. Consider your own leadership training and support needs

The role of the care home manager is key to creating the right atmosphere for residents, relatives and staff to flourish.

### 2. Help your staff take the initiative

Too often we instruct our staff on what to do, rather than supporting them to come up with their own solutions. Staff meetings and individual supervision can be useful catalysts for more thoughtful and reflective practice.

### 3. Be a role model

Staff look to managers to communicate the ethos and culture. Get out of the office as often as you can and role model best practice.

### 4. Develop your communication skills

Managers need to inspire, enthuse and communicate accurately. All staff need to know what is expected of them and to receive constructive feedback on their work.

### 5. Provide training in response to residents' needs

Consider your residents' and relatives' health and social care needs. Check your staff have the right knowledge, skills and attitudes to meet those needs. If not, put plans in place.

### 6. Encourage curiosity

People need to understand why things are done the way they are. A good learning organisation is open to challenge and values questions from residents, relatives and staff.

### 7. Recognise the natural leaders within your organisation

Encourage residents, relatives and staff to share their own good ideas and support them to put these into practice. Learning from each other is good for teamwork.

### 8. Accentuate the positive

Too often people are blamed for doing wrong. Try to focus on what is working well in the care home and encourage staff to celebrate and learn from their successes.

### 9. Be open to outside expertise

Get to know the local sources of help and engage them in training and supporting staff, residents and relatives.

### 10. Positive risk-taking

Create an open dialogue about the need to balance risks and rights. Learning on the job from real cases can be the best way to learn.



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