

My Home Life

The bulletin for care home staff

ISSUE 2: Maintaining Identity **Free**

January 2008

**FREE
POSTER**

SEE INSIDE



This is ME!

Tips for maintaining residents' positive identity and well-being

My Home Life

My Home Life is a UK initiative aimed at improving the quality of life of those who are living, dying, visiting and working in care homes for older people.

My Home Life celebrates existing best practice in care homes and promotes care homes as a positive option for older people.

My Home Life, led by Help the Aged, the National Care Forum and City University, is a collaborative programme bringing together organisations that reflect the interests of care home providers, health and social care commissioners, regulators, care home residents and relatives and those interested in education, research and practice development.

My Home Life, a bulletin for care home staff, is distributed to 18,000 care home contacts through *Care Management Matters*. Additional copies can be provided at a cost of £1 per issue (+ 50p towards p&p) from Help the Aged Publishing (tel. 020 7239 1946).

The next issue will be sent out in March 2008 with *Care Management Matters*.

The opinions expressed in this magazine are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Help the Aged or its affiliates.

Programme Director: Julienne Meyer
Managing Editors: Tom Owen, Gill Rowley
Design: Darren Nelson
Produced by Help the Aged Publishing
Copyright © Help the Aged 2007.

My Home Life is supported by an unrestricted grant from



Maintaining identity – the difference that care staff can make



In my work as Vice-President of the Princess Royal Trust for Carers I have seen many people coping with difficult situations in the years before a care home finally became a necessity. More recently I've observed at first hand the excellent care given to my mother-in-law at a care home where the staff have helped her settled into a safe, comfortable environment, despite advancing Alzheimer's.

However, it's the problem of losing individual identity in a communal living situation that concerns us.

Old age can make it more difficult for us to achieve the things that make us feel

positive about ourselves. Loss of health and mobility can make it harder for us to be independent or to do the things we take for granted. The people who were so much a part of our lives may have died or moved away. Sight and hearing loss can make it difficult to engage with the people that can help us communicate who we are.

Unfortunately, care homes can sometimes feel a bit impersonal. There may be a lack of private

space; or fixed routines in the home may limit residents' feeling of choice or control over their lives. However, this doesn't have to be the case. In fact, many care homes are offering the right support to help residents regain a sense of meaning and control in their lives, to pursue interests and to have a valued role, however large or small.

My mother-in-law, for instance, has started one-to-one music lessons, as the staff at the care home had noticed that she benefited so much from the group classes. My husband and I are deeply grateful to all at her care home who, through their care and sensitivity, are continuing to improve her quality of life –

even at 91.

This magazine includes some ideas, tips and practice examples to help promote positive identity among care home residents. As care home staff, your skills and expertise in engagement and supporting residents can make all the difference.

Pam Ferris

'Engaging with residents in a person-centred way can be challenging but also incredibly rewarding'

Need more copies? Download at www.myhomelife.org.uk or call Help the Aged on 020 7239 1946

What is my

This is me!

How would I describe myself? Some people might see me just as a 93-year-old woman, but you'd be surprised the things that we did when we were younger.



In those days we had to make our own entertainment. I've never been one for drinking but I do remember one particular night when we were in the pub. At closing time we wanted to have a sing-song. Friends would say, 'Come back to ours. We won't interfere – we'll just go to bed.' We would take some drinks from the pub, pop it in a taxi, then, because there wasn't enough room in the cab for all of us, we would walk arm in arm to the address we were going. At the house, we'd carry on into the morning dancing and singing.

It was so good and jolly, but there were no 'underground sports' – none of that. We would fetch bacon, eggs and bread from the local dairy, come back and make

breakfast for everyone before going home at 8 in the morning. It was lovely – lovely times. Later my husband and I would go out occasionally to the West End. This picture is of me and Tilly – 58 years I have been friends with her, and she still comes to see me here.

The staff here have realised what sort of life I have lived – not that it's all been about partying! But it's good that they know me. It helps. They come into my room and we talk about things. I do make friends here, other residents too, 'cos that's what life's about. It's them, the staff and residents, and family of course, that keep you going.

Emily Gearon, care home resident

Putting ourselves into residents' shoes

The key thing about this job is that you must have patience. Strangely, when I am in my own home, I am not the most patient of people. Sometimes the slightest thing gets me going. But here, it's the opposite for me.

It's so important to give people enough time to get washed, dressed, to do things at their own pace. And when you give them time, conversations just develop. We chat a lot. We talk about our lives or about things that are going on. That way, we get to

know each other better and that helps me to find ways to support them.

For example, we found out that Mr Phillips loved football. And so now, when it's warm, we go for a kick-about in the park or the garden. We both enjoy it a lot, even if by the next day Mr Phillips seems to have completely forgotten about it. But it's often the simple pleasures that can mean so much. One resident used to be a singer and so we play music that she loves and other

residents gather in the lounge. It brings back memories and gets people talking together.



'My past and future'
'Being a person with a name and n
'The books I read'
'My family'

identity? Who am I?

Not just sitting in front of the TV

What distresses me the most is residents being forced to be stuck in front of a blaring TV against their wishes. Luckily we have an active lounge where people are not just sitting. There are a lot of people coming in, chatting, things going on. It's a busy place where many of the residents thrive.

My main concern, however, are those residents who, because they have no visitors or have significant speech or physical impairments, find it hard to interact socially and so can become very isolated.

While resources for the care home are limited, we have managed to fundraise to recruit a music therapist who has been doing some one-to-one work which has had some very positive results.

Mrs Matthews was of particular concern to us. She had lost her husband and did not appear to be able to grieve. She had become very depressed and low. Through relating to the music, she is now starting to open up and tell stories. We have found out that she has family members who are still alive whom we knew nothing about. The care staff are now exploring this in more detail using a life story approach.

Simply through exploring creative ways to interact with residents, we are finding out things about older people who live here. We found out the reason why one resident got so distressed through Friday lunch – the day we generally serve fish 'n' chips. The fish reminded her

of her late brother, whom she had cared for and for whom she had always bought fish. So now she gets her own special meal of her choice.

The work we do with residents often evokes past memories. We are able to provide a safe and warm place for residents to express themselves verbally or emotionally.

Diane Jureidin, Manager, Acorn Lodge



Not just a room number'

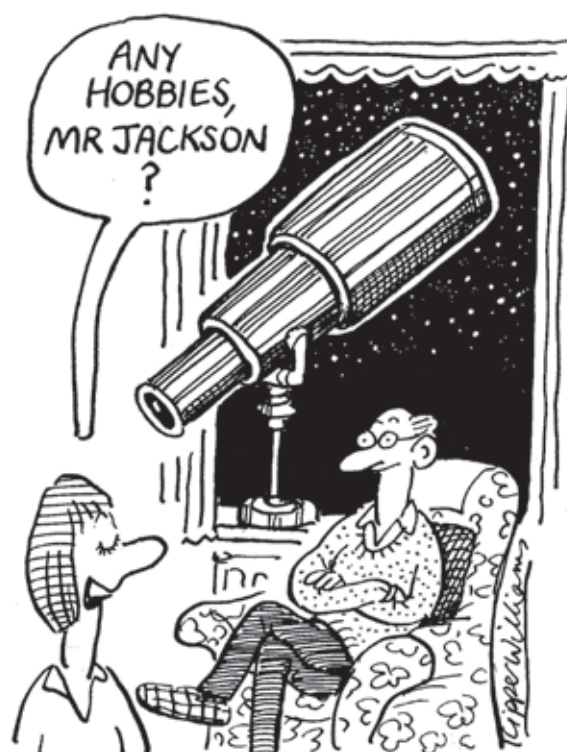
and friends' **'The meals I make'**
'The way I like to dress'

'It's often the simple things that can mean so much'

We need to try to put ourselves into residents' shoes and ask: "How would it feel like for me living here? What would I want? How could I continue to have my own identity in this place?"

If you haven't done this kind of work, you really can't imagine what it's like. After a shift, when I go home, I sometimes sit and reflect back on the day: on the residents, the difficulties that they have experienced in life, and the problems they have now. And I sometimes wish we had a little more time – to talk with them, to take them out, to do what they want to do.

Lawrence Shonibare, care assistant



Tips and ideas from *My Home Life* – North-East London



In partnership with Hackney Community Services, care home staff, relatives and inspectors in North-East London have come together to develop best practice in relation to the theme of ‘maintaining identity’.

Here are a few of the practical ideas already emerging from the network.

- One resident, who used to be a gardener, is supported to go into the garden centre, buy plants and take a major role in looking after the garden of the care home.
- One care home, in addition to using a key-worker system, makes use of co-key workers, who directly support a resident when their main key worker is off-shift.
- Providing small sofas where couples can sit together, offering private times for relatives to spend with residents is so important in helping residents to maintain intimate relationships with their partners.

If your home is in North-East London and you wish to join this local network, let us know and we will put you in touch.

Other ideas from the network

Other ideas include: introducing pets into the home to stimulate resident engagement, holding regular ‘cocktail hours’ for residents, offering music tailored to individual tastes by providing personal/portable music players and headphones, walking groups and use of audiobooks.

Rating your care practice: some useful questions to ask yourself

The person

Who is this person? What has been important to them in their life?

Values

What does their life story tell us about the values they hold?

Strengths

What are the strengths they have developed throughout their life?

Response to current situation

What is their response to the current situation of living in a care home?

What changes have they made to cope with and manage the current situation?

How have they managed at times of loss and change?

How can residents continue to have choice and control over their lives and routines?

How can the resident maintain a level of privacy?

Network

Who are their family and social network? How can they maintain these contacts and continue to be linked to the clubs, activities and places that they used to attend and the interests they pursued?

Perceptions of the future

How do they see the future?

Hopes

What would they like to achieve?

Working in partnership

Can they describe the kind of help they would like?

Adapted from Wells (2005) Biographical and developmental approaches. In H.Heath and R.Watson (eds.) *Older People: assessment for health and social care*. Glasgow:Age Concern

For more ideas, tips, resources and opportunities to talk to other care homes, check out the ‘shared space’ at our website www.myhomelife.org.uk.

NEXT ISSUE:

Helping create community within a care home – send us your tips on helping to engage family, friends, volunteers and the wider community in supporting the quality of life of older people living in care homes.

My Home Life, Help the Aged, 207–221 Pentonville Road, London N1 9UZ

Email: myhomelife@helptheaged.org.uk Website: www.myhomelife.org.uk Tel. 020 7238 1881

Help the Aged is a registered charity no. 272786

10

My Home Life

TIPS

for maintaining residents' identity



1. Person-centred care

Person-centred care is crucial to maintaining positive identity. It involves valuing people and those who care for them; treating people as individuals; looking at the world from the perspective of the individual; challenging stereotypes and providing a positive social environment.

2. Supporting residents' choice and control

Residents should be able to decide how they dress and which items to bring into the home, and have control over personal space. They should feel able to exercise choice and control and be supported to do so through flexible routines and regimes.

3. Offering space for intimacy and privacy

We all need privacy, and this must be respected. Intimacy among loved ones must also be respected.

4. Staff assignment

Consistent staff assignment enables staff and residents to get to know each other. Staff should be able to note the time of day when individuals express themselves best and the activities that stimulate conversation.

5. Biographical work

Biographical work gives staff an insight into what matters to each individual. It can include sharing memories, life stories, oral history or a life review, and can be both therapeutic for the resident and helpful to staff in getting to know residents as individuals.

6. Communication skills

Good communication is essential but may not always be straightforward. It can help to use creative aids such as photographs or personal objects as cues, and to have visitors support interactions. Paying attention to environmental conditions, such as noise, is particularly important for those with sensory impairment.

7. Sustaining friendships and links to the community

Enabling individual residents to maintain contacts with friends and the local community, as well as to develop new relationships with other residents with similar backgrounds or interests, helps to promote positive identity. Supporting residents to visit, write to or telephone others can be helpful.

8. Participating in meaningful activities can be very positive for maintaining identity. But what counts as meaningful depends on each and every resident's interests and capabilities. In the case of organised activities, having the choice of opting out of them is just as important as the activities themselves.

9. Recognising ethnic, cultural and spiritual needs

Exploring with residents their own ethnic, cultural and spiritual needs is part and parcel of person-centred care. Recruiting staff from different ethnic groups to reflect the resident population is also important, along with enabling residents to attend places of worship or religious events outside the care home.

10. Staff support

Staff need to be supported to appreciate the psychosocial aspects of their caring role, be given space for their own reflection, be recognised and valued for the work they do, and be given help to deal with any difficulties.