

My Home Life

The bulletin for care home staff

ISSUE 3: Creating Communities
March 2008 **Free***

**Tips for engaging family, friends
and the wider community to
improve quality of life**

P2

STORY AND ADVICE INSIDE

RELATIVE POWER!
**How well do you know
your relatives?**

P3

TRUE STORY

**FREE
POSTER**

SEE INSIDE



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 May 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



Creating communities –

the difference that care staff can make



Lionel Blair, Chairman of Stage for Age and long-term supporter of Help the Aged, explains

I have sometimes wondered whether older people who are encouraged to treat a care home as if it were their own home can really feel that this is possible. After all, 'home' is a place for family. It is your history, a place of your own, whereas care homes are places where residents, relatives, staff and friends come together with all their stresses and problems, along with their passions, interests and experiences. Care homes can often feel more like communities than homes.

This is not to suggest that this is in any way a bad thing. A good community feeling where residents have relationships with each other, with staff, where friends, family, the local community feel at ease in popping by and contributing their time, has to be a plus: it can help residents to cope with the loss of ties to their communities. When people can come together, supporting each other for the common good, it can spur something new – relationships, interests, energy

and trust. So if you have a family member in a care home, don't forget to visit them.

There is no doubt that opening up the care home to the wider community can take time and effort, but it is worth it. Linking up with external groups and churches, and making use of volunteers are critical in helping to maintain residents' quality of life.

But perhaps the most important relationship within the care home must be the one between residents and the staff working with them. It is these relationships that are at the heart of a positive community. When staff and residents are able to develop real friendships that go beyond the practical care duties, this can make such a difference. After all, when it comes down to it, life is all about positive relationships.

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

Relative power!

Family carers can make a vital contribution, personalising and humanising the life of a resident and re-engaging residents in familiar aspects of their lives and to the world outside. Nurturing such relationships can be resource-intensive but it can make all the difference, as Dennis Norman explains.

My wife Linda is in a care home. I was a lorry driver and she kept things going at home, looking after the boys and sorting out bills etc. In 2002 she suffered severe brain damage. I cared for her at home but it got too much. She couldn't stand and needed a PEG feeder. Eventually she came here. It's been a hard change. I felt so guilty about it but also relieved that I don't have so much pressure on me. Thoughts still come into my head about what we used to do when we were younger.

I visit most days, but seeing Linda in that condition can get me upset. I don't always have much to say – after a while she just seems to stare or close her eyes. So we relatives help each other. A daughter of another resident does Linda's nails and chats with her while I try to help others, particularly those who have difficulty in communicating. I suppose I am as much a volunteer as a relative.

I help with the big things, like building the pond in the garden, and with the little things, like helping Bill to get to the local shop, or buying Stan, who is paralysed down one side, an expandable strap for his watch so that he can get it on by himself.

Because I spend time with these residents, I have learned to pick up when they are upset or frustrated about things. These people aren't silly – they are people that I have



things in common with. One man loves steam engines, another likes speedway, so that's what we talk about. I bring in posters and we have a laugh and a cigarette together.

The way I at look at things, I don't treat them as residents and staff. I treat them all as people who I have built up trust with. It's taken time to get to know them, their likes and dislikes . . . You have to step slowly, but now I know that they appreciate me coming to see them. And you know what? It does me good!

Making it happen!

What you can do to support relatives' involvement in your home

As a care home practitioner, you play a critical role in making the home feel like a welcoming community. Here are some ideas offered by the My Home Life network:

- » Make sure that there is a quiet, private place where relatives and friends can talk to residents, if they so wish.
- » Join in when conversation is obviously flagging, where appropriate.

- » Arrange furniture so that visitors have somewhere to sit with their relatives in comfort.
- » Provide protected times for staff to speak to relatives about any issues arising. This really can help improve relationships between the family and staff.
- » Help facilitate transport for frail visitors, provide residents with easily accessible telephones and assist with writing cards or letters to help maintain contact.
- » Suggest a 'family orientation process' to introduce families and friends to staff so that they can talk about what part they may wish to play in the caring. This might involve their continuing to provide a level of care

- for their loved one or bringing their own ideas and skills into the home.
- » Ask relatives if they can think of ways in which the care provided and the running of the home might be improved. You could also start a League of Friends group.



Creating a care home 'community'

The relationship with staff members is the most important factor influencing the quality of life of a resident. Similarly, the quality of their relationship with residents is the most important reason why staff stay in the job. But how do you develop this sense of community? Glenn Carroll, Activity Officer at Avon View Care Home in Dorset, has some ideas . . .

Residents here at Avon View told me that they missed being part of the local community so I decided that, as the care home is so large, I would work with them to create a village under one roof. We started by opening a proper shop with a real till. I have two residents who like to work in the shop – one lady of 91 (who thought it most amusing to be starting work again) and a gentleman in his 70s.

Outside the shop we have our very own postbox where residents can post all their letters and even send internal mail if they wish. This has led to our own magazine, the *Avon View Courier*. Many residents are supported to contribute to it with poems, stories etc., and that's gone down a storm. Some of the staff have joined in too. Our local adult education team is helping by providing training for residents to use the computer.

I have also given all the corridors street names. Instead of 'the

Bluebell Unit', rooms now are described with proper addresses such as '40 Bluebell Lane'. This has given residents the feeling that they have their own private space that resembles 'home'. The home has its own permanent chapel – a non-denominational one, where people can sit quietly sometimes with family and friends. The local school is helping to design the stained-glass window effect for us.

I've seen the staff sit with the residents and read together. It prompts a conversation, and I think that it also helps staff to feel able to share their histories with residents too.

We also have an activity called the 'armchair traveller', to take the residents on an imaginary journey to the different places where the staff are from. We have been to the Gambia so far. Staff sit and tell the residents all about their home country. We make residents passports, bring in African food and drums and costumes. For a couple of weeks afterwards, discussions between residents and staff continue, and I think it helps create tolerance and understanding. I also think it helps the staff feel more valued.

Of course this is no substitute for getting out into the community. While we do have a weekly outing to the beach, forest, garden



Glenn with residents Bess McCarter and Mike Cooke

centres etc., it can be difficult for some of the frailer residents to get out. That said, we took part in the sponsored memory walk for the Alzheimer's Society recently, raising over £500 for them. It was an amazing sight to see everyone in the home take part – residents, staff and families.

The next 'trip' will be to Albania. But I have bigger plans for this year: I want to open a working café in the home, again with residents running it.



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

Linking residents with the outside world

Imagine a world where your local care home was the hub of community activity in the area, with doors open to a wealth of interesting experiences inside and outside the home – a place that people enjoy visiting rather than dread that they might end up in. This is a vision that underpins the work of the National Association of Providers of Activities. But could this be the vision for your care home?

Care homes in Clacton have been exploring how best to bring the wider community into the home and have come up with some tips:

- Think creatively with residents about what kind of community involvement might benefit each of them.
- Think about the places that your residents used to frequent, the friends and interests that they had. Do they still visit these places or see these people? Map out the services, activities and groups in the local community to see what you can access for them.
- Encourage the community to help in identifying and responding to some of the less obvious individual needs of your residents (e.g. cultural, spiritual, sexual).
- Ensure residents have access to money, transport and escorts so that they can pursue their own interests. Volunteers can help here.
- Get friends, family and volunteers involved in special events in the home because it is a good way of sustaining their involvement.
- Do remember that older people in your care home might have skills and expertise to actually engage in volunteering themselves.

Rating your care practice

Some useful questions to ask yourself

1. What do you know about the relationships residents have with their family and friends?
2. How do you support residents to maintain good relations with others outside the home?
3. How are residents encouraged and supported to make friends within the wider community?
4. Are families and friends of residents able to visit freely and, where appropriate, participate in the care of the resident?
5. How are visitors made to feel welcome in the care home and put at ease?
6. What contribution do relatives make to care and how is this communicated to others?
7. If a resident wanted to buy a present for their friend, how would they be supported to do this?
8. How are residents given opportunities to contribute to the wider community?



NEXT ISSUE:

Sharing decision-making within a care home – send us your tips on supporting residents and families to play a greater role in making decisions about both their care and the wider running and organisation of the care home.

10

My Home Life

TIPS

to support practice in creating communities



1. Relationship-centred care

The quality of relationships between and across residents, staff, relatives, friends and the wider community is closely linked to quality of life. Every opportunity should be taken to engage relatives and members of the local community in the life of the home, for the benefit of all.

2. Positive relationships between staff and residents

The most important factor for residents' quality of life is their relationship with the staff who work with them. Consistent staff assignment helps relationships to flourish, leading to improved quality of life and lower levels of staff burnout and turnover.

3. Supporting reciprocity

Opportunities for giving and receiving between residents and staff should be encouraged. Simple acts of recognition, such as a thank-you card from a resident, can help make staff feel valued and ensures a two-way relationship.

4. Companionship and support between residents

Older people often want to engage with and support fellow residents but hearing loss or poor eyesight can inhibit normal conversation. Supporting such interaction, introducing residents to each other, finding common interests or simply reducing external noise can make all the difference.

5. Active engagement of family and friends

Relatives and friends can be a real resource on a number of levels, from providing direct care to supporting staff with additional information to meet the needs of the resident.

6. Bringing in the wider community

Older people have a right to access the outside world – services, family, friends, the local community. Everyone coming into contact with the care home can play an important contribution to the care home 'community'.

7. Community activities

Meaningful activities that engage staff and relatives, as well as residents, can create fun, humour and interest, helping to bring people together.

8. Working with animals and children

Pets have been found to enhance quality of life among residents, particularly those with dementia. Intergenerational work can be as positive for children as it is for residents themselves.

9. Physical environment

The way that communal areas, individual rooms and outside areas are laid out can impact on privacy and on opportunities for people to interact. Staff should consider how the care home layout can be changed to better support relationships.

10. Leadership and teamworking

A positive care home community requires energy and enthusiasm from every part of the care home. Mutual support across the 'team' of residents, staff, managers and relatives can make a real difference.