

# Pioneering Change

**Community for Nursing  
Home Residents  
Education Module**



to

**Promote Excellent Alternatives in Kansas  
Nursing Home**

## ***ABOUT THIS MODULE***

This educational module is intended for use by nursing homes who wish to promote more social, non-traditional models of long-term care. The intent of this module is to assist organizations in implementing progressive, innovative approaches to care that should make a significant difference in the quality of care and the quality of life for those living and working in long-term care environments.

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## **Course Objectives**

1. Develop an understanding of community within the nursing home.
2. Create an awareness of the importance of being involved in a community.
3. To highlight strategies for fostering community both within the walls of the nursing home and with the surrounding community.





## Community for Nursing Home Residents

*"...when people are considered to be "in-community", they are part of a group of individuals who provide mutual support, caring and connectedness"*

(Peterson, 1997, p. 2)

For as long as he can remember, Marty enjoyed starting each day with a cup of coffee and conversation with his friends at the local McDonald's. Once he moved into the nursing home, he no longer felt up to traveling to McDonald's but missed his friends. Rather than letting this piece of Marty's life end, staff members contacted the gentlemen in the coffee group and asked them to start having coffee each day at the nursing home. The nursing home provided space and the coffee to the group. The gentlemen bring their own McDonald's mugs! Marty may be living in the nursing home but he is still "in community" with his coffee group friends and the nursing home.



One of the greatest joys many residents remember is spending time connecting with others and being part of the local community. Many share stories of community fairs, festivals, friends and dances. Being part of a community makes a person feel connected to something greater than him or herself and feel a sense of belonging. When a person enters the nursing home, they may lose the connection to community and the benefits from participation. These community connections need not be lost. Community can be created within the nursing home and maintained with the broader community around the nursing home. Marty provides a wonderful example of how person-centered

care can lead to community connectedness that never has to end.

### Envisioning Our Community Activity

Each person perceives community differently. Definitions include everything from place of residence to shared ethnicity. In order to build community within the home, the group must develop a shared vision. Working together to develop a vision provides an opportunity to develop shared experience and shared symbols, which are both key elements of community. This activity first has small groups of residents and staff working together to define community, then builds a group definition and strategies for building it. The facilitator should let the groups know that the definitions could include the way we want it to be, who is part of the community, what takes place there, and feelings and connections between groups and individuals.

Divide the participants into groups of four making sure each group has residents and staff members. Each group of four will need poster paper, several colored markers, scissors, magazines for cutting out pictures and a glue stick. The group will have 30 minutes to make a pictorial definition of community and develop answers to the following questions:





- Did everyone in the group have the same concept of community?
- How did you reach a consensus?
- What elements does your group feel are most important?

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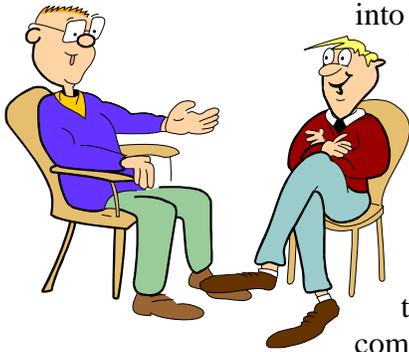


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After the groups are finished, each should take a turn discussing their poster and sharing their answers to the discussion questions. Posters should be hung on the wall where people can view and discuss them. At a later time, the group should reconvene to make one poster that incorporates the ideas of all of the groups



into one shared definition of community. Once the definition is developed, the group should discuss strategies for implementing their ideal community.

Remember, as persons in the community change, so too must the vision of the home. This activity should be repeated periodically to see if the definition and strategies are still in alignment with the ideas of the group. Involvement from as many different people as possible will make this activity more valuable. Research has shown that communities are more accepting of activities, policies, and programs when a

variety of individuals are involved (Mattessich et. al, 1997).

### What is Community?

There are numerous definitions of community. For the purpose of this module, community will be defined as "*people who live within a geographically defined area and who have social and psychological ties with each other and with the place where they live*" (Mattessich et. al., 1997, p. 6).

This definition is easily applied to the nursing home environment since residents all live within the same walls and are also in the same broader geographic community. According to the authors of the definition, social ties include kinship and friendship connections as well as participation in community-wide activities. The psychological ties include feelings of attachment, identity, a sense of belonging, as well as commitment and camaraderie with other occupants of the community. The social and psychological ties to community are what this module is intended to help foster.



### Being Part of a Community

Communities and the opportunity to participate in them are an important part of and determinant of health for both an individual and a group (McAllister & Silverman, 1999). People need to feel that they belong. This includes feeling valued as a member of a group, receiving support from others and having emotional sustenance (Peterson, 1997). People have a need to be connected to others around them and this need does not end because a person is older



or has chronic health conditions. People always need people!

Al Condeluci, a leader in community building, believes there are three critical elements for belonging, inclusion and community membership. These include:

- Being acknowledged
- Being appreciated
- Being accepted (Condeluci, 2008)

To demonstrate these, he points to the theme song to the well known television show Cheers which states "You wanna go where everybody knows your name and they're always glad you came." This simple song has a powerful message and gives a clear understanding of what being part of a community feels like.

For people to have this feeling within the nursing home community, residents and staff must know every individual and encourage each person to share things that are uniquely them (both good and bad) with the community. This might be asking a resident with a special talent to perform for the group or asking a resident with knowledge on a topic to share their thoughts with others in the community. It could even be as simple as saying, "good morning" and asking a question that demonstrates your understanding of the individual and that person's current joys or concerns. It certainly includes providing opportunities for each person to contribute to the community in his or her own unique way. Such inclusion is vital to community and individual success.

*"Without a sense of caring, there can be no sense of community."*

Anthony J. D'Angelo

At Villa Maria in Mulvane, Kansas, part of becoming a community has included learning about the individuals who live there. Staff members decided they wanted to give residents a purpose and realized one of the best ways to do this was to find out more about the residents. In the process, they found that one gentleman was previously a mail carrier. He came to Villa Maria from an assisted living facility where he never left his room. Upon moving in, he began delivering mail to the other residents six days a week. This gives him a reason to get up and get moving. He has benefited not only from having a purpose but also from the social interaction with other residents. Another resident, who has a master's degree in social work, was exhibiting some negative behaviors. Once staff members began giving her the opportunity to use her skills the behaviors diminished. She has helped staff members problem solve, given them ideas on how to help other residents adjust to life at Villa Maria and provided some training to staff and residents. She was searching for ways to get attention and feel needed. Since making these discoveries and utilizing the knowledge, residents have opportunities to feel useful and be fulfilled.



For residents to have a sense of community the connections must not only be between residents and staff

members but must also occur between residents. Find ways to encourage residents to get to know each other. At a recent conference, the presenter suggested having a get to know you question of the day or week. The question could be sitting on the dining room table or could be



used in learning circles. The intent of this is to get residents to share their stories and to encourage connections to develop among residents. It is very difficult to feel connected to someone about whom little is known.



In her research related to homelessness among the institutionalized elderly, Judith Carboni (1990) suggests that those living in a nursing home share many of the same interactions with the environment as those who are homeless. She found that residents experience the same sense of powerlessness, non-personhood (loss of identity and not belonging), disconnectedness (loss of place and memories, no future), insecurity, meaningless space (shared space), placelessness with no journey (no boundaries and dependency) and lack of boundaries (lack of privacy). Carboni suggests these feelings like homelessness may be overcome by building a "holistic, nurturing, affirming, and healing community in the nursing home." (Carboni, 1990, p. 36) The meaning of community and the benefits from participation could have an impact on many of the feelings of homelessness experienced by those in nursing homes.

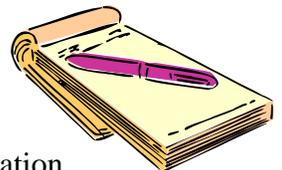
### **Are We a Community?**

It is difficult to know if residents within the nursing home feel a sense of community without asking them. To get a feel for the sense of community within the nursing home, residents could be asked to answer a few of the yes/no statements below. These are taken from the Neighborhood Sense of Community Scale (Nasar & Julian, 1995). If the home utilizes a household or neighborhood model, neighborhood or household could be inserted instead of community. This would provide

information on the sense of community within each household or neighborhood instead of the home as a whole. If a resident answers no to any of the following questions the interviewer may want to explore the reason for the answer with the resident.

- I am quite similar to most people who live here.
- If I feel like talking, I can generally find someone to talk to right away.
- My friends in this community are part of my everyday activities.
- If there was a serious problem in this community, the people here would get together and solve it.
- What is good for this community is good for me.
- There are people in this community, other than my family, who really care about me.

The responses given to these statements can be used to gauge the sense of community within the building. The responses could also be used for community building. Completing this assessment with a variety of residents and doing this survey frequently will ensure the information is accurate. A staff member or a resident who is interested in community building could conduct this study.

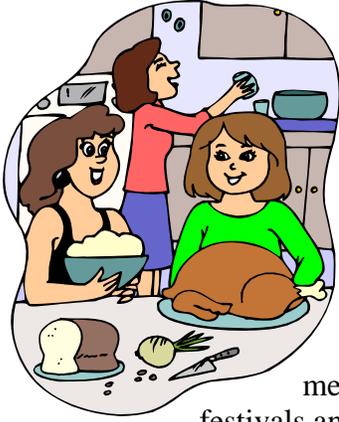


### **Building Community Within the Walls of the Nursing Home**

With an understanding of community and its benefits as well as an idea of what the residents and staff would like the community to look like within the home it is time to develop an understanding of how to build community. The term community



building is often thrown around but what does it actually mean? Community building is about developing connections between members and creating a sense of belonging



and shared ownership in the group. Community building is really as simple as building relationships, which is one of the goals in person-centered care.

Community building activities can be small like potlucks, social hours and meetings or larger events like festivals and building projects, but the components necessary for success and the outcomes experienced by members are the same.

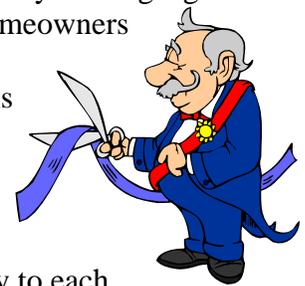
When discussing community building, it is important to distinguish between accomplishing the goals and tasks necessary for community survival and the actual outcome of the community building process. The community must accomplish certain goals and tasks in order to meet the needs of its members. By building community the ability to accomplish these tasks and goals is increased and the social and psychological ties are also increased (Mattessich et. al., 1997).

A book by Mattessich et. al (1997), reviewed hundreds of studies related to community building and found three categories of factors that were necessary for community building success. These include characteristics of the community, characteristics of the community building process, and characteristics of community building organizers. This module will explore some components from the characteristics of the community building

process that have direct ties to community building within the nursing home.

1. Widespread participation. As previously noted in the Creating Community activity, participation by a variety of people is necessary for success. It is also necessary to continue inviting new persons to join the planning process to ensure continued enthusiasm, fresh ideas and group representation.

At Villa Maria, in Mulvane, Kansas, residents and staff members are enjoying the feeling of community. They have transitioned from hallways into distinct neighborhoods without major renovations. Each neighborhood was responsible for developing their culture and electing representation in the form of a mayor. Candidates ran for election by making signs and campaigning. The homeowners (neighborhood residents) then chose their leader. As a neighborhood, they worked together to create mission statements. The statements are framed



and posted in the entryway to each neighborhood. They describe the culture of each neighborhood and give the reader a feel for the people who live there. As the neighborhoods were drafting their mission statements, they were asked to think about who they are and what they wanted their neighborhood to represent. Once the neighborhoods were ready, the community of Mulvane was invited to an open house and ribbon cutting ceremony. The mayor of the city and city council members attended and community members got to experience first hand the new addition to the city. The neighborhood mayors read the neighborhood mission statements to those in attendance.



There are other ways to encourage community building through widespread participation. A group of interested residents could form a "Welcome Wagon" that visits each new resident. The group could take a basket of goodies to help ease the transition. While visiting the group could also share information about the home such as the people who live and work there as well as the current events in the home. The new resident could then be invited by his/her peers to take part in activities. This would begin connecting residents immediately and would make sure everyone know they are important to the community.

2. Good system of communication. When a group of people resides within the same community, they must have access to the same information. This is not only important when trying to build community but is important every day. Residents must be aware of activities, meetings and changes occurring within the community if they are to take part. It is a good idea to have standard methods of communication.

For nearly three years one resident at Galena Nursing Center Skilled Care by Americare in Galena, Kansas took charge of providing communications to residents. Norman, a retired journalist, developed a daily newsletter for residents and staff members of Galena Nursing Center. He chronicled the activities in the home through stories and pictures.

Stories included profiles of new residents and staff members as well as

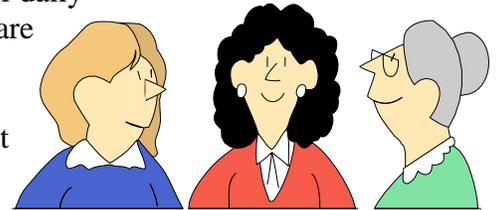
information about the resident of the month. Staff members

report that Norman has a great sense of humor and often offered his take on world events. The newsletters were developed on his computer and distributed to residents.



Norman made sure each table in the dining room had copies and that residents who did not come to the dining room had a copy delivered to them. Residents enjoyed reading the newsletter and it provided Norman with the opportunity to do what he loved and give something to those around him. The newsletter gave him a voice even though he could not speak. Due to changes in his health status he no longer writes the newsletter but still communicates with staff and other residents through his computer skills. Staff members shared that since Norman has stopped writing the newsletter the other residents often ask about him and the newsletter showing that they miss hearing from him.

Other methods of daily communication are available. Each day in the neighborhoods at Brewster Place



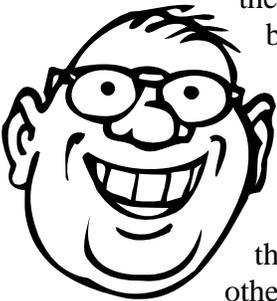
in Topeka, Kansas, residents and staff sit down for a learning circle. The learning circles take place in the families within the neighborhoods. Each family is one staff member and four residents. This circle is used as a time for residents to give input into the happenings of the day, find out what is new around Brewster Place and learn about any events happening that day. This time together helps develop relationships within the family and gives opportunities for resident involvement in planning all aspects of their lives.

3. Develop self-understanding. For community building to be successful, the group must develop a sense of identity and have shared goals. The Creating Our Community activity described earlier in this module is intended to create one vision to



work toward and develop a plan for achieving the community agreed upon by the group. The desired outcome will never be achieved if members of the group are working toward different goals.

4. Benefits to many. The group working to build community must make sure their ideas and vision are beneficial to all living in the community, not just those involved in the planning. To receive support from others in the community, the benefits must be clear.



It has been said that when the Dali Lama is making decisions, he imagines himself on one side and all of the people of the world on the other. So when he asks himself if this action will benefit me or everyone else the decision becomes easy.

5. Systematic gathering of information and analysis of community issues. It is easy to assume that residents are satisfied simply because they are not complaining. This is often a mistake. Residents will rarely begin a dialogue about issues unless they are asked and they realize that they are not stuck with what they currently have. A few questions about issues within the community could be placed on resident satisfaction surveys or could become a discussion point at every resident council and care plan meeting. The information gathered could then be discussed and the group could develop solutions. It may be helpful to bring in someone from the outside to solicit resident feedback. Responses are often more honest when sought by a third-party.

While homes are required to have resident council meetings they often serve very little purpose. They tend to become sessions

filled with complaints about the same few topics. Turning the neighborhood council into more of a city council where members discuss not only problems in the community but are also involved in planning could make the meetings more productive.

Instead of traditional resident council meetings, residents at Villa Maria in Mulvane, Kansas take part in neighborhood association meetings. Their meeting focus has changed since becoming distinct neighborhoods with elected mayors. Instead of being a time to complain and focus on the negative, the meetings have turned into an opportunity to plan for the future. Residents are empowered to make their neighborhood the best it can be and use the meetings for planning. The meetings have become very proactive as well as

productive. One neighborhood recently decided to raise money for an Iraq war veteran who was having trouble paying for his home. The homeowners' association meetings serve as an opportunity for the group to decide what activities they would like to do together. The administrator feels that by giving the residents a purpose they do not need to focus on complaints and can see how they can make a difference.



6. Community control over decision-making. The members of the community must be empowered to make decisions and act upon them. Community building efforts will serve very little purpose if residents begin making decisions only to have management staff over-rule them. Since nursing homes have limited resources that must be shared amongst all residents, it may be necessary to visit with the residents to ensure they understand what limitations may exist. If residents feel they have been given

the authority to make things happen in the community and then it is taken away, the next time input is sought it will be much

harder to gain the residents' trust and receive information.

***Is it possible to be person-centered, meet the needs of each resident, and be community-minded?***

During a Pioneer Network conference session, participants were raising questions about how to balance the requests of individual residents with what is best for the overall community. The home presenting shared a philosophy that has been adopted. It is person-centered and community-minded.

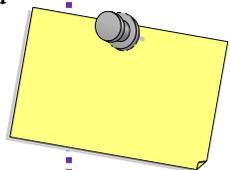
Messiah Village is a CCRC in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, with approximately 800 residents and clients; along with 600 staff members. A few years ago, they were discussing the idea of culture change and person centered care but neither of the terms really sat well with members of the community. The residents felt that no single person was better than anyone else and that your wants and needs should fit into the social system you are a part of. Vice President of Operations Gary Johnson uses the example of a father in the family to illustrate the idea of need fitting the social system. The father may want to buy a sports car or go on a vacation but he cannot do this if it is not what is best for the entire family. It is a balance of the needs of the individual and the needs of the community.

The idea of being person-centered but community-minded came up and residents, staff and family members worked for over a year to decide what the meaning of community-minded would include. They used several strategies to define community-minded, making sure everyone had their voice heard. The strategies used included the following: dialogue day when the campus basically shut down for everyone to come together and spend the day discussing the topic, small focus groups that included family members, and lots of sticky notes.

Each person noted their idea of community-minded on a sticky note and they worked together to group the notes into themes. They kept narrowing down these suggestions until they came up with the idea of community life at Messiah Village being a journey inward, a journey outward and a journey together.

- The journey inward is focused on each person's individual spiritual growth.
- The journey outward is focused on caring for others and giving back.
- The journey together is focused on friendships and being a part of the community.

At the time, many felt this process took too long but looking back Gary is glad they put so much time and energy into it because it now serves as the guiding philosophy and is used when making decisions and changes that affect the community. They feel that intentional and meaningful community life is an essential part of living.





Here is a recent example of how it is used for decision-making. Residents in one neighborhood began requesting that more staff be hired for that neighborhood. Staff members sat down with the residents to find out why they felt more staff was needed. The residents learned from staff members that more staff could be hired but it would mean their rates would increase potentially making it unfeasible for some to continue living there and could also mean fewer people living in their community. Residents realized that adding more staff was not in the best interest of the overall community. By using this philosophy everyone's voice is heard and the decisions made are in the best interest of all those living in the community, not just those with the loudest voices.

As the make-up of residents at Messiah Village changes, so does the community but the philosophy stays the same. Since the community is a faith-based organization with beliefs that do not allow dancing, the campus has not had dancing. The dynamics of the community have recently changed with more residents of different faiths moving in and asking about dancing. The community life philosophy was used to open a dialogue to decide if dancing should become part of community life at Messiah Village.





## Community when Divided

Other questions about community have focused on how to maintain community in the overall nursing home when residents are divided into smaller households or neighborhoods. In order to create smaller more person-centered environments, many homes have opted for remodeling into the household or neighborhood concept. However, these changes have left some residents commenting that while they enjoy their household/neighborhood they miss the interaction with other residents in the home. Some have noted having close friends in other neighborhoods that they rarely see since the day-to-day life takes place in the household/neighborhood. There are several strategies that are proving successful for keeping residents connected when they are divided into smaller households.

At Meadowlark Hills in Manhattan, Kansas, each household is paired with a sister household. The sister households share staff and often come together for activities. While each house has its own activity calendar and routine, residents are invited and encouraged to take part in the planned activities of other households or the larger events for the community as a whole. Households are encouraged to mingle and residents often slip out to visit in the other households. In fact, one house has residents who really enjoy spending time in the other households so they plan very few activities and instead take part in what others have planned. Each month a full community activity is planned. One month the neighborhoods all came together for an ice-



cream social. Each neighborhood worked to perfect an ice-cream recipe and brought it to share at the social. Residents enjoyed mingling and a few lucky residents served as taste testers to choose the winning recipe.

At several other homes departments have been renamed to reflect the businesses within a town. Examples include the activity department becoming parks and recreation and the business office as town hall. Many homes also have a bank, post office, restaurant and library within the building so residents have the amenities of the community within their home. While these are just changes in the names, they create a feeling of community and having them located throughout the building encourages residents to be out and about in the community mingling with one another and conducting business just as they would have prior to coming to the nursing home. Having spaces within the building for people to congregate allows for informal socialization to take place.

While preparing for a full-building remodel, residents and staff at Village Manor in Abilene, Kansas discussed whether or not to keep a larger community space when they changed to neighborhoods. The group decided that a larger space was necessary for continued contact between all of the residents. They now have a Village Center, which serves as a multi-purpose room. It is not uncommon to see residents from several households gathered to play games or sip coffee. Staff members feel that the Village Center is a vital piece of the community.



Military bases are similar to nursing home communities in the sense that community members are often coming and going. In an effort to build community on the bases, some have adopted a model of community government that could easily be used with a



neighborhood or household model. Each neighborhood has representation. This is typically a mayor but might also include council members. This group would meet regularly with the other members of their neighborhood to discuss ideas and concerns that relate specifically to that neighborhood. They would also discuss issues that affect the community as a whole. The elected officials from each neighborhood could then come together to discuss those issues that have been identified to impact the entire community. This would give residents the opportunity to have input into what happens not only in their neighborhood but the community as a whole. This is similar to the resident council system that is in place in nursing homes but has a "natural" community feel versus the institutional feel of the resident council.



When working to build community within the nursing home, the characteristics of successful communities can provide guidance. Remember that looking to a successful community (outside of the nursing home) for ideas is an excellent way to create a "natural" community within the walls of the nursing home. The majority of the components of community that can be seen in outside communities can be adapted and brought into the nursing home. Remember that each community is made up of unique individuals so there is no cookie-cutter model of community. Ideas shared in this module or viewed in other communities should be adapted to fit the needs of each community.



### **A Friendly Community**

Scharlach (2008) describes what makes a community aging-friendly using the words continuity,

compensation, and opportunity. It is easy to think that because the population served by nursing homes is older adults, the homes are aging-friendly. This may not always be the case. While the author of this article was referring to community in a broader sense the concepts can be adapted to fit the purpose of this module.

Continuity entails maintaining lifelong interests and activities. A person's life should not have to stop because of moving into a nursing home. This is a change in physical residence that does not dictate a change in lifestyle. Maintaining lifelong interests and activities should be an activity goal and is part of the intent of the activity F tag #248 (CMS, 2006). Looking at this F tag from the perspective of community, lifelong interests and activities could include social roles, relationships, organizational memberships, social groups, participation in community planning, etc.

At Pleasant View Home in Inman, Kansas a resident is taken to her weekly Take Off Pounds Sensibly (TOPS) meeting in a nearby town. The resident has been a member of the group for several years and did not want to give up that connection. Staff members take turns providing transportation and know that the continued contact with friends is very beneficial for her.

Compensation entails encouraging persons to stay engaged even as losses occur. There is the thought that older adults enter the nursing home and are isolated from the communities in which they once played key roles. The person-centered model of nursing home care would suggest that we find ways to make sure that as ability decreases, adaptations are in place to ensure continued involvement to the extent desired by the resident.



Opportunities must exist for residents to stay involved in things they have always enjoyed but there must also be opportunities to take part in new things. Residents should be informed of and encouraged to take part in activities within the home and the surrounding community.

At Village Shalom in Overland Park, Kansas, residents are informed about opportunities on the campus and in the community through several different forms of communication. There is an in-house television station that provides information about activities and upcoming events. They also use flyers and word of mouth to let residents know what is happening. Residents are given calendars of planned activities and each evening they discuss what events are happening the next day. Sign-up sheets are available for any resident wishing to take part in the planned outings.

### **Community Built on Interdependence**

Persons leave their homes and communities to enter the nursing home where they no longer have connections with previous activities or roles and may feel forgotten by others. Keeping residents aware of opportunities, involved in the home and as connected to the surrounding community as much as possible may prevent disengagement. These connections provide opportunities for residents to continue giving and for the broader community (which includes the nursing home as well as the surrounding area) to develop interdependence.

The idea of interdependence depicts what community should be. The Pioneer Network has even developed a Declaration

of Interdependence to help guide those on the culture change journey. Interdependence is about realizing that we are all connected and that we all need one another for support and sustenance. It contrasts dependence, which focuses on only one party needing support from others. Dependant is the way we have viewed the elders in our homes and the idea of being dependant is typically looked down upon by our society. Interdependence, however, provides a new perspective for viewing the elders in our home, the connections between elders and the home's connection to the community.

Interdependence is needed in order to form a sense of community (Dunne, 1986). The possibility for growth in all communities is almost endless when members begin to value interdependence.

Barry Barkan, a leader in the person-centered care movement, has worked to develop a community among residents that regenerates joy (Congress of California Seniors, 2007). As the administrator of the Live Oak Institute, he saw the role of administrator as one of community developer. Each day at Live Oak began with a community meeting. This meeting served as a time for residents and staff members to gather and be welcomed individually, socialize, discuss daily happening both within the nursing home and outside, sing, laugh, tell stories and make decisions. It served to "...build a life of shared experience and concerns." (Congress of California Seniors, 2007, para. 10)





## Community Circle Activity

The community circle is a great way to build community and provides a good beginning or end to the day. It brings everyone together and provides an opportunity for interaction and connection between community members. The activity is adapted from Action Pact's Person-First Training. More information about this



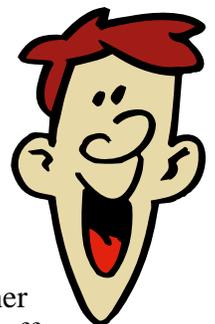
training can be found at [www.actionpact.com](http://www.actionpact.com). It will be more effective in your community if you develop a format that includes items of importance to the group you are working with. If you are in a neighborhood or household model, it is important to remember that each is a unique community and that should reflect in the community meetings.

Gather the group into a circle. The group should include residents, staff, family members and others in the neighborhood. The circle is effective because it puts everyone on a level playing field and allows all members to see one another. This works best with a smaller group. If the group is too large it may be better to break into more than one circle so people feel comfortable sharing. The facilitator (any staff member or resident could fill this role) should encourage everyone in the group to greet one another. After the greetings have taken place, the facilitator should begin by providing some discussion for the day. Ideas include household events that have taken place, upcoming household events, happenings in the lives of residents, the weather, news from the surrounding community, planning for upcoming events and concerns in the neighborhood. Every person should have the opportunity to contribute to the discussion. As the

discussion flows around the circle the discussion topic may flow in a different direction. Allow the conversation to go where the group takes it. Once everyone has had the opportunity to share, the meeting can come to a close. The group should make sure to end on a high note using something that is unique to the group like a favorite song or poem.

Some very simple things have an impact on the sense of community felt by residents. A study by Taunton, et. al (2006), looked at how satisfied residents are with the care received from the nursing home. Four themes emerged based on the responses of residents – community, care, supportive relationships, and loss and grief. On the theme of community, the author suggests that some residents are very satisfied because they always have the company of other residents whereas others wish they had private spaces and fewer people around. Residents did note enjoying times in the dining room with friends and felt that the planned activities contributed to the sense of community. The author found that learning the special wishes of residents and fulfilling them would increase the sense of community as would providing quiet spaces and access to and assistance with using the Internet.

A resident from Greeley County Long Term Care Unit in Tribune, Kansas mentioned to a member of the PEAK travel team that she missed a good friend who lives in Wichita. When this was mentioned to a few staff members, they looked at each other and said, “We’re going to Wichita for a conference and she could come with us.” The staff members took the idea to the resident and she excitedly called her friend to make plans. While the staff members were at the conference the resident





and her friend enjoyed catching up. The staff members were always available by phone to the resident. They even taught her to use one of their cell phones so she could call if there were any concerns. To make sure the entire trip was centered on the resident's wishes, staff members took her to favorite restaurants and spent some time people-watching at the hotel bar. Since it was karaoke night at the bar, the resident asked to hear the DJ sing "That's Amore"; he did and she loved it. She also coerced the staff members with her to do some singing! During the drive home, the resident told them that this was the best trip she had ever been on.



While it is important to have the in-home sense of community, it is also important to make sure connections with the community surrounding the nursing home are maintained. A move to the nursing home should not mean isolation from the residents' pre-nursing home community.

### **Building and Maintaining Connections with the Broader Community**

*"...nursing homes divest elders of meaningful roles and promote their exclusion from society. The collective wisdom of the older generation is not being captured and passed on to future generations--rather, it is being locked away behind nursing home walls."*

(Ashoka, 2004, para. 3)

When residents are isolated within the nursing home they are not the only ones missing out. The wisdom and experience of our elders is an essential component to every community. The interaction between nursing home residents and the local community is a powerful vehicle in the

passing of this wisdom and experience. Typically nursing homes within small communities are very connected to the community. In some cases they may be the communities' largest employer. It is important to explore not only the nursing home's connection to the community as a business but to look at the connection of the residents within the nursing home to the community. Being a business leader in the community does not automatically mean residents are active participants in the local community. It has been demonstrated that contact between nursing home residents and those in the broader community contributes to psychological well-being and physical health (Ward et. al., 1996)



The key to having residents involved in the local community is maintaining connections to the community and creating opportunities for new forms of interaction. Keep in mind that community involvement is not just entertainment. While residents may enjoy being entertained by local community groups they will also enjoy taking part in the daily life of the community through participation. It may be helpful to think about community connections using the idea of connection from the inside out as well as from the outside in. Connections from the inside out include those events where residents from the nursing home go out into the surrounding community. This might be a continuation of the activities attended prior to admission or residents attending special events in the community. Since each resident's connection with the community is different, many of these inside-out activities will be done on a one-on-one basis.



Residents at the Presbyterian Manor of the Plains in Dodge City, Kansas, have been exercising their talent for quilt making and sharing their work with others for nearly three years. The residents have made hundreds of quilts in various sizes to share with those in need. Residents began by making lap robes for other residents within the Manor and then began sharing with Ft. Dodge and other manors. Residents have sent quilts to the Indian Council in Phoenix to be given to Indian tribes that do not have access to electricity. More recently they have sent quilts to victims of Hurricane Katrina and the tornado in Greensburg. Other quilts have gone to families in the community that have had house fires. The group recently made a quilt to fit a queen size bed for a family who lost everything to a fire. The quilts have also become a way of welcoming new residents. Each new resident is welcomed with a quilt that is



wrapped in clear plastic with a large bow. Fabric and yarn for the quilting projects has come from donations from residents' families and community members.

Connections from the outside in would include anything that brings members of the outside community into the nursing home. This could include special events within the nursing home, volunteers, visitors, or hosting of community events at the nursing home. Both types of connection are necessary for a true community.

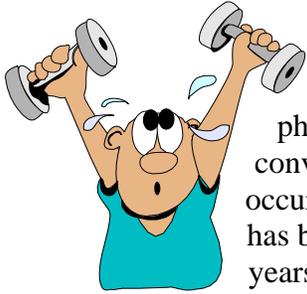
Each June, the sound of busy sewing machines fills the air at Atchison Senior Village in Atchison, Kansas. Students from the local elementary school come to the nursing home for a few hours each day for a week to take part in the Generations of Sewing Camp. The elementary school

sponsors weeklong camps every summer and a few years ago asked Atchison Senior Village if they would be willing to host a camp. The school provides transportation for the students and pays for the supplies. Nine students take part in the camp. Staff members feel that they could have more students but only have access to nine sewing machines. The students range in age from second grade to eighth grade. The students pair up one on one with residents to work on projects that range from items the kids take home to wheelchair pouches for residents. The administrator at Atchison Senior Village says it is amazing to see how much the children learn from the residents even if the resident no longer has the dexterity to sew. The camp is making an impression on students that participate. Several students have come multiple summers and others are now entering high school and have contacted the home to do their community service projects there.



At Schowalter Villa in Hesston, Kansas, residents, staff, college students and community members can be found breaking a sweat, learning or relaxing side by side in the Wellness Center. The Wellness Center has more than 1,000 members. The employees and residents of Schowalter Villa as well as the students from Hesston College are automatically given memberships to the center. Other members of the community purchase memberships. In addition to exercise facilities there is a computer center, pottery shop, woodworking shop, massage and therapy center, beauty salon and restaurant.

At Life Care Center in Seneca, Kansas, residents enjoy the Sit and Be Fit class with members of the surrounding community. About 15-20 community members come to Life Care a few times each week to take part in a chair aerobics class with residents. All



individuals involved in the class enjoy not only the physical benefits but also the conversation and social support that occurs during the class. The class has been meeting for about four years.

Some suggest that nursing homes may play a greater role in communities by expanding services they offer to include community health clinics or other services.

Nearly seven years ago, St. Francis Good Samaritan Center in St. Francis, Kansas, saw a need in the community. The person who had been running the home health services for the area retired. The nursing homes in the area had long waiting lists and the healthcare systems in the area were overwhelmed with persons who could be in their homes if the necessary supports were available. The nursing home responded by opening a home health care agency. The agency currently provides a variety of home health services ranging from homemaker and medication management to skilled care and wound dressing. The agency is licensed and does Medicare and Medicaid work in four counties. They also have a contract with the Northwest Kansas Area Agency on Aging to provide homemaker services in their area. Since the opening of the agency, more people are using the nursing home for temporary stays and are able to live in their own homes where they prefer to be. The

agency has also had a positive impact on the financial picture of the nursing home. Currently the home health agency has its own staff but occasionally the nursing home and agency have employees who work for both. Several of the staff members from the nursing home have the certifications necessary to provide home health services and help out when the client load is too large for the agency's staff to manage. The services have been well received by the community and the agency typically has a full client load.

Community Connections “to do” list:

- Provide opportunities for residents to continue with community affiliations
- Open the nursing home for use by community groups
- Take residents to activities within the community
- Partner with local organizations such as schools, clubs, charities, and churches
- Develop a pool of community volunteers
- Share what you are doing





## Cultivating Community through Strong Leadership

Monte Coffman, the Executive Director of Windsor Place Nursing Home in Coffeyville, Kansas, has a distinct way of viewing community. He suggests that building community is like cultivating a garden. The seeds that you plant and nurture will eventually bear the fruit that will provide nourishment. When Monte arrived 16 years ago, he immediately began planting seeds. He started a community advisory board and invited leaders from the local school district, college, newspaper and other community organizations to take part on this board. He used this as an opportunity to let the community members know about the philosophy of Windsor Place but the real intent was finding out what the needs of the community were. He believes that for an organization to be part of the community it must first seek out opportunities to help others in the community have "wins." Some of these "wins" were not immediately beneficial to Windsor Place but Monte knew that over time they would become "wins" for all involved.

The development of the advisory group moved things forward in many ways. Windsor was able to begin providing some services that were missing in the community like weekend Meals On Wheels and providing non-emergency medical transportation. This also linked him with organizations in the community that began reaching out to him and Windsor Place for assistance.

To tend the seeds that had been planted and nurture the relationship growth, he spent a great deal of time helping the local school system seek new solutions to state funding problems. He feels that the administrator must commit time and energy to other organizations. When you reach out to help others first you are more likely to reap benefits long-term.

Windsor Place began sponsoring some community events on their campus as well. Every year the lawn is filled with children hunting Easter eggs. The most recent egg hunt brought nearly 1,000 children and their parents in contact with Windsor Place and its residents and staff. They also host a Treats Off the Streets Halloween Party that has grown to provide a safe Halloween experience to over 2,000. Windsor Place also serves as host to several organizations like the Red Hat Society and the Ministerial Alliance meetings.

Once the seeds had developed, Windsor Place was able to reap the rewards. The school system has children in Windsor Place multiple times each week. The school has recently partnered with Windsor to put a kindergarten classroom on the retirement community's campus. Students from the alternative high school have spent numerous hours teaching residents computer skills. Residents are a fixture at community events and organizers of these events make sure they have the best seats possible. They sit ringside at the rodeo and are so close to the action at high school and college sporting events they can smell the sweat!

Not only are there advocates for keeping residents involved in the community inside the walls of Windsor Place, but also the community itself now makes sure that residents are integrated into the happenings. The community sees the value of keeping the elders engaged. Monte feels that these things are so beneficial to the residents at Windsor and would not have happened had



the strong connection with others in the community not been established and nurtured to grow. Had they gone into relationships with the “*what's in it for us*” mindset, the community would view them differently than they do today.

Monte has made new connections and continued to build on those already established. He says community is like a painting. If you have one brush stroke or even 50 all you have is brush strokes. To have a true painting that is something special with depth you must have thousands of different strokes. Having one community event/connection or even several does not mean that you have a relationship with the community. It takes numerous connections on different levels and a great deal of time to build a true community where the nursing home and its residents are integrated into the community. The administrator must stay in place for a significant length of time and spend the extra time necessary to develop community relationships.

Monte feels that community must be an extension of the home’s mission and the values of leadership in order for it to be developed on the outside and sustained. Windsor Place is truly integrated into the Coffeyville community because the commitment of time and energy are a priority. The community connections keep growing and evolving. Monte suggests that the integration will come in its due season once the seeds have been planted and nurtured.



## Outcomes of CommUNITY

There are a variety of outcomes that are related to the involvement of residents in the local community. Some will be of benefit to the residents, some to the local community, some to society and certainly some to the organization. The local community may begin to look at older adults and the nursing home differently once they have had the opportunity to interact with residents. Never underestimate the marketing value of being known in your community.

A few years ago Medicalodge in Kinsley, Kansas was battling low census like many other nursing homes. Knowing they were providing good care and had a great facility,

they realized they had to get the community in the door so they could see first hand what was happening at Medicalodge. One of the first things they did was start inviting the community to attend any activity that was on the calendar. They did this by putting the activity calendar and an invitation in the local newspaper. At first only a few showed up but over time participation increased. They also began hosting several community events and are always open for community organizations to use meeting space. They have an annual motorcycle rally. They paired with the Christian Motorcycle Association to sponsor the rally





and parade. After the parade the residents, motorcyclists and community members gather for a meal on the lawn and enjoy some gospel music. The residents really enjoy the music from both the gospel singing and the bikes' engines. The local fair board approached Medicalodge to host the pet show. The lawn was filled with children and their pets. There were a variety of animals including hamsters, rabbits, dogs and cats. One resident's eyes lit up when she saw a Shetland pony. One of the contests most enjoyed by the residents was the best-dressed competition where the animals and often the owners were dressed in a variety of costumes. At Medicalodge in Kinsley, they are open to anything that brings people to visit who would not come otherwise. Since focusing on community building, Medicalodge has seen improvement in census and knows that their image in the community has drastically changed.

Intergenerational contact is an excellent way to help all age groups overcome fears and prejudices they may hold for each other. Dr. William Thomas, the founder of the Eden Alternative, notes that nursing home residents suffer from three plagues. These are loneliness, helplessness and boredom (Eden Alternative, 2002). Intergenerational interaction through community involvement could go a long way in overcoming these plagues by providing what Thomas calls the anecdotes, opportunities for companionship, opportunities to give and receive care, and a life filled with variety and spontaneity.

Schowalter Villa in Hesston, Kansas, wants to make sure that residents have an opportunity to connect with members of the community in all age groups. Located down Main Street (an inside hallway) from the nursing neighborhoods is the Hesston Intergenerational Child Development

Center. A few years ago the child development center needed new space and Schowalter stepped forward to build a space together. Today, residents have numerous opportunities to interact with the children. Since Main



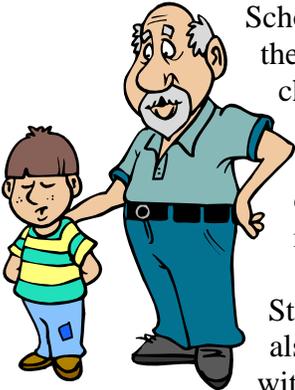
Street is an indoor walkway residents have access to the child development center despite the weather conditions or their disabilities. Some residents prefer to watch the children interact while others like to take hands-on roles. Some residents spend their free time rocking the babies or helping with craft projects while others join the children for ice cream on Main Street and listening to music. Travel down Main Street goes both ways. The children often go into the neighborhoods for story time, games and art or cooking projects.

Recently all enjoyed the apple themed festival. During the festival, more time was planned into each day for interaction. Residents showed the children how to use old-fashioned peelers and make pie and tarts. The residents enjoyed the opportunity to teach the children something and everyone enjoyed eating the outcome! The interaction between the children and residents is constant. Residents do not wait for special designated times to interact with the children; instead, it is just part of the daily life at Schowalter Villa. The community of Hesston thinks the program is wonderful and some residents chose to come there because of the intergenerational programs. A family commented that as a family member was dying in a different nursing home, many family members brought their children to





visit. The children who spend time at Schowalter were not afraid of their family member like the children who had not had this type of exposure. The family felt that this was one of the many benefits of being involved with the program.



Students from Hesston College also have frequent interaction with residents. A professor of Sociology at the college wanted students to do volunteer work and journal about their experience. Schowalter has become the most popular place to volunteer. Students spend a few hours each week interacting in various ways with residents. As they do the journaling they are processing the experience. The interaction has developed close relationships that have continued beyond the volunteer experience. It has given the elders an opportunity to give back and the students the opportunity to learn about a variety of topics like death, marriage, and raising children from the elders' perspective.

**Case Study: Elements of Aging-Friendly Communities**

*Ruth has always been a member of numerous service organizations within the community. Prior to her admission to Riverview Lane, she went to several meetings each week. Her family was concerned that giving up these connections would really take a toll and might cause her health to decline more rapidly. The social worker from Riverview Lane assured her family that as a part of the home's focus on psychosocial health, they would visit with Ruth to determine what she still wanted to be active in and make sure that she could still take part. Ruth decided that she would like to continue her connections with three of her groups and keep her office as*

*secretary in one of them. Since she can no longer drive or use her old typewriter, staff members from Riverview Lane take turns driving her to meetings and helping her type the minutes from the meeting. One staff member is teaching her how to use the computer so she can make the font large enough to read and prepare her minutes. Staff members and other residents also keep her informed about other groups, events and causes in the community in case Ruth wants to add to her busy schedule. Ruth visits with residents and staff members after her outings to let them know what is happening in the local community. Ruth commented to a staff member that she does not feel her life has changed much at all.*



Can you identify each of the elements necessary for an aging-friendly community in the case study? These elements were shared in the *A Friendly Community* section of this module.

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Discuss the impact of each in Ruth's continued life.

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Describe the elements of interdependence that are depicted within the case study.

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### Ask and Ye Shall Receive

When homes are discussing change, whether at the beginning of a journey or somewhere down the path, concerns about resources often arise. Homes that have a strong connection with the community can often find resources beyond imagining. In order to get community support when needed, the home must be an active community participant. The communities around nursing homes are often very willing to help but do not know how. A local emergency shelter has advertisements on the radio asking for donations. Instead of just saying that they are in need of donations, the shelter specified exactly what was needed. Being clear about wants and needs takes the pressure off of the giver. One could simply go to the store and pick up items from the list instead of having to determine what the needs might be.



At Minneola District Hospital Long-Term Care Unit in Minneola, Kansas, residents and staff decided they wanted to switch from traditional nursing home dining to buffet dining.

Everyone was excited about the change, but they did not have the financial resources to purchase all of the necessary equipment. Instead of giving up on the idea, staff

decided to look at possible ways to get the equipment. One thing the home has always done was keeping the community abreast of changes and the outcomes of these changes. After letting the community know what they wanted to do, a donor came forward and gave them the necessary equipment. Had they not been connected to the community, they might still be wishing they could implement buffet dining instead of enjoying it each day.

It may not even be material or financial resources that are needed.



Many homes are in need of volunteers to help with special projects. At the Good Samaritan Center in Olathe, Kansas,

volunteers from the local garden club come to the home each year to plant

flowers. They also work with residents to maintain the raised flowerbeds at the home. Community organizations are often looking for service projects. Unless they know you have needs, they are not likely to fill them. Take inventory of ways you could use volunteers and contact organizations that seem to fit. Many schools are now requiring community service hours for graduation. These students could be a wonderful asset to the home and could learn a great deal from the experience.

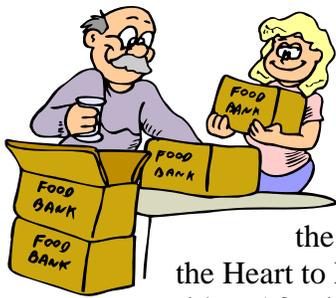
Instead of sitting back wishing for extra money in the budget or gifts to fall from the sky, be proactive. Let the community know what is happening at the home, the home's needs and the needs of residents. It will probably be surprising what the community can do when they know what is needed. This, however, is a two way street. The nursing home must also be willing to share resources with the community. The nursing



home must also be willing to share resources with the community

### **Staff Members and/or Residents Volunteering to Help Other Community Organizations**

Residents at Brewster Place in Topeka, Kansas, can frequently be found in the community doing various volunteer projects. As a part of the Heart to Heart program, residents are paired with a volunteer and as a pair they go out to community organizations. The volunteers spend time doing a variety of jobs at organizations like Stormont-Vail and the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP). Brewster has



had residents doing volunteer work for several years but recently started the Heart to Heart program.

At this point, most of the volunteers who are in the Heart to Heart program are the residents' family members. Residents enjoy the opportunity to connect with a community member and give back to the surrounding community.

### **Hosting Community Events at the Nursing Home's Facilities**

At Parkside Homes in Hillsboro, Kansas, staff members were looking for ways to bring the idea of wellness to the staff and residents and make connections with organizations and individuals in the surrounding community. The idea to do a Safety and Wellness Fair came about and as contacts were made, it snowballed into a week of presentations with the fair as the finale. The events were advertised to those living and working at Parkside but also to the broader community through newspaper articles and flyers. Events during the week included presentations related to bank fraud,

food safety, disasters and disaster relief, and the importance of breakfast. A local shoe salesperson performed walking analysis on those in attendance in an effort to help them choose shoes for foot health and comfort. They also offered tests like body fat, cholesterol and diabetic screenings. The local police department did seatbelt checks as people arrived at Parkside. The Safety and Health Fair at the end of the week took place in the courtyard area. There were booths from many community organizations that covered a variety of topics such as checking child safety seats, water safety, skin cancer and oral health. The residents enjoyed the opportunity to learn from those working in the booths and mingling with the members of the local community who attended. The event did just what the organizers hoped. Residents and staff gained an understanding that whole-person wellness is more than exercising and eating right. Partnerships with community organizations were built. Several of the organizations that set up booths encouraged Parkside to have the fair again and many presenters have contacted Parkside to let them know they would love to have the opportunity to present in the future. Parkside is planning to continue hosting the fair and they hope that even more community members will be in attendance in the future.

### **Partnering with Other Community Organizations**

Golden Heights Living Center in Garnett, Kansas, has partnered with the local pharmacy to do monthly health screenings for members of the local community. After being approached by the local pharmacist, staff members began going to the pharmacy the first Friday of every month to provide blood pressure and blood glucose screenings free of charge. At least one staff





member who works at the screenings is a licensed nurse. This allows for the recommendation of further medical intervention or response if a health related emergency occurs during the screening. The pharmacy advertises and Golden Heights' staff members do the screenings. The event has become very popular and staff members report that there is typically a line of waiting customers when they open for business! Each person who comes for screening gets a wallet card, courtesy of the pharmacy and Golden Heights, to keep track of their health. While they do not push the services provided by the nursing home, community members know who is providing the service. Staff members enjoy interacting with community members and realize the value in being known by the community.

**Letting those in the community know they are appreciated will also ensure they remember you in the future.**

At Village Manor in Abilene, Kansas, National Nursing Home Week is not just a celebration for those who live and work within the nursing home but also a time to thank the community for their support. Teams of residents and staff members visit all of the businesses in town thanking them for being part of the community and for their support of the nursing home's efforts. The gift varies yearly but the relationships that have formed have been quite fruitful. Staff members mentioned that the first time they stopped in and unloaded a bus full of residents those working at the businesses looked confused but now they have come to expect it and often meet them outside to escort residents inside.



**Case Study: We Have No Money**

Each month when staff members of Sunnyside Manor get together for the culture change meeting, many ideas for keeping residents connected to the community are discussed. Somehow the discussion always ends with several staff members saying, "we can't because we don't have a van." At one recent meeting, staff members were discussing what they learned about resident pleasures during interviews and how to bring those pleasures back into the lives of residents. Mr. Jones commented during his interview that he missed getting together with friends at the local cafe for morning coffee. The staff member finished reporting about the interview and immediately the dreaded "we can't do that because we don't have a van" statement was uttered. Another staff person challenged the group to look at ways they can make it happen without a van.



What options might exist for getting Mr. Jones to morning coffee? Consider resources within the home and from the community.

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If Mr. Jones becomes incapable of going to the local cafe, what are some options for keeping him connected to the group?

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The program descriptions that follow are ideas that have been researched and have been shown to build a sense of community.

### **Community Program**

The Community Program is an intergenerational experience that brings children from an elementary school into the nursing home on a regular basis to engage in a variety of educational activities. Unlike many other intergenerational programs, this program seeks to maintain the relationship for the long-term and become part of the culture within the community. (Hamilton et. al, 1999) The Community Program had several pilot sites and from those sites a guide to replicating the project was developed. The guide provides detailed information related to setting up a program, necessary forms, and methods to sustain and evaluate. Among the many outcomes from this project were residents having the opportunity to do something meaningful and give back to the community, improved resident quality of life, and the development

of interactions between the community and the nursing home (Hamilton et.al, 1999).

### **Ethical Wills**



The Ethical Wills project not only gives elders the opportunity to share wisdom and leave a legacy but also serves as a vehicle for building community. Ethical wills are documents written by elders (with the help of trained volunteers) that detail the values, expectations, hopes, dreams and fears of the individual. The project trains volunteers in how to solicit the information, developing the document and working with the older adult to ensure its clarity and accuracy. Some of the project outcomes include the transmission of wisdom from seniors to those who may benefit, building a community, and receiving accurate feedback about the residence (Stanton & Peyser, 2007).

### **Conclusion**

*“...there can be no community without vulnerability; there can be no peace and ultimately no life, without community.”*

M. Scott Peck

Community is vital to human existence no matter where a person resides. Each community, whether or not in the nursing home setting, will have different values and feeling, but its importance in the lives of residents is the same. Community is really a simple concept; we all want “to be where everybody knows your name and they are always glad you came.”



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