Establishing an activity culture in care homes

Heather Manktelow explains how she is sharing knowledge, skills and best practice around activity provision in an attempt to try to raise standards of activities in care homes

Having recently attended the opening of a new ‘state of the art’ care home in Exeter – Green Tree Court – by Angela Rippon OBE, I was very interested in her speech. She was speaking at the opening ceremony, which took place in the home’s dementia unit, built to specifications as recommended by the Dementia Services Development Centre, University of Stirling.

Ms Rippon has worked tirelessly in her role as ambassador for the Alzheimer’s Society. In her speech, she read from a book scribed by people living with dementia, (Donaghy 2014) and said this quote is her favourite: ‘Dear dementia, I’ve looked at activities in care homes and activities in prisons... I’m off to rob a bank.’

I agree with the sentiment that activities are often better in prisons than in care homes. While there are care homes doing well to promote person-centred activities, I believe that there is plenty of room for improvement in many care homes across the country regarding activity provision, especially for people living with dementia.

I am in full support of the free COT resource Living Well through Activity in Care Homes: The Toolkit and I urge all OTs to recommend it in their interactions with care homes.

I have worked for the past four years as an OT in a nursing home, caring for some of the most challenging people in the area who are living with dementia; that is, individuals that other local homes could not cope with.

I achieved amazing things by tapping into the interests of each individual, getting them involved in meaningful activities, and using an approach of ‘me getting into their world, rather than expecting them to live in mine’.

For example, singing with one lady her school song, because she believed she was in school assembly, and helping a gentleman collect glasses in the dining room, as he used to be a publican and thought he was in his pub, chatting with him about ‘bottling-up’ and what beers he has ‘on tap’.

Another gentleman kept himself isolated in his bedroom, but through appreciating his life history and interests – stage and screen production and management – I put on film shows of the films and stage shows he had been involved in, and he started coming out of his room and engaging in the activity and with other residents.

I harnessed his knowledge and experience to create a Christmas Show for the residents, using staff and residents as the cast. He envisaged and wanted the show to be staged in the local theatre, but I convinced him that we should try it out in the nursing home before we took it to the theatre. He accepted this, the show was a roaring success, and the Christmas Show the following year was even better, with this gentleman playing the starring role and dressing as a dame (Manktelow 2011).

On a personal note, following a shock diagnosis of breast cancer in November 2013, and successful treatment, I realised that time is precious and you never know how much time is left to achieve the things you want to.

It has given me a passion to ‘get on with it’ and share my knowledge, skills and best practice around activity provision in an attempt to try to raise standards of activities in care homes.

Consequently, I became an independent practitioner in May 2014, to offer consultancy, training and general support in activities in care homes. I also aim to generate some research on the topic, to swell the evidence base.

I was thrilled to have been selected as a social entrepreneur through the Dartington School of Social Entrepreneurs Scheme, and to have received some funding from Lloyds Bank to help with set-up costs. This involved competing with 400 other applicants in four rounds of eliminations, culminating in pitching my idea to a panel of six judges ‘Dragon’s Den style’.

I am one of 20 selected social entrepreneurs in the Plymouth cohort. It lasts one year, gives me a good support network, a Lloyds Bank mentor and some business and marketing training.

Being an OT, businesswoman and social entrepreneur enables me to raise awareness about the occupational therapy profession and the benefits of engagement in activity to a wider audience.

I have been on quite a journey in one year. I do not know how it will all turn out, but I am proud to be giving it a go. I am also co-working with the charity Sing For Your Life, to make singing more accessible to people in care homes and community groups.

References


Heather Manktelow, Activities for Health, and member of COTSS-Independent Practice, contact: heather@activitiesforhealth.co.uk or visit: www.activitiesforhealth.co.uk.

For help to start up as a social entrepreneur contact Dartington School of Social Entrepreneurs on tel: 01803 847006 to find your local support team. Applications are being taken now to start in October 2015.