

Action Pact, Inc.

www.Culturechangenow.com

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"Ask Pact" is our own question-and-answer column where people can ask their Culture Change questions and have them answered by our seasoned team of trainers and educators. You may find some topics here that are relevant to you - if not, feel free to Ask Pact!

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Ask Pact

Dementia Specific Neighborhoods or Households

Dear Ask Pact,

We are looking to have a designated dementia unit that incorporates person-centered care and would like to know if special care units will continue in the culture change movement or are we looking at the elimination of special care unit?

THANKS!

We've asked Action Pact consultant Megan Hannan who specializes in supporting those people who live with dementia and their caregivers. She has presented at the National Alzheimer's Association Conference, the World Congress on Alzheimer's, and the International Eden Alternative conference on Community Learning Circles, an innovative means of involving elders who live with dementia, staff and family together in meaningful life.

I am intrigued by your question. The most comprehensive research that I am aware of, done by the Alzheimer's Association several years ago concluded that it did not matter if people living with dementia resided in a "special care unit" or not as long as the environment provided excellent (person-centered) care.

So then the issue becomes one of your organization, its market, the needs of the population you serve and your

resources at hand. I am familiar with and have helped grow several households and neighborhoods specifically designed for people with dementia. The traditional case for doing this is that "programming" can be tailored to the specific needs of the people living in that neighborhood.

However, if your organization is truly committed to the deep work of creating smaller groups of residents with a dedicated, cross-functional team who is responding to what the residents truly need both as individuals and as a community, then anyone living in that environment will thrive.

Unfortunately, we only have anecdotal outcomes on dementia specific neighborhoods or households, most of which is, quite frankly, astounding. When people living with dementia live in a physical environment that has a kitchen, living room, dining room somehow it feels more comfortable. When that environment is supported by staff who listen, watch and respond with support, any person in that environment feels more like "themselves." A specific example is of a lady who has been living in a nursing home for several years and has required almost total assistance to eat her meals. She moved into a household about three months ago. Same staff, same residents, but the

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Dementia Specific, *continued*



daily lifestyle is different. She arises when she feels like getting up, there is not a morning rush to confuse her and agitate her. And not only has she been totally independent in her eating, she is relishing her food, eating more and gaining some needed weight. The household team is astounded because it was not an expectation they had. They expected that people would feel better, more comfortable and more included. And that is so. Apparently, along with that is some renewed ability to take care of herself. After all, that is what many of us want to do; care for ourselves.



Community circles, using the learning circle concept, are one of the most effective ways to help grow the community aspect of a group of residents by building relationships among residents, staff and families. The environment and organizational structure of a neighborhood or household is dependent on constant relationship building; the better the team knows each other the better the staff are at responding. See *Circles Everywhere* at: http://www.culturechangenow.com/free_resources.html

So, to wrap up, you can see that any true neighborhood or household has the potential to serve people who live with dementia better than a non-neighborhood or large groups with little identity or community. It sounds to me

like you are going to create neighborhoods in your whole house, as it were. That is important – everyone deserves to be connected to a small group that benefits from individualized care.

The task you and your team have now is to envision your own future. Ask yourselves, “What makes sense for our home? Our community? Our organization?” You might start by reading *In Pursuit of the Sunbeam* http://www.culturechangenow.com/other_items.html > as a leadership team to begin to shape your vision. I don’t know what other resources you have already accessed and are using, but I will be glad to recommend more if you’d like.

You may also be interested in our PersonFirst™ process, which educates, empowers and facilitates an in-house team to teach person-centered care and work hard at growing that culture in your home. In fact, this curriculum and process focuses on people who live with dementia because they are most often left out of much of daily life. We use the knowledge and good skills for serving those living with dementia to apply to person-centered care for everyone.

Feel free to contact me directly with any other questions. Good luck in your endeavors.

Megan, Action Pact, Inc.

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