

Action Pact, Inc.

www.Culturechangenow.com

Ask Pact

Topic: What About The Younger Resident?



"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!

www.culturechange.com/askpact.html

Dear Ask Pact,
The company I work for just sent us to a 3-day seminar on the Eden Alternative™. We were all very excited and motivated. My question is this: the specific building I work in is a 50-bed facility where all our residents have major behavioral issues—a lot of schizophrenia, bipolar disorders, etc. Do you have any specific idea on how to implement the different aspects we learned about? Most of what I have read is geared towards the geriatric resident. Many of our residents are very young. Thanks.

- Kim

Kim, we have asked our good friend Nancy Fox, Executive Director the Eden Alternative,™ to give your question her personal attention. She has kindly done so in great detail and has included two downloadable handouts for you to use. Here's Nancy's reply:

Dear Kim,

What an important question. If Eden were designed only to help old people or people without mental challenges, then I think it would be a failure. Our charge is to create a world that is better for everyone, not just the few.

In Eden language, we define an "Elder" as someone who, by the virtue of their life experience, is here to teach us how to be human. So an Elder

is not defining a chronological age, it is defining a life experience. That life experience can include the physical or mental challenges that can place someone in a position of honor and respect in our society because they truly teach us everyday.

They teach us those things that make us human. They teach us about patience and compassion and unconditional love, and forgiveness and humility. Caregivers understand that by giving care, they are also receiving something very valuable in return. That gift is the gift of our own humanity.

Bill and Jude Thomas know this lesson well. They have two special needs daughters who teach them every day. Hannah and Haleigh may be 9 and 11 years old, but they are truly Elders in our community.

As for Elders living with psychiatric illnesses, I can tell you from my own experience, that the lessons of Eden can help you create a life worth living for them, as well. I believe that many of the "behavior" problems we experience in caring for these special people are a result of our attempts at forcing them to conform to the scheduled routines and published policies of the institutional model.

They are suffering from loneliness, helplessness, and boredom, and the lack of meaning in their lives. Eden teaches us that relationships matter - love matters!

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Younger Resident, *continued*

*They teach us
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In the organization that I was privileged to be involved with in this Eden journey, we had 94% of our Elders living with dementia or psychiatric illnesses. By creating meaningful relationships and a world in which those Elders had autonomy over their daily lives, we were able to reduce "behavior problems" by 92%.

I would begin your journey by listening to the Elders and the hands-on caregivers. Engaging them in conversations (learning circles) about the things that they care about. Help the Elders become well-known by implementing permanent assignment of staff, so that the same people are caring for the same people every day. When we know the Elder well, we can begin to create a world in which he or she feels at home, and feels loved.

Begin to grow your teams and listen to what they are telling you. What are the current institutional methods of operation that are getting in **their** way of creating a better world for the Elders? One of the best ways to warm the soil of your organization is to listen and involve others in creating a world in which they can be comfortable. When you do that, you will create a world that is better for all.

I would refer you to your *Haleigh's Almanac*™ that you received in Eden training. It is a vast resource for you to use in this journey. Look at two sections: *The Farmer's Calendar*, which is a personal pathway to Eden, and *The Gardener's Companion*, which

is an organizational pathway to Eden. Those chapters are filled with tools that you can use to begin this journey.

I am attaching two files from *Haleigh's Almanac* for you to use as you begin your journey. The first is [Ten Ways to Create involvement](#). The other is a brief tool for [creating a vision](#). You want to get as many people as possible involved in creating a new vision for your journey.

I would also refer you to Carol Ende, our Eden Support person. Her email is cende@edenalt.com. If you will email Carol, she can put you in touch with other Eden Homes that have a large percentage of younger Elders and those who have a large percentage of Elders living with psychiatric illnesses.

One of the great benefits of *The Eden Alternative*™ is that we have hundreds of organizations who are on this journey and all are willing to help each other. I would encourage you to talk with these other organizations to discover the things that have worked and not worked for them.

This journey is not an easy one, but it is an important. Learn from each other. Be patient, Be creative. Be committed.

I want to thank you for having the courage to make a better world, and for giving me this opportunity to answer your question.

–[Nancy Fox](#), Executive Director, [The Eden Alternative](#)™



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Celebrate differences!



TEN WAYS TO CREATE INVOLVEMENT

If you want to get people involved...

1. Give them the opportunity to be in the spotlight, in the center, and in control – and at the same time, **find out something about them, understand where they're coming from, what they need.**
2. Create a safe place! Create a circle of warmth, a circle of friends.
3. If you want to get people involved ... **Ask!**
4. Ask **your small circle of friends to go out and get someone else involved!**
5. Change the atmosphere – **create the climate for involvement.**
6. **Give them the opportunity to share themselves, to talk about themselves** – to seek meaning through this involvement.
7. **Encourage them to talk from the heart, to tell the stories in their hearts. And to listen to each others' stories – to discover each other.**
8. Acknowledge and celebrate that we are all equals, we are all the same... and we are all different. Celebrate it!
9. **Share your vision and determine your mission together. Discover common values and goals.**
10. Give them a few simple guidelines, then let them establish their own rules, and even reshape your guidelines as time goes on. Be willing to give up the control, to take a different role in this new community.

Training Manual: Organizational Assessment through High Involvement Practices

©An Action Pact program, designed for *Eden Alternative*™ Handout #1



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Creating a Positive Vision

Why do we exist?

What are our values?

What do we want to create?

Nearly every organization has a well-intended mission statement posted somewhere in the building. In many instances, the mission statement is handed down from the corporate office. We are after something different. We want people **to really question themselves** as people, as professionals, and as an organization.

As you write your mission statement, ponder the following questions:

How can we make a difference in the lives of our Elders?

How can we make a difference in the lives of our Employees?

How can we make a difference in the life of our Community?

How can these values be woven into a Human Habitat?

How will our statement reflect our commitment to the Eden Alternative™ Principles?



From "Gardener's Companion" Haleigh's Almanac, Eden Alternative