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Culture Change in Practice



Culture Change in Zoos?

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Posted by Steph Kilen



"Culture Change in Practice" is our own weblog where people can become involved in a conversation about Culture Change as it is practiced by professionals in real nursing homes. Feel free to join the conversation, or post a comment about something you have learned on your journey.

www.culturechangenow.com/weblog.html

In the 70s, while all over the country cold, institutional nursing homes were being built to warehouse elders, zoos were discovering that animals do better in habitats that mimic their natural environment than in the cold, institutional environments of cages. How is it that we recognized the importance of familiar home-like environments for Bobo but not for Grandma?

WNYC public radio show Radio Lab (<http://www.wnyc.org/shows/radiola>) did a fantastic show (<http://www.wnyc.org/shows/radiola/b/episodes/2007/06/01>) on the culture change of zoos.. In it, the hosts interview zoo director David Hancocks (<http://www.ucpress.edu/books/pages/8850.php>) who pioneered the change. He said, "[There was a time when I thought] Do I want to go and work in zoos and try to change them or do I want to stay outside zoos and work to close them down and I came to the conclusion that there is no way you are going to close zoos down."

So, what did he do? As host Robert Krulwich (<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5194672>) says "He decided to take a look at the entire philosophy of the zoo and change everything." Wow, right? It gets

better...the zoo staff had all the worry that comes with systemic change and anxiety about how the animals would react to their new environment. The kicker...in just four weeks in an improved environment, the animals showed improved brain activity.

Once you get over the retro-frustration about the fact that a need for culture change in zoos came about 20 years before the need for culture change in long-term care, you can take heart that these more natural environments for animals are now "the way things are done" in zoos. If they can accomplish that for animals, we can certainly accomplish that, and more, for our elders.

(In the podcast of the show, you may want to listen up to minute 23-ish as the first segment is the one I am talking about and the second deals with letting zoo animals eat what they would have in the wild – an excellent case for refrigerator rights but not the sort of thing to listen to around meal time, if you get my drift.)

