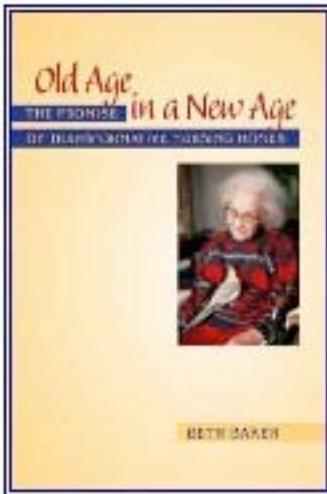


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June, 2007

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Old Age in a New Age: An Urgent Call to Action



An Interview with Beth Baker
by Keith Schaeffer

When her grandmother “lost her spark” after moving into a conventional, medical model nursing home, Beth Baker assumed it was the result of old age and frailty.

But after four years of extensive research for her new book, *Old Age in a New Age: The Promise of Transformative Nursing Homes*, the writer and former hospital worker is no longer so sure. “I wonder now, it might have been the environment itself,” she says.

Baker, a regular contributor to the *Washington Post* Health Section and the *AARP Bulletin*, visited more than 20 nursing homes across the country and interviewed countless residents, caregivers, administrators, advocates and gerontological experts. As an outside observer, she confirms what culture change enthusiasts within the industry have been saying all along: institutionalized nursing homes are unhealthy for residents and caregivers alike.

The good news is, it doesn't have to be that way, as demonstrated by Baker's stirring accounts of elders who have literally come to life when placed in “person-centered” surroundings. Common threads running through the successful transformative models she visited

are strong leadership, environments that encourage interpersonal relationships, and commitment to creating a real home for residents.

Baker discovered to her astonishment that nursing homes that empower frontline caregivers and give residents choice, autonomy and a reason for living need not cost more to operate than the old model. “Everyone assumes if it is a good quality home, it must be for rich people. (Learning otherwise) was a very welcomed surprise,” she says.

She doesn't dismiss the practical difficulties of deep culture change. But the biggest impediment, she believes, is cynicism by management and the public about residents and staff.

“I can't tell you how many times I've heard, ‘that might work for assisted living but not in a nursing home because (the elders) are too far gone...(or) aides at our home couldn't possibly do (that),’” she says.

She dispels such myths with individualized success stories and statistical outcomes, some at transformative nursing homes located in the most unlikely places. Baker hopes her book imbues readers with a sense of urgency and

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Old Age, continued

willingness to play a role in transforming the culture of long-term care.

"There's a million levels they can do that on," she says.

Old Age in a New Age is an extensively documented overview of the current situation and how it can be so much better—a must-read for anyone with a nursing home in his/her future.

You can find the book *Old Age in a New Age: The Promise of Transformative Nursing Homes* at our website:

<http://www.culturechangenow.com/otheritems.html>

For a printable version of the interview with Beth Baker, go to

http://www.culturechangenow.com/free_resources.html In the Papers and Others section click on the Old Age in a New Age link.

Action Pact Training Calendar

Tale of Transformation

**Special price for
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Wed, June 27, 2007

United Way of Greater
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Thu, June 28, 2007

Bordeaux Long-Term
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Hospital Road Nashville
TN 37218

Fri, June 29, 2007

Memphis Jewish Home
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form & fax to 414-
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<http://www.culturechangenow.com/pdf/tot-registration.pdf>

Person First at Meadowlark

As part of ongoing PersonFirst training at Meadowlark Hills in Manhattan Ks, staff are sharing their stories about engaging elders to get to know them as whole people. Laci Cornelison, a Household Coordinator, shares this story with us:

"I know an individual that forgets everyday how many times he goes in and out of the building and that we have the same conversation everyday, but each day he tells me about his career. Everyday, I hear him tell me about this as if it were the first time I ever heard it. When he is done reliving all of the different places his career has taken him, he smiles and feels good about himself and what he has accomplished. Though he does have memory loss and I, as a staff

member, may know that I have heard his stories many times, he feels like he is telling them for the first time. His stories remind me every time that he was a person outside of here full of knowledge and vitality. I get to know him better and better each time I hear the story because I can picture how each place that he has been shaped him into who he is today."

We all know it takes time to get to know people and build relationships, but we are used to that happening in a certain way - as time goes on, we learn more. However, Laci's story shows that learning more doesn't always mean learning something different. Even when we hear the same story over and over, each

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Person First, *continued*

Did you know?
Free resources and training materials are just a click away!

The Action Pact website offers free downloads of materials to get your team moving and learning! We recently

added several new articles. Instructions for the learning circle, help finding non-caregivers' roles in culture change, techniques for embracing change, a new spin on meetings and many more tools to help spread culture change in your facility.

These mini training, discussion and self-improvement aids, taken from our Ask Pact column and Culture Change in Practice blog, can be used by beginners of the movement as well as those already operating in the Household Model.

You need not register and there are no strings attached. Visit <http://www.culturechangenow.com> and click on the red **Free downloads** link.

time is a chance to see more of that person because each day brings new perspective. (We might even apply this idea the next time we listen to our spouse tell the story of high school championship or meeting a celebrity at a Quick Trip for the nine thousandth time(!).

Often those working in long-term care do so because they find great reward in helping residents. But what about the reward of residents helping staff? Think of the pride and satisfaction residents get from turning the tables and giving back to those who care for them. While building such relationships benefit those involved, in the case of Tami Sparks, a Certified Dietary Manager at Meadowlark Hills in Manhattan, Ks, it benefited her dog too! Here, in her own words, she tells how:

"One of the residents used to be a vet and I was having an issue with my dog so, I asked him for advice. My dog was running into the coffee table. It was a glass coffee table. He told me to get rid of the table and get something wood or solid that she could see. He also said that it sounded like cataracts and I didn't know dogs could get those, but he assured me that they can. He said I should take her to her vet and tell them what I told him. I did and they agreed with this resident. My dog has cataracts and now we have a new coffee table and my dog doesn't walk into the table anymore thanks to a retired vet's advice."

We should always be on the lookout for opportunities to honor elders by asking for their advice and opinions, which have grown rich with their life experience.

Are you making the journey to households? Let others know so that they can learn from you. Contact Steph at Action Pact (steph@actionpact.com) and ask her about our new page on the web that will be devoted to telling household stories.

New Articles on the Free Downloads

Weighted Voting

Reflections of An Older American Activist

The "Culture" in Culture Change

Morale

A Homelike Home