

**Appropriate for**



**Athlete**



**Active now**



**Getting started**



**Needs a little help**



**Needs ongoing assistance**

## Offense, offense, offense: running the community wellness ball

by Melissa Bossert, Sarah McCallin and Janelle Renda

There are wonderful programs offered in our field to improve the well-being of our clientele. Yet a program isn't successful unless people participate, and many communities struggle with this. What's the perfect solution to pull people into your wellness program?

At our community, Westminster Towers, Orlando, the key factors that motivated residents to join the program were staff involvement and identifying stages of change. This combination has led to a 20% increase in participation from all levels of care each year.

### Drafting the team

One person waving the pom-poms to create enthusiasm for programming isn't likely to be successful. It really does "take a squad" to make wellness work. Our community has taken a hands-on approach to involving staff in our wellness programs. As a result, there is a whole team waving their pom-poms. This concept has been very successful as we have seen more residents, volunteers and families becoming winners in the community wellness program.

The first step was to involve the entire wellness team so that programming didn't always come from the same few people. The wellness team consists of staff representatives from fitness, social services, activities-health center, volunteer coordinator, activities-assisted living, resident services, pastoral care, health services administrator, therapy, assisted living, dining services and 3 residents. We divided into 4 subcommittees that were responsible for planning and facilitating a program for 2 of the 8 wellness dimensions used in our community. The programs had to be compatible for all levels of care, and each dimension was assigned a designated month to hold the program.



The popular "Rosemary" program explores the use of herbs.

The wellness team asked the staff to make suggestions for programs they would like to organize and/or help out with in the coming year. Their ideas and talents amazed us. The staff members were bouncing ideas off each other even if they worked in different departments and had different roles. Then, staff members found other people (residents and staff) who shared the same interest and asked them to help work on a wellness program idea.

The staff started taking more of an interest in the residents' wants and desires. We heard people talking about what Mr. Smith's hobbies were and what Mrs. Jones did last week and how much fun it would be to have a program on that topic. You felt a

Continued on page 9...

Continued from page 8

sense of pride coming from staff members that this was the month when “their” ideas were going to be used, or that today they were going to step outside their normal job roles. This created a “buzz” of word of mouth as people were promoting their own programming and encouraging residents to come and participate.

Among the many success stories, these 2 examples demonstrate how staff involvement helped increase resident participation in the wellness program.

**Rosemary and the herbs.** A former teacher, Human Resources Director Dawn Hogan invented an alter-ego named Rosemary Oregano. Dawn’s first workshop on using herbs in our everyday lives was called “An Hour of Herbs with Rosemary.” Dawn promoted her program by recruiting the dining services staff to bake herbed bread and asking the residents to pick herbs from the rooftop garden to bring to the workshop.

Rosemary came dressed in costume for the educational session, which included a taste-testing of herbal teas and treats, and gave away great door prizes. This workshop had the residents talking for months and they asked Rosemary to continue the herb series. Since then she has taken residents to local herb shops and out for High Tea. The big bonus of this program was that we saw many new faces come out and participate.

**United Nations Day.** One of the wellness subcommittees came up with the idea of putting on a United Nations Day. This program had over 20 staff and residents involved in the planning and production process. The goal was to ask the staff to share their cultural backgrounds with the community to enhance the intellectual wellness of our residents and other attending staff.

A search team found staff and residents from Puerto Rico, the Ivory Coast of Africa, France, China, Germany, Haiti, Italy and, of course, the United States. Participating



Photography: Melissa Bossert

United Nations Day featured displays from 8 countries and had the highest attendance of any wellness program.

staff members worked in the health care center, maintenance, dining services, residential assisted living, the fitness center and residential living. Staff encouraged residents from all levels of care to come for several weeks prior to the event.

The program was set up in our largest common room with booths representing each country placed around the perimeter. Residents assisted with educational research for the display boards that were at each booth. Staff members and residents representing the countries came dressed in native costumes and even brought in home-baked items for the residents to sample. Residents moved from booth to booth at their own pace.

A dance floor was placed in the center of the room with a few rows of chairs for a cultural belly dancing performance. On a stage, the Germany booth expanded to create a “Beer Garten” café that had samples of German beers and was surrounded by German memorabilia and figurines.

This 2-hour event had one of the biggest turnouts of any wellness program. Afterward, one employee who ran a booth said, “This was the best day at work I’ve ever had!”

Continued on page 10...

Continued from page 9

## Staff and resident programs

The majority of the people who work in this environment want to enhance other people's lives and, by doing so, enhance their own. Staff members provide motivation for the residents by bringing the outside world inside and asking themselves, "What can I contribute?" The wellness team makes sure that many programs are ones that everyone can participate in—no matter what job they have—which creates a sense of family.

Examples are:

**Rooftop Garden Get-Togethers.** Every month, residents and staff work side by side planting, weeding, picking, pruning and doing general maintenance.

**Halloween Costume Contest and Pot Luck.** Fifty percent of the staff dressed in costume and paraded through each level of care, followed by a huge potluck luncheon and costume contest.

**Around the World in 80 Days.** A walking incentive program, residents and staff worked in teams to see who could log the most miles.

**Holiday Hi-Jinx.** Residents and staff signed up to participate in caroling, decorating cookies, making and delivering snowman poop to other "unsuspecting" residents and staff, painting winter scenes on over 50+ windows throughout the building, decorating 20+ trees throughout the building and

---

Caring for the rooftop garden is a favorite activity of residents and staff.



producing a program titled, "Christmas Tales from the Kitchen" (led by our dining services staff).

**Model A Ford Day.** The Model A Ford Club of Central Florida came to display their cars for our residents and families. The staff dressed up in period costume to host the event.

**Country Fair Days.** The fair (run by staff in all levels of care) featured a petting zoo, carnival midway, watermelon-seed-spitting contest, cow-milking contest, pie-eating contest, soup- and-chili contest plus booths offering cotton candy, popcorn and snow cones. Our resident clown troupe entertained by making balloons and painting faces. Dining services prepared a "fair food" dinner offering hot dogs, corndogs, funnel cakes, corn on the cob and lemonade.

## The running and passing games

The second key factor to motivate involvement is to meet the needs of residents at their stages of change. Getting a person involved in a program does not just happen immediately; not all of us begin at the same starting point. For some, coming to a program may seem overwhelming and intimidating. Others may want to be more involved and volunteer with planning a program. While some people need a guiding hand with simple tasks, other participants need a good challenge to stay interested. This is why

Continued on page 11...

---

Model A day brought out the flappers showing off 1920s clothing.



Continued from page 10

identifying the stage a person is at can be very helpful when motivating participation.

The Active Living Every Day program references 5 stages of change that we apply to the majority of our resident population. The stages are:

1. Pre-contemplation (not even thinking about it)
2. Contemplation (giving it a thought now and then, but not doing it)
3. Preparation (doing it irregularly)
4. Action (doing the new habit consistently, but for less than 6 months)
5. Maintenance (maintaining the new habit for 6 months or more)

**1. and 2. Pre-Contemplation and Contemplation.** We use multiple resources to let people know about the wellness program. We print notices in newsletters and bulletins that are posted around the building in well-visited areas, send flyers to each apartment the day prior to an event or program, encourage friendships with those who are involved, and advertise via our in-house television station and on our community website.

**3. Preparation.** To reach residents in the preparation stage, building relationships is very important. Once you have established a friendship with a person, you are better able to understand her or his interests, type of motivation and personal goals. This is why the more staff that are involved, the better you are at reaching your residents.

For example, one of our residents had recently lost his wife and was having a very hard time adjusting to this life-changing event. The last thing on his mind was getting involved in community events or physical activity.

After some time passed, he was invited to be on the wellness team. We asked him to be a part of this new adventure into

wellness and explained how he could help out the community by doing so. This automatically informed him of the programs that were being offered, and how they were brainstormed and put into action.

His opinion was expressed and valued while working on a subcommittee that had 3 projects to organize and facilitate, and he built a deeper friendship with the committee chair. Gradually he visited the fitness center more often and even requested weekly personal training.

Today, whenever help is needed, he is the first to offer assistance. He now regularly participates in activities and attends many fitness-specific events.

**4. Action.** Introducing a new program and asking for volunteers is the best way to keep people involved and interested in your wellness program. Know your audience, keep up your enthusiasm, and believe in what you are doing.

For example, during the month of February we are holding our first annual Film Festival (thanks to a suggestion by a family member). For this week-long program, we asked many residents who volunteer irregularly to a special meeting to explain a “secret project.”

During this meeting we had specific jobs that people could do: logo design, picking out films, being an usher, promotions, building the concession stand, selecting the concession candy/food, working the concession stand and being a projectionist.

We did not make volunteers wait to find out what they needed to do; we *put our plan into action that day*. People were signing up left and right to volunteer for a task they felt comfortable with.

**5. Maintenance.** One important factor that we seem to forget is the Fun Factor. It’s not all about charts and graphs. Fun is the key word to getting all of us motivated to promote and participate in wellness.

Continued on page 12...

Continued from page 11

Who doesn't want to have fun? We all do...residents, staff, families and volunteers.

It is very important to help each other continue setting new goals that are attainable, yet challenging, and yes...keep it fun!

You can keep it fresh by not micro-managing or making participation feel like an obligation. Encourage people to use the freedom of imagination. Variety of programming is very important for the participant as well as the facilitator. If your staff members are bored, the residents are bored.

### **Strong offense takes you to the wellness bowl**

Motivation to participate in a program is important at any age—we all struggle with it. However, those who are in an active-living community have a distinct advantage because the people who work and live there can create an environment of constant fun, enthusiasm and support. The residents are surrounded by this enthusiasm and it can be contagious!

Meeting the needs of the residents at their particular stage of change is essential to ensuring participation and continued involvement. Taking care to establish a rapport with the residents will aid in the proper stage identification and will help you meet their needs in the long run.

Finally, having a clear vision and action plan ensures that everyone (residents, staff and families) are on the same path to the Super Bowl of community wellness.

Melissa Bossert is the Resident Lifestyle Facilitator at Westminster Towers, Orlando, part of the Westminster Communities of Florida family. Her career working with older adults began as a tour guide traveling the United States and Europe. A move to Florida introduced her to Westminster Towers where she has been a member of the management team for the past 11 years bringing new, exciting and quality programming to the community. She has been

featured in The Florida Magazine in the article, "Jugglers of Joy." Melissa has a degree in travel and tourism management from Johnson and Wales University.

Sarah McCallin, SFA-SPT, is the Fitness Coordinator at Westminster Towers, Orlando where she is responsible for running the Keiser Fitness Center, instructing land- and water-based fitness classes and providing multidimensional wellness education classes. Sarah is a graduate of Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, with bachelors degrees in athletic training and in health promotion and a minor in gerontology.

Janelle Renda is the Assistant Resident Lifestyle Facilitator at Westminster Towers, Orlando. With a major career change and a new degree in hospitality management, Janelle's responsibilities include everything from formal event planning to departmental support. Additionally, she has earned the "unofficial" title of staff artist, gardener and clown! Her creative talents and fresh ideas have produced awards and articles from the Orange County Citizens Commission for Children and Central Florida News, Channel 13.

### **Reference**

Blair, S., Dunn, A., Marcus, B., Carpenter, R. and Jaret, P. (2001) Active Living Every Day, Human Kinetics:Champaign, IL, p.8

### **Resources**

Active Living Every Day  
Book, online course, classroom course  
Human Kinetics  
[www.humankinetics.com](http://www.humankinetics.com)

Active Living Every Day  
[ICAA member discount available]  
[www.icaa.cc/Education/thelCAAstore.htm](http://www.icaa.cc/Education/thelCAAstore.htm)

Reprinted with permission from International Council on Active Aging, [www.ICAA.cc](http://www.ICAA.cc)

**Functional U**®  
Jan-Feb 2007