

# Embedding social activities and interactions in care homes

NICHE  
KNOW-HOW

## **What is needed to make social activities and interactions routine in care homes?**

- Engaged care staff who value social activities and interacting with people living with dementia.
- Managers supporting and encouraging staff to carry out social activities and interactions.
- Getting to know residents, and adapting activities to match their likes and abilities.
- Giving residents time to get used to and become familiar with activities.

## **What can the organisation do to support staff?**

- If staffing levels are low, adapt work schedules to ensure there are enough staff to allow opportunities for social activities and interactions.
- Train staff on the benefits of social activities and interactions.
- Give staff opportunities to practice activities they may feel uncomfortable with, for example, singing and dancing.
- Listen to staff concerns.
- Encourage staff to share and speak with each other about what works (or doesn't).



**Staff at Seacroft Grange asked:** “How can we achieve more meaningful interactions with residents living with dementia to promote well-being?”

**Background:** Social activities and interacting with people with dementia helps improve their well-being. It is important that social activities and interactions are part of everyday care.

### **Work carried out to look at this**

In 2012<sup>1</sup> work was carried out to understand how social activities and interactions can become routine in a care home environment. The results of 35 individual studies were brought together. A summary of what was found is described below.

### **What is needed for social activities and interactions to be part of routine care?**

*Engaged care staff who value social activities and interactions with people living with dementia.*

When engaging staff start with a group approach. From the beginning acknowledge their expertise, listen to their views, their preferences, and their concerns.

*Managers supporting and facilitating change.*

Management in the home are needed to support, and encourage care staff to carry out social interactions with residents during their day to day work.

*Activities and interactions need to fit the likes and abilities of each resident.*

Get to know what residents like by speaking to their relatives. Create opportunities for staff to speak to relatives over face to face meetings, telephone calls, or group workshops. Group workshops work particularly well for getting relatives involved, and for building trusting relationships between relatives and the care team.

*A flexible approach.*

Adapt activities, and social interactions to suit residents’ abilities, and behaviours.

*Give residents time.*

Carry out activities for enough time to allow residents time to become familiar and confident in activities. This is particularly important for people with dementia.

### **What else should be considered?**

*Staffing levels*

Low staffing will make it difficult for staff to carry out social activities and interactions. The care home may need to adapt work schedules to ensure there are enough staff. When there is a lack of time consider activities that could be incorporated into day to day practice, for example, favourite music could be played during care activities, or meals served outdoors during good weather.

*Staff concerns about risk*

When staff are concerned about risks encourage them to think about the negative impact on residents when they do not take part in meaningful activities.

*Staff not seeing the value of social activities*

When staff do not believe that social activities are beneficial, or they feel uncomfortable participating in activities such as singing or dancing then some of the following suggestions could be carried out below:

1. Train on the benefits of social activities and interactions.

2. Managers support, and encourage care staff to carry out social interactions during their day to day work.
3. Speak to staff and listen to their concerns. During supervision meetings give staff the opportunity to speak and reflect on their practice, practical issues, and listen to their suggested solutions.
4. Create opportunities for staff to share and speak with each other.
5. Practicing may help if staff feel uncomfortable taking part in certain activities, such as singing or dancing then practicing may help. Formal training, role plays, videos and vignettes are also a useful approach for teaching.

### **Things to take into account**

The information described here summarises 35 individual studies focusing on a range of different activities carried out in a care home setting. The types of activities looked at were related to animal, nature, music, exercise, and reminiscence related activities. These studies were undertaken across a range of contexts but offer valuable insights which may be applied in other care homes.

### **Conclusions**

The findings will support staff to consider how they can promote social activities and engagement in their day to day work.

**References:** The information described in this NICHE Know How is based on research conducted by Lawrence and colleagues in 2012. The full research paper can be found using this reference; Lawrence, V., Fossey, J., Ballard, C., Moniz-Cook, E. and Murray, J., 2012. Improving quality of life for people with dementia in care homes: making psychosocial interventions work. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 201(5), pp.344-351.