

Montessori for Dementia Certification Final Report

March 2013

By Tammy Day

I cannot tell you how much fun this has been. I am totally enjoying getting to know each of my residents and learning how best to interact with them. Each day is something new and something to return to.

I have to say my experience did not start out well. The Activities Manager at the Extendicare I am working for has no interest in what I am trying to do. Fortunately the DOC for Nursing recognizes the value in Montessori for Dementia and took me under her guidance. The Activities staff has been a mixed group. Several are not pleasant with me at all, as I believe they feel threatened by me. I would say they have right to be uncomfortable as the more time I spend with the residents, the better results I am getting and the fewer behaviours we are seeing. The others are pleasant enough and express an interest in learning but I guess that remains to be seen after my certification! I try not to upset them or interact with them in order to avoid conflict. I want to keep my job!

The other staff has been so supportive of what I am doing. The PSW's are very friendly, except for a few and they are often commenting how nice it is to see a resident acting "more like themselves". They are always asking me to work with another one who they want to be more social or that they are concerned is getting depressed or otherwise exhibiting "behaviours". They appreciate the time I am able to give the residents and make their life easier.

The nursing staff and other management staff have also been supportive. They are often commenting on positive things they have overheard in the lunch room and at morning meetings. This makes the job a lot easier that is for sure.

The best is that the residents have been also commenting on my work. One in particular, B, said to me "You know Tammy, if everyone were as good as you are working with these people, we would have a lot less problems." This was in reference to my resident "CP" as well as another who is similar in some ways. I wanted to kiss her I was so pleased to hear that. I thanked her profusely and went to my supervisor and told her. The Charge Nurse on duty also heard it and agreed with B.

Something that is rewarding to me is that many of the residents whom I have worked with no longer require so much of my time. This is the hard part of trying to include them in my report now! They were residents who were showing particularly negative behaviours such as aggression, and playful things which could potentially hurt someone (i.e. tripping people walking by). I concentrated heavily on them during the first few weeks of my contract, getting to know them and working on activities to get them engaged. Now I have little contact with them for activities as we spend our time chatting most often.

A.L. now plays solitaire with a deck of cards I gave him. He reads books, attends group activities and is causing no problems. G.A. varies between calling me “the old lady” and asking me for coffee. He tires easily with activities but loves to sit and chat with me and attending music activities. He chats a lot during these which annoys the Activities people but I look at it as therapy for him! He is lonely and if music triggers memories which he is willing to share with me, then I feel honoured to be part of this. R.S. used to spend an awful lot of time going downstairs to phone her daughter – upwards of 10 times per day or more. I now spend the afternoon (when I can) playing cards and chatting with her. She thinks she is doing me the favour of it all. I don’t tell her differently! R.Y. loves to chat now. She will talk for a long time with me now but declines activities. She would rather look at her photos and talk about her boys! J.C. is slowly warming to me – she is rather unsociable but was thrilled when I gave her a beautiful mirror for her night stand to try to encourage her to take pride in herself again. She now chats briefly with me. Baby steps! C.C. who is nonverbal and severely challenged now giggles when I approach and loves to colour with me and use stickers! This is progress for sure!

I have introduced many activities and am still developing more. I was surprised to see that picture matching was not successful as the photos were too dark – I never thought of this—they need more contrast in them to be easily seen. I have introduced puzzles, playdough, matching with Velcro tabs to hold pieces in place, sensory balls, shape puzzles, painting, giant balloon tossing, cards, colouring, reading books and more.

Seeing how much progress is being made I am very pleased. My only concern is that I have to date been unsuccessful in creating roles and routines for my residents. This is something I want to change in the coming months for sure. I feel confident that I could do this now that the residents and staff are more comfortable with me.

This has been a wonderful experience for me. I am gaining the confidence to do this and the support I am finding has been so helpful. I have made a good name for myself in this building now and hope to keep going with this. I truly did not know that I would be comfortable working with seniors in a nursing home environment. This is pretty much the opposite of what I have been accustomed to. Happily I am finding my way and enjoying it very much! I’ve even taken the initiative to do the Feeding In Service to add that to my day. This has really cemented my rapport with CC and CP! I’ve come to realize that working with seniors and working with children is really not so different – only their body sizes are different!

Thank you for this amazing opportunity.

Tammy Day
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