

The Impact of Reminiscence Programming on Overall Operations

ABSTRACT

This white paper will summarize the potential for reminiscence and life story recording to impact the overall operations of community settings. Reminiscence impacts wellness, memory care, hospice, home care, outreach/marketing, community life/activities, family visiting, community volunteerism, social accountability and human resources.

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LifeBio, Inc. 232 N. Main St., Suite 2J, Marysville, OH 43040, 1-866-LIFEBIO, info@lifebio.com

OVERVIEW

With the continuing evolution of person-centered care and the importance of providing more individualized approaches in active adult, assisted living, skilled nursing, adult day programs, and CCRC settings, communities have an increasing interest in reminiscence and life review programming and see the potential impact on overall operations.

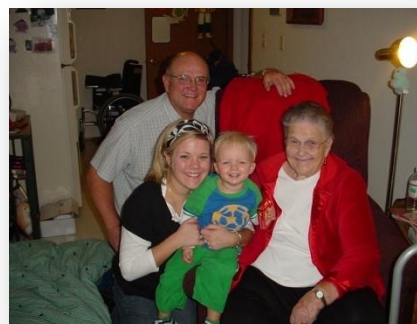
In competitive markets, current or prospective residents and their loved ones have very high expectations for service which, in turn, requires the community's staff to have an even deeper knowledge of each person's background, events, and values in order to meet and exceed these expectations. At the core, relationships matter—whether meeting a person for the first time, speaking with a family member, in everyday interactions, or when facing end of life.

There are a number of ways that focusing on the life stories of residents leads to improvements in the overall operations of a community.

WELLNESS & HEALTH CARE

Reminiscence is found to touch all dimensions of wellness. In addition, as the life story is learned, it helps to improve relationships between staff and residents. It is important to promote **engagement** and ensure people are not just focusing on physical fitness but on overall *wellness*.

Social Wellness – connecting people to promote friendship, seeing what they have in common
 Spiritual Wellness – seeing the “big picture” of life and the importance of faith and values
 Emotional Wellness – exploring the joys and challenges, strength from overcoming obstacles
 Intellectual Wellness – learning about one's own life and the life of peers, writing, sharing



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Physical Wellness – reminiscence found to lower physical pain and feelings of depression
 Vocational Wellness – recording life stories gives people an important life pursuit

Genetics plays an important role in successful, active aging and wellness, but the choices people make every day are critical too. Cognitive stimulation matters, but the Dana Alliance for Brain Initiatives also noted that physical exercise, diet, **social connections**, how we manage stress, and seeing the self and the world in a positive way are also important too.

Dr. Robert Butler, author of *Why Survive? Being Old in America*, coined the term “life review” fifty years ago. Before that time, researchers and physicians saw reminiscence as just a stepping stone toward senility and dementia. He disagreed with this belief and proposed that, as people age, reminiscence and life review were a normal part of healthy aging. Now large bodies of research show the positive outcomes from reminiscence and life review.

MEMORY CARE & BRAIN FITNESS

Reminiscence is believed to stimulate the hippocampus area of the brain where memories are stored. Reminiscence and *recording* the life stories are critical for people experiencing Alzheimer’s or another form of dementia. The detailed information gathered could be vital to current and ongoing delivery of service and care.

Going the extra mile in providing the best possible tools for brain fitness and memory care could make the difference between someone living independently and someone needing higher, more costly levels of nursing care.

Personal interaction matters in promoting positive brain health. “There’s a lot of evidence that other people are the most unpredictable things you can encounter. So activities that have you engaging with other human beings are a fantastic form of brain exercise.” said Lawrence Katz, Neurobiologist.



HOME CARE & HOSPICE

Communities are expanding their services to home and community-based services. Companionship services offered in non-medical home care can be enhanced by providing reminiscence tools to use with clients. During the hours spent visiting, there is the chance to do something meaningful by reminiscing and recording the older person’s life story—a priceless gift to the family.

Too often staff members experience *memorial service surprises*. They learn more about the person after they have passed away. Knowing more about someone’s life can lead to appreciating the whole person and the person’s life journey more. This, in turn, can improve service and care. In addition, learning more about the person’s past can only improve bedside manner at the end of life. Life review typically helps the dying person experience more love, more hope, and more peace when they are reminded of their accomplishments, their family relationships, their beliefs, and more.

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OUTREACH & MARKETING

Not every community today offers a comprehensive reminiscence program—therefore this innovative approach differentiates communities from their competitors and demonstrates a very high level of caring. As in-depth life stories are captured, there are a number of great publicity opportunities that result via newspaper, TV, radio, and online. In some progressive communities, the waiting list members or prospects are even invited to participate on campus in autobiography writing classes to build relationships between current residents and people who may be making a decision about moving to the community soon.

COMMUNITY LIFE & ACTIVITIES

Reminiscence provides interesting lifelong learning classes and fun activities that can be easily adapted for independent living, assisted living, skilled nursing, or memory care. It's time to break out of the “same old, same old” conversation patterns of weather, health, sports, and food. Expanding communication could build new, genuine friendships. Conversations should move to personal accomplishments, childhood memories, historical events, and aspects of daily life that this person has always loved. Also, reminiscence activities should include *recording* the personal memories for the resident and his or her family. Innovative communities are being intentional about relationship-building. Promoting new conversations leads to a dynamic environment. Also, residents in many communities can lead reminiscence classes or activities or serve in a leadership role in the overall reminiscence program. Former teachers, social workers, or clergy are excellent facilitators of autobiography classes.



FAMILY VISITING & COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS

Family members struggle to know what to say when they visit. Reminiscence tools help them have a reason and structure for visiting. Adult or youth volunteers are involved in capturing memories and building relationships with residents in nursing homes or assisted living. It is a “win-win” situation when residents can volunteer to share their life stories and high school students can volunteer to help in the recording process either via the web, in journals, on storyboards, or through video. Youth are mentored by the older adult in the process and they learn important communication skills along the way.

COMMUNITY BENEFIT & SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY (NON-PROFITS)

Because of the numerous opportunities for employees to volunteer as part of a reminiscence program OR because the community-at-large can be provided with free presentations, such as a “Tell Your Story” workshop, there are a number of ways that a senior living community can give back to the community-at-large. Non-profit retirement communities can reach out to in-home caregivers, churches, YMCAs, and other senior services and community-based organizations to provide free informational sessions on recording a biography to help in building relationships, keeping people engaged in the community, and touching all dimensions of wellness.

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HUMAN RESOURCES & INTERNSHIPS

Attracting and keeping the best talent is always a struggle. Many people who enjoy working in long-term care or community settings had positive experiences with older adults in their lives when they were in their youth. The potential is there for a new generation to gain immensely from the wisdom and experience of older adults—and to choose a career serving older people as a result. With the growth in population, this is vital for the future. In addition, communities that build genuine relationships between staff and residents typically experience lower turnover.

An Illinois non-profit community has recently become a federal work-study site. They now have local university students capturing life stories and the students are paid \$10/hour by the university for their time spent at the senior living community. Their work-study job is relevant to their future careers as doctors, nurses, and pharmacists, and they are providing a valuable service in recording the memories of residents there. This approach could be duplicated in communities nationwide. For-profit communities could provide relevant internships involving reminiscence and life review to university students.



SUMMARY

Communities should consider the beneficial outcomes from incorporating a reminiscence program. Although every community is different, positive results from capturing life stories should be expected.

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