

Article 4

Nursing Home Living - Where People Thrive or Fail to?

So what's your experience? People thriving to life's fullest because they moved into a nursing home? Or the opposite - decline, depression and eventually a sooner death than might have been? Well there is good news. The culture change movement which has been in existence for 13 years now officially is helping people thrive instead of what is even an official medical diagnosis called "failure to thrive." Have you heard of people living in nursing homes attaining such a higher level of living that they were able to remove a G-tube or "feeding tube" and eat by mouth again? Have you heard of people talking, singing and feeding themselves again? Well, hold on to your hats....

An "ah-ha" moment came to administrator Franco Diamond of Idylwood Care Center in Sunnyvale, California after being reminded personally of the feelings evoked for him by the soup his mom made and the bread his grandmother baked. He then embarked on a journey focusing on foods and their aromas in the nursing home he led with his staff team members, residents and their family members. It all started with a Soup of the Day contest which brought out the competition in everyone and later led his whole community into forty some different food focused activities and events. As reported in an exciting book about dining changes in nursing homes called *Nourish the Body and Soul*,

"Diamond's soup-aroma theory was validated when a woman fed through a gastric tube for seven years began eating again. 'I smell the food and I want to start eating,'" she said. With her doctor's guidance she began with a puree diet and slowly transitioned to solid food. Ironically, she gained 20 pounds and now wants to go on a diet and become more active in order to lose weight. In all, half a dozen residents have traded in their g-tubes for a place at the table" (Schaeffer, 2008, culturechangenow.com).

Isn't it amazing to hear of even six people able to eat again? We are also realizing that for persons with advanced dementia, food may be one of the last things they lose interest in. One resident at Idylwood, Mrs. C, was not "so easily enticed" by all the improvements and still complained about the "lousy" food while her eating habits continued to decline. Staff team members refused to take "no" for an answer though and kept trying to find a food link to Mrs. C. Their persistence paid



off. They eventually discovered her lifelong love for cooking Italian food with Fava beans. Caregivers planted some, but because they “didn’t know beans” about Fava beans, they got her to show them how to pick, shell and cook the gourmet bean which ultimately led to Mrs. C *leading* a cooking class. Not only did she flourish socially, but nutritionally as well. “Mrs. C’s magical transformation confirmed for Diamond that residents would become involved if offered familiar and meaningful activities. It also fed staff’s gastronomical approach to culture change: If Mrs. C could change so dramatically, maybe they should put more stock into how meals were presented and the ingredients in them.” The simple focus on food has helped persons living in nursing homes be revived again.

Dr. Bill Thomas’ the founder of the Eden Alternative (last month’s article and for more information go to edenalt.com) felt that nursing homes were not changing fast enough and so developed the Green House® model to create true home. A Green House is just that a house where 10 elders live with a large dining room and table where they dine together, with a kitchen where they can be a part, with a fireplace as the hearth of the home. They are cared for by the Shabazim a newly developed professional that is cross trained into a blended role so that the person can be cared for in all ways by all staff instead of the old institutional way of only certain professionals doing certain tasks, parceling the person into parts instead of caring for him or her fully.

Living in a home, living in the Green House, has indeed helped people to flourish. The Green House Project ® captured move-in day on a DVD for those residents who moved from the traditional nursing home to the first Green Houses in 2005. On it, a resident named Mildred Adams, who has dementia, is observed in the large nursing home before moving to the Green House®. She is fed by others, non-responsive, and in a wheelchair. Upon moving into her new Green House® home, staff and family are astonished, as is anyone viewing this video, to see Mildred take a fork from her son’s hand and feed herself at the very first meal! And by the end of the day we see her singing *Amazing Grace* with her new family in her new home- incredible! (For more information, go to www.thegreenhouseproject.org.)

Mildred and the others show us that the institution actually contributed to their decline while changing the culture and the environment back to home creates the opportunity for one to thrive.



By Carmen Bowman, Edu-Catering, Regulator turned Educator and Firestone resident

Carmen is available to speak to your group about how nursing homes are changing or about how your group can reach out to people who live in a local nursing home, assisted living or in your neighborhood, church or family.

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