

Get Wisdom, Get Relationship with an Older Person in your Life

Did you know that in China, there aren't many nursing homes at all? Why? Because in so many older civilizations people revere the elders of their society and family and serve them in their own homes. More so than we typically have in this very young industry focused country of America. Apparently there are a few nursing homes in China however but that is not what they call them. Check this out, look at even the very subtle yet poignant difference in language... In China a nursing home is called A Home for Respecting the Elderly. Guess what the staff turnover rate is in a Home for Respecting the Elderly in China? Zero. Why? Because again, people in that country want to work with the most revered, the sages of their communities. According to a 2001 Institute of Medicine study, turnover rates for nursing home staff are 100% for certified nursing assistants, 66% for RNs/LPNs, 50% for directors of nursing and 25% for nursing home administrators. Students go to the Home for Respecting the Elderly in China every day to study. Guess what they go to study? I thought history when I was first asked this question years ago, how about you? What students go to learn is how to become **wise!**

Wow, are you meeting up with an older person in your life in order to become wise? Did you know that in the book of Proverbs at 4:5 it says, "**Get wisdom**, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them." Did you also know that at Proverbs 19:8 it says, "He who gets wisdom loves his own soul; he who cherishes understanding prospers." In Psalm 90:12, it says "Teach us to number our days aright that we may gain a heart of wisdom." How are you numbering your days "aright?" Besides getting wisdom from the Creator of wisdom the Lord himself, another way is to strike up a friendship with someone older than you from whom you can learn.

Does this idea tug at your heart? Did you know that most people living in nursing homes or assisted living residences or even alone in their own homes suffer most from loneliness, not heart failure or any other medical ailment?

Consider befriending someone you know in your community or neighborhood or even in your own family. For those of you from "out of town," who do not live near your own family and can't take your children to go see their grandparents readily, find a place nearby to go and build relationship. A resource is healthfacilities.info where you can look up Nursing Homes or Assisted Living Residences or Adult Day Programs by County or City for the state of Colorado. Sometimes there are homes or programs you may not even know about around the corner.

Focus on building relationships. Make a commitment to go regularly. Once a month at the least, more if you can, make it a goal to go every other week or even every week. If you are going to pursue a nursing home or assisted living ministry call or go to the home and ask who to talk to, probably the activity director maybe a volunteer coordinator, they will know and refer you. Express your desire to start a ministry to foster friendships on a regular basis. Propose and ask for days and times that would work best for all.

What to do when you get there? Express to staff and residents that there will not be so much of "a program" but instead more visiting and getting to know one another. Think connection. Some activities, however, can be a catalyst to connect people. Sing songs. Little ones can do finger play songs, residents love to watch and sometimes join in. Solicit requests; ask everyone for ideas - kids, residents, parents alike. Hymns are usually well known by older people and they will sing them by heart. Bring a hymn book so you have the words.

For an additional benefit bring an echo/play microphone/karaoke machine, tell your kids that they only get to hold the microphone if they lead a song, sing a solo or recite something. This builds their comfort level with performing for others. Within your group or family, assess your skills, interests, and ideas for making connection. Toss balloons or beanbags, blow bubbles outside, have kids serve residents a snack (made by nursing home), have someone play the piano or organ, other instruments, perform a skit, etc. But, most importantly challenge yourselves mostly to just be together, converse, chat, get to know each other, ask open ended questions.

Pose to the entire group or even to your own grandmother: "I was wondering what question could we each answer that would help us get to know each other better?" Come with some ideas for conversation starters in your "back pocket" and usually someone in the group will come up with something. Go get to know an older person, ask their opinion, learn from them, glean from their years of experience and "get wisdom!"

For more information on this subject Kevin Swanson of the *Generations with Vision* radio show interviewed Carmen Nov. 27, 2009 archived at generationswithvision.com.

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

Carmen is available to speak to your group about establishing a ministry with the people who live in a local nursing home or assisted living or just reaching out to older adults you know in your neighborhood, church or family.

Submitted Sunday, April 18, 2010 and printed in the Carbon Valley News May 2010