

It's Better to Live in a Garden than in an Institution

A leading model in the culture change movement that is transforming the traditional institutional culture of nursing homes is the Eden Alternative®. Basing this idea on the Garden of Eden, the main premise is that it would be better to live in a garden than in an institution. This is the perfect time of year to think about the garden analogy. What happens in a garden? Living plants are tended to, nourished and pruned to help them live, grow and thrive.

What happens in an institution? People are treated like things instead of the living human beings they are. They are woken up on the institution's schedule. They are "fed" food (people are not fed, animals are fed) on the institution's schedule. The menu is decided upon by someone who doesn't eat the food or live in the home. The menu is not a menu as you and I know it. The nursing home menu consists of the main meal and an alternative if you're lucky. Why does menu in a nursing home mean something different than menu in a restaurant? Which would you prefer? The timing of everything in an institution is according to "the almighty schedule" not your life long preferred routine. Staff members are taught and the institution itself perpetuates to think of the people cared for as tasks to be completed rather than beautiful persons to care about. Nurses and other professionals are taught to "keep a professional distance." Although no harm was intended, this is a lie everyone. People must be able to care for people as people. We must be able to care about one another, to laugh and cry together.

Like what you're hearing thus far? The Eden Alternative® was founded by Dr. Bill and Jude Thomas. The good doctor "diagnosed" what the real problem is in nursing homes, what people living there really suffer from. They don't suffer from diabetes or blood pressure, for the medical focus treats the medical conditions well. What is forgotten about however, what is being neglected and ignored is the spirit, soul and essence of the person, our personhood. Dr. Thomas diagnosed that what people living in nursing homes truly suffer from is what he calls the three plagues of institutionalization: boredom, loneliness, and helplessness. People are bored out of their gourd even though the activity staff is trying to offer things to do. There are never enough activity staff team members to truly meet the needs and life interests of each person. Eden teaches that although these older persons have cared for others and ran homes, families and businesses all their adult life, they now have no one and nothing to help or care for and thus feel helpless. And

Edu-Catering: Catering Education for Compliance and Culture Change in Long-term Care
303-981-7228 carmen@edu-catering.com and www.edu-catering.com



what so many living in nursing home institutions struggle with is loneliness. The good doctor Thomas then “prescribed” Elder-centered communities, not institution-centered, that commit to creating a Human Habitat where life revolves around close and continuing contact with plants, animals, and children. Nursing homes and assisted living residences across the country are committing to the following 10 Eden principles:

1. The three plagues of loneliness, helplessness, and boredom account for the bulk of suffering among our Elders.
2. An Elder-centered community commits to creating a human habitat where life revolves around close and continuing contact with plants, animals, and children. It is these relationships that provide the young and old alike with a pathway to a life worth living.
3. Loving companionship is the antidote to loneliness. Elders deserve easy access to human and animal companionship.
4. An Elder-centered community creates opportunity to give as well as receive care. This is the antidote to helplessness.
5. An Elder-centered community imbues daily life with variety and spontaneity by creating an environment in which unexpected and unpredictable interactions and happenings can take place. This is the antidote to boredom.
6. Meaningless activity corrodes the human spirit. The opportunity to do things that we find meaningful is essential to human health.
7. Medical treatment should be the servant of genuine human caring, never its master.
8. An Elder-centered community honors its Elders by de-emphasizing top-down bureaucratic authority, seeking instead to place the maximum possible decision-making authority into the hands of the Elders or into the hands of those closest to them.
9. Creating an Elder-centered community is a never-ending process. Human

Edu-Catering: Catering Education for Compliance and Culture Change in Long-term Care
303-981-7228 carmen@edu-catering.com and www.edu-catering.com



growth must never be separated from human life.

10. Wise leadership is the lifeblood of any struggle against the three plagues. For it, there can be no substitute.

Homes can elect to become a registered Eden home. To find them and more information about the Eden Alternative® go to edenalt.com. If you work in one or have a relative or friend living in one ask the leaders or owners of the home if they know about Eden and encourage them to get registered as one. You'll be glad you did.

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.

Submitted by Carmen Bowman 5-15-10 and printed in the Carbon Valley News 6/10

