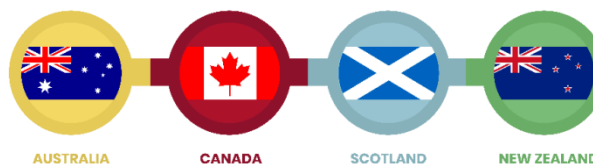


## Decent Work Good Care

International approaches to aged care



### PROMISING PRACTICES:

#### Individualised recreation in residential care

**This promising practice describes one Australian aged care provider's innovative support for resident wellbeing through creative individualised recreation programs alongside group activities. This organisation aims to make residents lives richer and more enjoyable, through drawing on residents' personal life histories and interests.**

#### Background Context

Many aged care organisations are exploring ways to provide more holistic care to improve the wellbeing of their residents. These organisations acknowledge residents have a combination of diverse social, emotional and spiritual needs beyond their daily personal care and clinical care needs. Such programs help overcome the loneliness suffered by many aged care residents, particularly by those who have little or irregular contact with family and friends. A robust social or wellbeing program may also help alleviate boredom, a common source of frustration, agitation or low spirits among aged care residents.

In Australia funding for programs and staffing associated with more holistic care in aged care, whether activities or broader wellbeing programs, has been limited. The vast majority of staff working face-to-face with residents are personal care workers. While many facilities typically have activities staff or diversional therapists usually running a range of group programs, such programs vary widely in quality. Programs are seldom tailored to individual residents' rich histories and interests and most are restricted to week days.

The challenge for organisations is to provide dynamic wellbeing programs that move beyond group activities, but that don't rely on stretched personal care workers to drive them. One organisation's novel approach focuses on individualised recreation, centred around a deep knowledge of, and curiosity about, a resident's interests as well as a preparedness to take some risks. This individualised recreation is designed and delivered by a team of recreation staff, who form part of the frontline team in each aged care residence.

#### Individualised recreation

This organisation views recreation as central to residents' care and to the enjoyment of their lives. They use a recreation rather than diversional therapy approach, which in this setting includes individualised recreation that is 'fun'. The recreation team is resourced to provide recreation seven days a week. While recreation workers arrange group trips, in-house groups, programs and group visits, the recreation co-ordinator works with different individual residents, focusing on a handful of residents at any one time.

Recreation workers complete a social profile and mind map with individual residents. They uncover a resident's interests and hobbies, activities they participate in, past work, and any

goals, specific needs and barriers to participating in specific activities. Over several weeks they talk through ideas, often with personal care staff, maintenance staff, and other staff contributing ideas. The planning process itself provides an enjoyable focus for residents.

The result is a recreation plan that forms a vital part of each resident's care plan. These plans are based on residents' individual priorities. They typically combine frequent but simple activities, such as caring for a pet bird each day, footy tipping each week and a visit to a relative every 3 months, with a significant event. A resident may want to return to a suburb they once lived, visit a favourite beach, go to the cinema or the race track, for example. One woman who loved horses went on a horse and cart ride. Recreation workers will explore any suggestions and will take measured risks.

Importantly, this approach is not just about a single event or activity. The resident enjoys the anticipation leading to the event, the actual event, and then talking about it afterwards, which is helped by photos taken by staff. Often individual residents contribute to the cost of the activity, requiring them to save an amount each fortnight over several months.

Recreation staff describe noticeable changes in the demeanour of residents when they have such a positive focus.

Documentation on residents' participation is kept to a minimum, with photos of residents seen as much more useful. However, recreation records on residents' ideas and requests are used to ensure individual residents do not miss out and to help planning group activities. For example, when several people had indicated an interested in fishing, recreation staff organised a small group to go fishing on a pier for the afternoon. Each week another small group are supported to visit the local library to borrow books and have coffee together.

### **Benefits**

- Personalised recreation recognises people's diverse life histories and individuality;
- Boredom and associated frustration and low mood may be reduced;
- A well-resourced recreation program can help free up personal carers' time, so they can focus on providing relationship-based personal care;
- Personalised recreation can be particularly useful for engaging men, who may be less interested in participating in group programs.

### **Implementation challenges**

- Resourcing a program which allows the employment of a recreation team and seven day a week coverage is an investment that is not adequately funded by government;
- This organisation makes a significant contribution to its recreation program and has to sacrifice financial returns for delivering quality and appropriate client outcomes;
- Organisations and staff are more risk adverse than residents and families;
- Only a handful of residents have individualised programs at any one time;
- Ensuring activities accommodate both men and women;
- Balancing the time spent on individuals versus group outings and activities.