
Engaging with the community – the difference it can make for care homes!

What is it?

Community engagement is anything that meaningfully connects your care home with individuals, organisations, schools, community groups, businesses – in fact every sector in our society and every age-group. By either bringing the community in or getting your residents out, you can make a huge difference to the quality of life for all those who live, visit and work in care homes.

The difference it makes!

- + By opening your doors to the community, you're improving the awareness (and reputation?) of your home within the community, potentially leading to more referrals and interest in your services.
- + By connecting with schools, colleges, and other community organisations, you are helping the home to potentially recruit new staff.
- + By bringing in more visitors, volunteers and groups, you are enhancing the atmosphere of the home – creating a buzz of interaction, love and laughter.
- + By bringing in individuals from the community, you can give residents the proper time and 1-to-1 support that they need and staff feel too stretched to provide.
- + Because your local inspector will know that you are working to put your home at the 'heart of your community', she/ he is more likely to write favourably about your service.

But most importantly....

- + Through our efforts to build links with the community, we are helping residents connect to the people, places, passions and things that really matter to them.

How do you do it?

Chances are you are already doing some great work in connecting with the local community so build on what already works for you. Keep things simple, try small acts of engagement with the community or ask other care homes in your area to join together to engage with the community.

By linking to 'Care Home Fans' (www.carehomefans.org), you have access to ideas and goodies to help you on your way. When you are going out to the community, you may want to tell them that you are part of a national initiative called 'Care Home Fans' that brings the community and care homes together!

Who will lead it?

Everyone in the home needs to get behind your efforts to bring the community in. There is a clear benefit in having one or a couple of staff who take on the role of connecting with the community. The activity coordinator might be best placed to reach out into the community and establish new connections but will need the permission of the manager to get out and really forge these new relationships.

How much does it cost?

Friendship and neighbourly acts are free! Having the confidence to ask the community for support could possibly result in little to no cost to the residents or your home. In fact, the community may wish to donate to your residents or staff funds!

TOP-TIP It sometimes helps community groups to engage if you offer something back in return. Perhaps you have space in your care home to offer local businesses for their meetings? Perhaps you're holding an event which could be opened up to the local community? Or maybe you could use your space to creating something that could be beneficial to someone else in your local area? (e.g. crèche or homework club).

This seems like an additional task to me?

Making time for important things is truly a skill. Try and not see 'community engagement' as just another task. It is something that benefits everyone and can be grown and developed gradually over time (Remember, no one starts large!). It's often the little things that matter to people that can have the biggest impact on quality of life.

Share with us how you are getting on!

'Care Home Fans' would love to hear from you if you have stories from your attempts to connect with the community... register on the website!