

Experts corner

Interview with Barbara Stephens, CEO of Dementia Pathfinders



Oomph! Hi Barbara, can you tell us a bit about the work and aims of Dementia Pathfinders?

Barbara: Dementia Pathfinders is a social enterprise that aims to encourage people with dementia and other life challenging conditions to remain socially connected and engaged in meaningful activities. Our goal is to enable people to flourish.

Dementia Pathfinders delivers a range of educational programmes and therapeutic approaches that promote person-centred care and enhance communication and wellbeing. In our work, we often use the story of 'The Girl and the Starfish' to illustrate how care workers make a difference to people's lives. Small acts of compassion have a deeply felt benefit.

Oomph! Why are meaningful activities so important for care home residents with Dementia?

Barbara: Engaging people with dementia in activities improves wellbeing and quality of life. Relationships and communication are at the core of person-centred care and the benefits of meaningful occupation for people with dementia extend, as well, to relatives and families and to care workers, teams and the care setting as a whole.

People living in care homes can feel very isolated and their mental and physical health is at risk if their individual needs are not recognised and respected. Activities focussed on encouraging physical mobility and providing mental stimulation help to improve well being and create an environment in which people can express their needs and feelings.

Oomph! Why is effective communication so important during activities for these residents?

Barbara: Good communication is the key ingredient to meaningful engagement. Using all forms of communication is vital when working with people with disabilities and conditions that can affect their ability to express their needs and wishes clearly.

Eye contact, tone of voice, touch, smell and taste can enhance the provision of everyday care and lead to a better experience both for care home residents and care staff.

People with dementia experience well-being in the moment. Being able to witness laughter or a smile is a measurement in itself. We use Dementia Care Mapping for some of our projects to evaluate the impact of our work. The long term legacy of many of our interventions is embedded in the skill base of the staff team. Our educational initiatives



i Did you know? Exercise has been shown to be the strongest mitigating factor in preventing the onset of dementia



can bring about whole systems change and are designed to transform care cultures and values. Focussing on person-centred approaches and the potential of relationships is pivotal to making lasting improvements in quality of care.

Oomph!: Can you give us an example of a meaningful activity you recommend?

Barbara: Circle Dance is an excellent example of a positive intervention for people with dementia. Circle Dance is a facilitated group activity designed to build relationships through creativity, music, movement and connection. Circle Dance offers the opportunity for self-expression and the range of dances provides a culturally inclusive experience for people with dementia and care workers ... and it's fun!

Massage can be particularly beneficial for reducing anxiety and agitation and improving well being. Dementia Pathfinders works in partnership with the London College of Beauty Therapy (LCBT). We offer a course for care

workers in 'Therapeutic Massage and Dementia', which includes an introduction to hand, arm, leg and foot massage and is delivered by means of teaching, demonstrations and practical massage sessions. The course is accredited by The Beauty Guild.

Oomph!: What's your top tip for activity staff working with residents with dementia?

Barbara: Try something new! One small positive change in your approach to your work could have a huge benefit to at least one person with dementia, and, perhaps, could have a much greater influence. We all have the potential to be role models. Just like the girl in the starfish story, you can be the difference in somebody's life.

Email info@dementiopathfinders.org for more information or telephone **0845 257 2250** to find out more about Circle Dance in Dementia or Therapeutic Massage www.dementiopathfinders.org/






The Girl and the Starfish

Once upon a time there was a wise man who took his morning walks on the seashore. One day, after a storm, he saw a young girl in the distance moving like a dancer.

As he drew closer he saw that she was not dancing, but was reaching down to the sand and picking up starfish and very gently throwing them back into the ocean.

The man greeted the young girl and asked her what she was doing. "The sun is rising" replied the girl, "and the tide is going out. If I do not put these starfish back into the sea, they will die".

The man scoffed, "Don't be ridiculous, do you not realise, there are miles and miles of beach and hundreds of starfish all along it, you cannot possibly make a difference".

The girl listened politely, paused, and then bent down and picked up another starfish and released it into the sea."I made a difference to that one" she exclaimed.