

Welcome Home: Creating Connections Between Residents and the Community

2011 National Residents' Rights Month October 2011

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Remember how we used to look forward to community events like the 4H fair, street fairs, festivals celebrating our heritage, and community picnics. Several of us spent time at a local church and took part in community events within the church. We also belonged to Girl/Boy Scouts, United Way, the American Legion and other community groups. All of these ties become part of who we are.....they make us part of the community. When someone asks us where we are from, we are proud to tell them about our city or town because it belongs to us.

Residents' Rights Month 2011 reminds us that residents of long-term care facilities are part of the community. Residents do not lose their right to be part of the community where they live. Community is more than just a nursing home. It is the town/city where we live. Residents have the right to continue to participate in religious activities and other groups that meet outside of the nursing home. Imagine if you lived in half of one room for ten years. You can only participate in activities within the building you live in. This would take away a very important part of who you are.

Residents should be given choices about the type of activities they take part in. These activities should include things outside of the nursing facility. Residents can take part in parades, attend fairs and festivals. They can also continue to take part in the groups that they once belonged to...like the Elks, Moose or Optimist clubs. Most cities have public transportation that is handicapped accessible. Some Church's offer rides to those who cannot drive themselves.

If residents cannot leave the facility due to illness, bring the community to them. Invite scout troops or school groups to meet in your facilities. Most residents love to interact with children and participate in their activities. Host an Open House so that the community can come into the facility and meet residents. This Open House's can coincide with a big community event like Heritage Days. The residents can write stories about what the community was like when they were growing up and share those stories with visitors. Residents are the custodians' of our heritage. They are the blocks on which the community was built.

When community members visit the nursing facility frequently the quality of care the residents receive improves. This fact has been proven in multiple studies. Residents without family or without the ability to communicate are often the residents who are abused. By spending just a few hours a month in the facility, community members can change the lives of residents.

We live in a society that worships youth. We see commercials everyday on TV telling us how to look younger, feel younger or turn back the clock. The thought of living in a LTC

facility scares us. We do not want to ever have to live in a nursing home. We become afraid to visit them and when we do this we overlook a treasured part of our community...our elders.

This year's Residents' Rights Month theme *Welcome Home: Creating Connections Between Residents and the Community* challenges us to think of creative ways to involve residents in the community and to invite the community into the facilities in the month of October and throughout the year. It is time to bring our Elders back into the community at large. When this happens we all will benefit from it.

As we enter Residents' Rights Month in October and start thinking about the holiday season –the heart of which is being with family and having a sense of belonging to something larger than yourself– let's work together to make 2011 the year to provide our long-term care residents with new friends, old activities and a sense of belonging to our great communities.