

“MY JOURNEY” PROGRAM

Integrating intergenerational contact to capture precious memories and moments of the elderly to give value to their lived experiences and provide meaning, context and perspective to their care and wellbeing needs

Diversional Therapy Association
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Corumbene is a community-established Aged Care Services provider based in New Norfolk, Tasmania. Corumbene has an 82-bed residential facility and delivers home care services to approximately 90 clients across a delivery footprint that spans the rural Derwent Valley, Central Highlands and Southern Midlands. Corumbene has a unique place in the community as generations of families have either worked for Corumbene and/or have become residents.

Abstract

The 'My Journey' program explores opportunities for Corumbene's residents and community clients, their families, staff, volunteers and local schools and community organisations, to participate in the process of telling and recording life stories of the regions' elderly, to ensure that precious moments and memories of our seniors' everyday lives are not lost forever to the effects of natural ageing, dementia and other medical conditions.

Aims

By facilitating opportunities for meaningful dialogue, the goal of the 'My Journey' program supports, challenges and enhances the psychological, spiritual, social and emotional wellbeing of all participants:

- For the story-tellers, in having their stories heard and valued, they receive affirmation that their lives are respected and of interest to others. Furthermore, the bond created between them and the listener maintains the storyteller's sense of self, personal identity and quality of life. Importantly the use of youth and student volunteers in 'My Journey' fosters close and continuing intergenerational contact.
- For the listeners, they enter into a deeper understanding of the individual and their lives and experiences, evoking empathy and emotional interest, and enabling opportunities to explore experiences while assisting them to build their own skills and confidence and understanding of

what life used to be like in their community and region. This is particularly so for our youth and student volunteers.

- For community organisation participants, it is an opportunity to remain involved and engaged with elderly citizens in a life-affirming exercise while the capture of stories about local history adds significantly to the repository of recorded history for the area.
- For staff the capture of life stories and experiences provides meaning, context and perspective to the story-tellers, enabling care and wellbeing needs to be adjusted accordingly.

Method

Initially our residents were invited to participate in telling their life stories, then family, staff and volunteers were invited to become engaged in the program. Structured interview processes were developed for volunteers and staff, and informal discussions were recorded in note form. Once the program gained momentum, other mediums were introduced, such as electronic recording devices and introduction of the 'Corumbene Hour' on the local radio station once a week to capture, showcase and preserve the life stories as a permanent legacy of the individual and their contribution to the local community and region. By popular demand the 'My Journey' program was extended to Corumbene's community clients.

Results

Feedback received from participants indicates that the program has been beneficial and has been a positive and enjoyable experience for all involved. There is excitement amongst residents and clients who have not yet been interviewed, that they will also have an opportunity to recount their memories for posterity.

Reflection

Reflecting on our initial expectations we believe that we have achieved our aims but will seek to develop and enhance our approach to grow participation and ensure the sustainability and longevity of the programme.

ESTABLISHING THE BUSINESS CASE

Concept

The 'My Journey' program is an initiative of the Corumbene Leisure and Lifestyle department with the collaboration of the residents. The initial idea came from several discussions with residents regarding their early lives in the community. Many responses from residents were along the lines: "I didn't do anything special" or "I don't have anything noteworthy to tell". However the other residents disagreed, and the outcome of the discussions was that they wanted to record their stories so they could share them with others. The residents wanted as many people as possible to be involved to capture a permanent legacy of their knowledge, wisdom, experiences, and adages before their memories are lost forever to the effects of natural ageing, dementia and other medical conditions.

Program Purpose

The Program purpose is multidimensional:

- To engage our residents and their families and record residents' memories;
- To utilise our volunteers in a cross-generational activity that will enable them to engage in meaningful contact with our residents and develop their skills;
- To support, challenge and enhance the psychological, social and emotional wellbeing of all participants;
- To engage with community stakeholders to provide context to residents' stories and access to historical accounts that may otherwise be lost (subject to resident consent);
- To use the resident's personal 'My Journey' as a reference to provide meaning, context and perspective to their care and wellbeing needs;
- To provide families of residents who pass, with a copy of the resident's personal 'My Journey' as a family keepsake (subject to resident consent); and
- To foster professional development for the members of the Leisure and Lifestyle team.

Program Plan

Prior to commencement I developed a program plan that considered the following items:

- program design
- resourcing
- stakeholders (internal and external)
- risk management
- communication
- implementation
- evaluation
- review

Detailed information is attached, with Attachment 1 setting out the detailed program plan, and Attachments 2 to 9 containing research sources, the risk management strategy, communication plan and specific work plans.

Program Compliance – Aged Care Accreditation Standards

For the program to be considered, it must comply with the Aged Care Accreditation Standards, in particular:

- Aged Care Accreditation Standard 2 – Health and Personal Care, where care recipients' physical and mental health will be promoted and achieved at the optimum level in partnership between each care recipient (or his or her representative) and the health care team; and
- Aged Care Accreditation Standard 3 - Care Recipient Lifestyle, where care recipients retain their personal, civic, legal and consumer rights and are assisted to achieve active control of their own lives within the care service and in the community.

Each standard has a number of different outcomes, the ones relevant to our 'My Journey' program are illustrated in Figure 1 below:



Figure 1: 'My Journey' Program Satisfies Aged Care Accreditation Standard Outcomes

To ensure the Aged Care Accreditation outcomes are met, the resident must be at the centre of their personal 'My Journey'. It is paramount that the resident controls the pace of their story-telling and how much they wish to share. Having control/ownership provides choice, decision making and dignity, whilst building self-esteem and enhancing independence giving the resident a feeling of personal fulfilment. No information is shared with other parties without the resident's consent.

Program Principles – Diversional Therapy Australia

The Diversional Therapy of Australia principle of activities being client-centred dovetails with the requirement of the Aged Care Standards. Importantly, this principle will be upheld by the Leisure and Lifestyle team as drivers of the program. The role of the team is vital to ensuring stakeholder engagement, the 'rules of engagement' (including boundaries of privacy and confidentiality), regulatory compliance and continuous improvement in the leisure and lifestyle department. The function of the team in meeting diversional therapy objectives is illustrated in Figure 2 below:

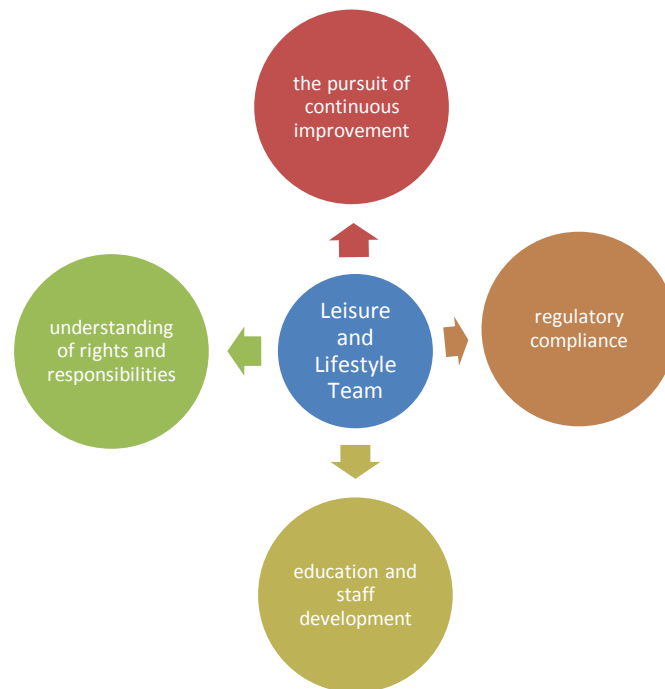


Figure 2: Role of Leisure and Lifestyle Team in Meeting Diversional Therapy Objectives

IMPLEMENTATION

Data Collection

Using Work Plans to guide the collection of information in a dignified and client-centred way, our volunteers began discussions with our residents. Families were also invited to participate.

Data Verification

Our volunteers and staff worked closely with local historians to authenticate as much as possible the veracity of the information supplied, providing feedback to the residents and clarifying the content and timelines of their recollections.

Data Collation

Using a variety of mediums, guided by resident choice and their assistance, our volunteers and staff collated the information into a personal 'My Journey' keepsake. Adaptation of activities as appropriate were designed to be inclusive to increase the participation rate of the residents; regardless of their physical or cognitive capacities.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

Resident Outcomes

Benefits of Telling One's Life Story

Reminiscing about the “good old days” was once considered a sign of senility, an indication that an older person was not adapting to today's world but instead clinging to bygone days. Yet research shows that telling stories about one's life, especially through a formal practice known as life reviews, has many benefits for the elderly:

- Allowing the residents to speak about events in their lives that had gone unnoticed or had been long forgotten validates their life experiences, affirms their individuality and purpose in life.
- For those residents who are making sense of the changes to their lives, environment and or are adjusting to living with a threat of chronic illness, it has been therapeutic to talk about their life journeys.
- For some residents, the experience prompted a re-emergence of resilience and identifying with others by offering support through empathy when retelling of experiences occurred.
- The reminiscing and conversation often uncovered connections between residents and/or mutual acquaintances resulting in new friendships and an extension of social networks in Corumbene and the community.

Creative Process

Participating in the process of compiling memories allowed residents an opportunity to explore mediums that they were either comfortable with, or wanted to know more about, resulting in the learning of new skills. Initially some of the residents found the voice-recording process confronting as for many this was a new technology for them. Often when the residents heard their voices

replayed back to them, laughter rang throughout the activity room. Overall, the creative process enabled residents to participate in a meaningful leisure activity that improved their wellbeing.

Stakeholder Outcomes

Stakeholder engagement has been extremely high, with strong friendships and networks developing internally, and external community partnerships evolving and strengthening. Each stakeholder group has experienced significant 'value add' outcomes:

Corumbene Home and Community Care Clients

Corumbene Home and Community Care clients were added into the program by popular demand. They add an important component to the program, not only recording their own stories, but providing peer community engagement, with many reconnecting with old friends and neighbours. Meetings are held monthly with residents and clients revelling in robust discussions. Our Community Care Coordinator has provided feedback about the benefits to these clients at Attachment 10.

Families

Some families have been actively involved in this program with their loved one, engaging in conversations, providing other supporting information and pictures of significant events. For them, the 'My Journey' program has offered deeper insights into the lives of their loved one and opportunities to better understand their hopes and dreams. Refer Attachment 11. For all families, each individual's 'My Journey' will be a family keepsake. We are aware that grieving families have used 'My Journey' to assist with the celebration of their loved one's life.

Adult, Youth and Student Volunteers

Volunteer input has been essential in this program, bringing together volunteers from different backgrounds and differing skill sets. The program design provided a platform for the volunteers to use existing skills but also to develop new skills in a meaningful way eg IT skills, active listening, communication skills and research. A positive but unexpected outcome has been the development

of a social network amongst the volunteers, and a desire by the adult volunteers to mentor our youth and student volunteers has created broader community connections.

St Bridget's Primary School

The cross-generational aspects of this program have had positive outcomes for the students involved and the broader school community, refer Attachment 12. The students have:

- gained a greater understanding of local history,
- formed friendships with some of the residents and Corumbene's elderly community clients and continue to maintain social contact, and
- become ambassadors in demystifying how the older person is perceived amongst their peers.

Derwent Valley Council

The 'My Journey' program is providing an intimate historical perspective of the people who contributed to shaping the local community and region. The Council has recognised the benefits of this program (refer Attachment 13) and recognised both the Leisure and Lifestyle team and one of the student volunteers in this year's Derwent Valley Council Australia Day Awards.

Derwent Valley Historical Society

The Derwent Valley Historical Society has worked tirelessly to verify and clarify the residents' information. Through this partnership, the program has had access to historical information which otherwise may have been difficult to obtain. In turn the historical society is gaining access to a rich source of local and cultural history and a better understanding of how personal stories intersect.

98.9 TYGA FM Derwent Valley Community Radio

TYGA FM is in the process of expanding its current 'Corumbene Hour' program to not only invite residents to have their favourite song and dedication played on the radio, but also to share memories associated with their chosen songs as well as their stories. Already this has created

interest in the community, with an increase of callers contributing their memories and creating dialogue in the greater community.

Corumbene Staff

Care staff not directly involved in the program have been impressed with the level of resident/client engagement, and have begun to use the material produced to provide additional meaning, context and perspective to the residents and clients care and wellbeing needs. One nurse who has worked at Corumbene for 23 years recently commented at a Continuous Improvement meeting that the 'My Journey' program was the best thing that she has ever seen since she began working here.

Personal/Team

The 'My Journey' program has offered my team and I many professional development opportunities. In particular it has enabled me to develop new skills, such as leadership, communication, IT, coordination, research, interviewing techniques and working within timeframes to meet stakeholder requirements. It has increased my personal confidence and throughout the process I have established many wonderful relationships with a variety of different stakeholders, opening the door to community cooperation for future activities/events/projects.

EVALUATION

As part of Corumbene's continuous improvement processes, a survey was developed to capture participant engagement in the program. The survey will be conducted 6-monthly after implementation to enable us to capture feedback and improve the program. Results from the initial survey are as follows:

Resident/Client Feedback

With the exception of one category, 75% or more residents responded 'excellent', with 25% of other responses rated 'good' or 'satisfactory'. Refer Attachment 14 for details of the resident survey, and quantitative and qualitative results.

Student Feedback

While not recording as many responses in the 'excellent' range, the total number of positive responses (either excellent, good or satisfactory) ranged from 79% to 92% across all four categories. Refer Attachment 15 for details of the student survey and results.

CONCLUSION

The 'My Journey' program has validated that the sharing of the resident and client stories has enhanced service delivery. Residents and volunteers have developed fond friendships, and social networks have grown across the organisation. In demonstrating how the fabric of the community has been developed, with the intrinsic connections and contributions of past, present and future, the gap of understanding between residents, their families and staff has narrowed. Staff feel that they understand their care recipients better and they are able to modify their care approach accordingly. Most importantly, the residents and clients feel valued, and with the program now reaching out into the broader region across all generations, they have a sense of well-being that their lives are important and they still have a role to play in the community.

WHAT NEXT?

Sustainability

The success of the program to date augurs well for its longevity. Plans to continue it, improve it and expand its scope are being explored. For example, it is envisaged that it will play a major role in the creation of a timeline to be developed to celebrate Corumbene's 50th anniversary in 2016. The timeline will include snippets of some of the 'My Journey' stories, adding a richness of living history with the sharing of significant contributions that some of the residents have made in transforming Corumbene into what it has become today.

Stakeholder Relationships

Existing stakeholders are keen to continue their association with the program. Discussions are currently taking place with St Bridget's Primary School to continue the program in 2016 and the Derwent Valley Council has pledged its continued support. The Derwent Valley Historical Society has expressed an interest in developing a long-term plan to catalogue the residents' stories for the community to access and together we will be working on options to develop a book.

Continuous Improvement

Leisure and Lifestyle workers are now being orientated to the program and being upskilled to provide leadership and support to an expanded program. Existing volunteers are being upskilled to address succession planning and these volunteers are mentoring new volunteers who have expressed an interest in the program. The recruitment for volunteers for this program has also changed focus as we now seek 'corporate' volunteers to bring specific skill sets to meet the evolving needs of the program. In addition conversations have begun with other interested community stakeholders to see how they can become involved in the program bringing with them resources to assist in the growth of the program.

Benefits to the Diversional Therapy field

It is hoped that the success we have had with the 'My Journey' program may be emulated by others in the field with a view to enriching the lives of many more aged care residents and home care clients with meaningful activity, social connections and laughter, enhancing and maintaining their social development and promoting a sense of wellbeing, independence and self-worth.

It has been my privilege to have facilitated this opportunity and to hear the amazing stories of each individual resident and client's life journeys.

Barbara Davis