

RESIDENTS' COUNCILS

STRENGTHS

Ontario Long-Term Care Homes

APPLYING A STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH FOR LEADING AND SUPPORTING RESIDENTS' COUNCILS

Using a person-centred, strength-based approach in our interactions with others involves focusing on the qualities that make each person special. When used in the context of Residents' Councils, this approach can help residents tap into and draw from their personal experiences, strengths and skills (past and present) and enables residents to contribute as part of the group in ways that are meaningful to them. This approach promotes inclusiveness, connectiveness and enhanced well-being.

HONOURING INHERENT STRENGTHS

“This belief in inherent strengths focuses on identifying and mobilizing the resources and assets, respecting the inherent wisdom, and knowledge that every person has, and leads to a rediscovery of these resources within the environment in which they live.”
(Pulla, 2017)

I AM NOT DONE YET

OARC's “I AM” statements contribute to the strengths-based perspective of empowerment. The process of creating a statement includes thoughtful expressions of naming oneself, capturing their current situations and highlighting their likes, dislikes and strengths. To learn more about the “I AM” statement process visit OARC's website, *Through Our Eyes: Bringing the Residents' Bill of Rights Alive* program, Section 3 <http://www.ontarc.com/education-support/through-our-eyes.html>

FOCUS ON STRENGTHS

Changing abilities and deficits are often the focus when residents are moving through our healthcare system and into long-term care; what illness, disabilities or limitations a person has. Strength-based approaches, by contrast, turn deficit-focused thinking upside down, placing emphasis on what an individual can do by leveraging their strengths, and upholding self-determination and resiliency. Strengths-based approaches reinforce the fact that the individual is whole and valued.

STRENGTH-BASED MODELS

Various strength-based models are used in social work, mental health, addictions and other settings to encourage people to look beyond their identified problems/deficits and focus on their strengths and skills. Common principles of strength-based models and approaches are that people:

- have strengths and competencies
- can learn and grow through their strengths and competencies
- can make their own choices
- have autonomy and feel empowerment (Pulla, 2017)

Our role as leaders and supporters of Residents' Council gives us the opportunity to support people to recognize and utilize their own strengths using a variety of activities.

When considering a strength-based approach to engage residents, this simple set of questions (below), inspired by Eden Alternatives, helps to minimize any perceived power imbalances and contributes to individual growth and self-determination. In this example we use OARC's Provisional Agenda for Residents' Council meetings. However, these questions can be used in many different situations, which we've highlighted as Enabling Practise ideas.

Can the individual do this by themselves?

The resident can gather feedback from their peers, draft an agenda and prepare it for the meeting. This doesn't mean that they must carry out the task entirely on their own, it means they can initiate this task without being asked.

Enabling Practise Idea: Remind peers to attend an upcoming Residents' Council meeting

Can the individual do this if asked?

If asked, can a resident gather feedback from their peers, draft an agenda and prepare it for the meeting? A reminder once a month may be enough to assist a resident to engage in this activity.

Enabling Practise Idea: Ask a resident to hand out meeting Agendas, greet residents at door, participate by reading aloud: OARC's Opening/Closing remarks, Residents' Rights review, etc.

Can the individual do this with my help?

With my help, can a resident gather feedback from their peers, draft an agenda and prepare it for the meeting? More questions can be asked to determine what parts of the task the resident can do independently and what tasks can be done together through collaboration.

Enabling Practise idea: Ask a resident to help you welcome a new resident to the home, create a Council brochure, chair a meeting, get a quote for an entertainer or desired purchase.

Can the individual accompany me while I do it?

In this scenario, Residents' Council leaders and supporters take the lead in drafting the agenda. However, they do it with the resident alongside them. This opens the door to inviting those with cognitive changes to share the experience of a task with peers and be involved in Residents' Council activities and meetings.

Enabling Practise idea: Ask a resident to accompany you to post approved meeting minutes, visit the bank to make a Council deposit or to update the account.

Eden Alternative. (2012). The Eden Alternative Domains of Well-Being. Retrieved 08 21, 2019, from

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For Residents, By Residents

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