Building Relationships at the 3rd Culture Change Exchange

Written by Kristian Partington

In 2012, Australia senior living provider Arcare Aged Care realized its approach to service was stagnant, rooted in a model that offered good care for its residents, but was far from exceptional.

“We were very much stuck in a way of doing things and being, and we wanted to do better;” said Arcare Strategy and Innovation Manager Daniella Greenwood during her keynote address at RIA’s third Culture Change Exchange (CCE) on March 16, 2017. The event was presented in partnership with the Schlegel Centre for Learning, Research and Innovation in Long-Term Care (CLRI).

Daniella explained how Arcare then embarked upon a deep exploration of the values its residents, families, teams and leaders held most dearly. “What brings you joy?” these stakeholders were asked. “What makes life worth living in, working in and visiting our long-term care homes?”

During the most recent Culture Change Exchange on March 16, Australia’s Daniella Greenwood offered her perspective on relationships in seniors living.

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The Schlegel-UW Research Institute for Aging aims to enhance the quality of life and care of older adults through partnerships in research, education and practice. Innovations are developed and tested in the Schlegel Villages, and then shared to benefit older adults everywhere.
A "values day" brought people together from across Australia to define key values that would guide the organization into the future. The day was long, Daniella explained, and after many hours of struggle to define the fourth and final value, they called upon a woman in her 90’s named Joan. They wanted her to remind everyone why they were there.

‘What makes life worth living at Arcare is . . . ’ Joan began, and Daniella recalls the room waiting with bated breath for the words of wisdom to follow ‘ . . . that second glass of wine the (care partner) gives me that I’m not allowed to have.’

The room erupted in laughter, Daniella said, but Joan’s point sunk deep. “Flexibility” became the theme of the final value, which continues to guide Arcare today. Perhaps more importantly, however, Joan’s example exposed the need for the organization to better support its team members and residents in pursuing those things that bring meaning and joy.

Having this support and flexibility, Daniella told the audience at the CCE and the many who followed online, is the key enabler to changing the culture of aging within an organization. Today every team member is given a placard that reads: “Whatever position you take within Arcare, first and foremost you are there to connect with others through building relationships – your particular role and task is secondary to this.”

Building Relationships was the theme of this CCE, and Daniella, along with the other presenters and attendees, shared many examples of how strong relationships change lives. By sharing these learnings from across Ontario and around the world, we inspire each other to make changes and find better ways of supporting our older generations.

To learn more about the Culture Change Exchange and how you can get involved in the growing Canadian culture change network contact the RIA at info@the-ria.ca or by calling Kate Ducak at 519-904-0660 ext 4107.