



Relaxing Through the **ARTS**

***Simple Arts Activities
for Nursing Home
Residents and
Volunteers***

 ***FriendshipWorks***

Nursing Home
Outreach Program

Dear Volunteer,

You are giving the gift of creativity and attention to those whose lives in the nursing home will be greatly enhanced by your presence with them. The following suggestions will help you to understand the nursing home environment, what some of the problems and solutions are, and how to connect and communicate with nursing home residents.



WHAT IS A NURSING HOME?



An nursing home is a long term care facility, based on the medical model, of caring for people who can no longer take care of themselves. They may have been living alone, in supportive housing, or with family members but at some point their medical needs could no longer be met where they were living. They have needed to come to the nursing home where you are going to volunteer.

Nursing home residents come from all walks of life. They have had long lives, had many experiences, and now have come to where most will live out the rest of their days.

Here are a few facts about nursing homes and nursing home residents:

- Nursing homes try to do the best they can for their residents, but there are many challenges.
- Sometimes staff are rushed, unhappy and do not want to be there. Other staff are gentle, kind and very engaged. You will see all of this in your experience.
- All nursing homes are required to provide activities for residents. They need volunteers to visit residents on a one to one basis, and carry out group activities when possible.

For you, the Activities Director is the key person who will organize your group for you or identify residents for you to see, along with FriendshipWorks staff. Activities Directors tend to be very busy, and often have staff who will help you in the beginning but later may not be around that much. However, you can always phone or email them. A nursing home may also have a Volunteer Coordinator who provides help and support. Be sure to be in touch with your FriendshipWorks Coordinator as well.

NURSING HOME RESIDENTS MAY BE:

- Tired, Alert, Confused, Enthusiastic, Shy, Gregarious.
- Have trouble talking. May need to use hearing aids. Have a walker or wheelchair.
- Be visually impaired. Have arthritis which makes it difficult to write or draw.
- May have some cognitive impairment, and medication issues.

Most importantly, remember that each resident is an individual, each resident brings his or her lifelong experience to your meeting, and can and will contribute to your time together.



FOR THE MOST PART, THE PEOPLE YOU WILL SEE AND BECOME FRIENDS WITH:

- Like to talk with you.
- Look forward to your visits.
- May take a few minutes to remember who are you, but then will be delighted.
- Have an extensive past.
- Want to reconnect with memories and experiences.
- Like to hold hands or be lightly touched.
- Love to laugh.

YOU WILL DO FINE AS A VOLUNTEER IF YOU:

- Be yourself
- Be natural
- Be a good listener
- Do not have any set expectations
- Let the residents take the lead in your conversations
- Slow down – time moves more slowly in a nursing home
- Enjoy – have a smile on your face
- Be sure to report any concerns to the nursing home staff right away

And... Do not talk down to the residents. They are not children. Sometimes you may have to talk loudly, so make sure you modulate your voice so it does not come across as shouting.

PROBLEMS IN THE NURSING HOME AND HOW TO SOLVE THEM:

There is much background noise.

If it doesn't bother them, try not to let it bother you. Take a deep breath and talk more loudly.

The room is crowded.

Keep focused and make sure to appear relaxed. The residents are used to this, and will turn to you to make sure you are okay.

The room is hot.

Not much you can do about this. Wear layers.

Your resident needs or requests to be moved.

Be sure to contact a staff person to perform this task.

Residents are late to your meeting or are taken away by staff for medical appointments.

Try to avoid this by calling ahead each time and making sure staff know you are coming. You could also ask the staff person if he or she could delay until the end of your meeting. This can sometimes work if they are doing a simple blood pressure check or medication. Otherwise, there is not much you can do except welcome people when they do arrive or return.

In general it is best to remember that nursing homes are busy, sometimes seemingly unpredictable places. Residents do not have control over their time and their schedules. In these cases try to plan ahead for these contingencies and "go with the flow".

Often residents are busy, but also experience times of great boredom. They are surrounded by people, many of whom they know as they eat together and share living space, yet they can feel lonely as they are apart from the people they love and who love them, and disconnected from the rest of their lives.



In summary you provide a great service to people by being there with them, by taking a personal interest in them over time, and providing a way for people to use their minds, their hearts, and their precious creativity. This is a very special and meaningful gift.

CHECKLIST FOR VOLUNTEERS



Make sure to arrange a time to meet that is convenient for the nursing home as well as the resident. This means avoiding change of shift times and meal times. Often mid to late afternoon works well and sometimes early evenings. Check to see what time is best.



Before your visit, **call ahead to make sure your resident is not away at a medical appointment.**



Many nursing home residents doze during the day. If this is true when you arrive, **call the name of your resident or gently touch her arm.** You may ask a staff person to do this for you as well.



Talk and laugh with your resident and be sure to tell him/her stories about the outside world and what you have been doing. Residents love to feel engaged with the world and what is going on.



Listen with interest even if your resident repeats herself. She may be just searching for something to talk about.



Bringing these simple arts activities to your meeting will generate interest and enjoyment.



Take a deep breath. Relax.

You are doing good work and making a difference in the life of your resident.