

TOTAL PROGRAMMING

Judith Weiss, CTRS

MJG Nursing Home Co., Inc., in the heart of Boro Park, in Brooklyn, NY, is a non-profit healthcare facility servicing the diverse needs of 529 patients and residents. A sub-acute unit, hospice and terminal care unit, two units for those with dementia and related disorders, and six chronic care units are all included in this facility. The Therapeutic Recreation Department provides daily leisure opportunities that promote a person's emotional, physical, cognitive, mental, and spiritual well-being.

An integral and necessary component of our programming centers around the opportunity to bring people of all ages together. Through programs in partnership with the New York City Board of Education and community liaisons with private schools and religious organizations, MJG Nursing Home uniquely welcomes, encourages, and nurtures relationships between our staff, clients, and residents with children and teens on a daily basis. We refer to this concept as "Total Programming."

Total Programming meets the needs of the Therapeutic Recreation Department, students, and residents. From kindergarten to first grade and all the way up to seniors in high school, our program has been in existence for over eight years.

The Therapeutic Recreation Department utilizes the abilities and strengths of approximately 25 students, ages 14-19, in assisting with leisure activities. Most of the students serve at the facility 2, 3, or 4 days a week for 6-8 hours each day. These students are placed in our program in order to learn social skills, form good work habits, and become familiar with and carry out several tasks and responsibilities. Many of the students are cognitively, mentally, emotionally, and/or physically compromised in some manner that has enabled them to feel compassion and empathy toward our residents who, due to illness, disease, and aging, demonstrate some of the same compromises.

Students are given inservices with lectures, role-playing, ongoing written evaluations, and extensive training by being paired with a Recreation Therapist. The focus is on escorting and transporting residents, visiting and socializing with the residents, using creative talents in decorating and craft sales, and learning to expand their abilities to read through filing, copying, and running errands. Students are treated as employees and are encouraged to dress and speak appropriately, pay attention to the facility's policies, and be on time. Teachers and para-professionals from their schools are available on the premise to help with supervision and to provide individual guidance. Many of our students are now capable of leading programs independently to groups of 8-20 and conducting such activities as video hour, beauty culture, and the ever-favorite bingo.

These students have gained self-esteem and confidence as they interact with our residents. The residents in turn are given a much-needed opportunity to nurture and care, and they affectionately shower the students with hugs, kisses, and love.

Boro Park in Brooklyn is fast becoming a neighborhood composed of people of diverse cultures and ethnicity. By and large, the Jewish community is strongly rooted here, and MJG Nursing Home honors the Jewish tradition. We gladly welcome students from the Yeshivas and other schools who provide "friendly visits" throughout the week. Kindergarten and first grade students sing at the weekly Oneg Shabbot celebration. During holidays, students regularly visit, perform, and distribute handmade gifts to the residents. Many provide service by becoming "Certified Feeders". Many of the students are of diverse ethnic backgrounds, and their bilingual ability and rich ancestry help us in planning special cultural awareness programs. Groups such as Club Shalom, Oriental Culture Club, and Russian Club provide children and residents of similar ethnicity opportunities to explore history and traditions in their native tongues.

Our intergenerational programs also expose college-bound high school juniors and seniors to a variety of health careers. By being placed in Therapeutic Recreation, the students have opportunities to observe and interact with all of the staff including doctors, nurses, certified nursing assistants, dieticians, social workers, physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech and audiology therapists. Opportunities for questions and exploration abound. The students are also introduced to residents with complex medical conditions. Relationships are fostered between them, and students are sensitized to the needs of the chronically ill. Therapeutic Recreation provides students and residents the opportunity to grow together in enjoyable and creative ways.

All our students are evaluated 2-3 times a year and given supervision sessions regularly. Our programs, as a whole, are also part of our continuous quality improvement program, both internally as per our department and integrally by the facility. Feedback from teachers, parents, students, and (most importantly!) our residents is always incorporated in program planning. We believe we have been successful and look forward to future projects.

Judith is the Director of Therapeutic Recreation at MJG Nursing Home in Brooklyn, NY. Thank you, Judith, for sharing these ideas. ☺