

CRAFTING FOR GIFT-GIVING

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Being an Activity Director means being crafty... well, mostly crafty anyway. One of my favorite things to do when meeting with other Activity Professionals is to swap craft ideas. Running a craft group is not an easy task. There are lots of ways to adapt crafts to match the skills of the residents, and you can read about those in a myriad of books and articles. This article, however, is not about adapting to skills, it's about adapting to space.

Residents in assisted living and nursing home communities have had to downsize greatly. They've most likely gone from a large house, to a small apartment and are now in a single room or even half of a room. What they do not need, nor have room for, is knick-knacks. Wreaths for the doors are great, but beyond that, a good arts and crafts program will produce items that won't sit around in the activity office collecting dust and will make the residents feel proud upon completion.

My first question when thinking of something to make is, "Can the residents do it?" Sometimes, the answer is no, and I am forced to think of simple, uncomplicated creations, and that sometimes leads to more childish projects. Personally, I've always had trouble asking an 85-year-old woman to make something childish, but then I had a breakthrough. Now, we make childish things all the time! What was my breakthrough? Residents can make childish things because they can give them, as gifts, to children!

What a simple, easy, wonderful way to do so much for your residents. Not only will they take pride in their creations, but they will feel fulfilled in that they are providing a need to children in the community. Find the closest daycare and/or hospital and take an armful of creations, and you will develop a relationship that will bring a ton of rewards.

CRAFT IDEAS

◆ Each year, we make Boo-boo Bunnies (out of washcloths) just before Easter. We take about two to three dozen to the children's wing of the local hospital so those kids who won't be home for the holiday can have something special. We put on a tag that says, *"I'm a Boo-boo Bunny, hopping by with a smile for you! I wish you a Happy Easter and hope you're feeling better, too!"*

◆ As a recycling project in April, we asked staff for donations of old crayons but didn't get any. Luckily, we had enough old ones. (You could ask a daycare for all their broken ones if you don't have any.) We had the residents peel off the labels and break the crayons into small pieces, then they filled mini muffin liners with them (either all the same color or mixed). We put them in a muffin pan and then into the oven at 275° for 8 minutes. After they cooled, we peeled off the paper and had the greatest little crayons for little fingers! We put four in each snack-size bag, attached the following poem, and gave them to a daycare.

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM CRAYONS

*Some are sharp, some are pretty.
Some are dull while others are bright.
Some have weird names,
But we all have to learn how to live in the same box!*

◆ Other craft ideas for children include painting and decorating pencil boxes or bags to use in school or child-themed wreaths or foam visors with foam shapes or flowers. The possibilities are endless. Just look through an Oriental Trading craft catalog (www.orientaltrading.com) to get inspired.

◆ Besides making crafts for kids, there is always an opportunity to make gifts for adults. We celebrate National Nurses' Week, Certified Nursing Assistants' Week, Housekeeping Week, and many other recognition days and give the recognized employees gifts. Making pins, flowerpot pen holders, candles, soaps, bookmarks, magnets, and more help residents show their appreciation to those who help them every day.

◆ Make crafts for Craft Shows. Our community hosts one where we sell items we've made. Think greeting cards, food items, pins, gifts, pet treats, and plants. The great part about Craft Shows is that you can raise money for your programs!

Be sure you print tags and labels to attach to your creations that say, "A Gift from the Residents of ____". Also, leave business cards out for people to take for those who want to send thank you. You can read any thank-you notes you receive at resident council and staff meetings (just to brag a little!). If you have resident outings, make deliveries in person. Someone from an organization will come out to your bus to receive a gift in person, trust me!

When thinking of your next craft, think outside the box... the box being the small spaces the residents live in. You will provide your residents with not only a sense of accomplishment in a craft well done, but also a sense of pride, purpose, fulfillment, and community, and what could be better than that?

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