

Healing Blankets

An Activity for All GEMS™ States

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One of the biggest challenges of community life as a person who supports persons living with dementia, is finding activities that can be modified for differing abilities AND making those activities meaningful. Engagement in meaningful activity is so important, yet we find it challenging as our precious gems move into different GEMS states.

Here is an activity I facilitated at a community in which I work. We called it “Healing Blankets.”

The activity involved tying two pieces of fabric together to create beautiful blankets, then donating those blankets to a local children’s hospital. These are the ways we enabled individuals in all GEMS states to participate:

- **Sapphire** – our facilitator of the activity and other supporters helped others be successful. We had residents from our independent living community partner with our residents in the most supportive environments.
- **Diamond** – handled the activity on his/her own, after receiving basic instruction. This was ideal for those who like crafts, and/or likes to do something good for someone else.
- **Emerald** – Our residents in the emerald state benefited from a partner/ buddy who demonstrated and provided both visual and verbal guidance, as needed. A focus on the “good” these healing blankets were going to do for the children was key to creating purpose for Emeralds.
- **Amber** – While changing abilities, and changes in visual field, impacted our Ambers, this was an excellent sensory experience given the softness of the material. Having a supportive partner that was able to adapt to brief moments in time that were super productive was a win/win for everyone.
- **Ruby** – due to changes in fine motor skills, tying knots was not always possible, but sitting side by side, with a blanket draped over the person’s lap, was a great way for that person to participate. As we played music in the background, swaying back and forth while doing the activity was a nice touch for our precious Rubies. Additionally, extending a finger for our Sapphire partners to tie a knot around was just ... well ... fun!
- **Pearl** – Our precious Pearls also participated in this activity. They provided a safe holding spot for the blanket while their partners were working on them, and it was a nice opportunity for warmth and connection.

The patterns on the blankets were used as great discussion topics. The more fun and unusual the pattern, the better! And, we made a great production of displaying our blankets throughout the creation process. We also talked about the power of love and

healing, and as we were working on the blankets, we kept referring to the children that would be receiving them.

As a final touch, we facilitated an activity in which our residents prepared cards to send along with the blankets. All in all, the entire activity took about two weeks.

Our Sapphire team delivered the blankets to the hospital, and we received a *Thank You* letter, which we reviewed with our residents.

This activity hit on so many levels. Not only did the residents of our most supportive community find meaning, but so did our independent residents, AND the community at large.

Carolyn Lukert, MBA, CGCM, joins the Positive Approach® to Care (PAC) team as a PAC certified consultant, coach, and trainer. As a care partner in her own family, and as a care manager in private duty home care and in senior living communities, she brings a broad perspective to her roles with PAC. Carolyn balances her time between Rhode Island and Florida, where she provides support to families where dementia is present. She also is very involved in staff development and organizational culture change relative to the care of individuals living with dementia.