Building Connections Beyond Language, Borders, and Cognitive Ability

Using StoriiCare

by Taylor Vander Well, Best Practice Lead at StoriiCare

Immigrants and refugees in care communities face a host of challenges and complexities, as do the individuals caring for them. It can be difficult enough to engage with and understand the desires of someone with dementia who speaks your native language, is accustomed to the food you cook, the holidays you celebrate, and the pop culture references you make. But those who require memory care and speak little English or are separated from their cultural norms experience a unique kind of isolation and loss of social capital.

As someone who has worked with both refugee and ageing populations, I have seen firsthand the importance of reminiscence therapy and life story work. Apart from recalling memories, these efforts acknowledge and validate one's cultural identity, helping to create essential connections between the care partner and recipient or their family.

I was recently in an adult daycare center, training staff on how to use StoriiCare, a software platform for care coordination and family engagement. With StoriiCare, users can run reminiscence sessions, create playlists, photo albums, record life stories, and use Google Street View to look up and save significant places from a person's past. A member of the care team at this center told me a woman from Zimbabwe attended regularly. Staff had previously had a hard time knowing how to engage with her or help her socialize, as she spoke very little English. With StoriiCare, the woman was able to navigate through the market where she used to live using Google Street View and play songs from her native country. She even bounced around the room singing at the top of her lungs, getting those around her to join in dancing to the Zimbabwean music.

At another care home, the daughter of a Portuguese man uploaded photos from his childhood to his StoriiCare profile so that his care partners had things they could show him and ask him about. Working with the family, the care staff are planning to have a whole Portuguese-themed day, watching a Portuguese football match and serving traditional Portuguese food.

Now, new technology is often met with resistance and skepticism from those who didn't grow up in the digital world and have remained disengaged from it. But for all the ways it can interrupt our lives and way of doing things, it can also build bridges of connection that extend beyond language, borders, and cognitive abilities.

© 2019 Positive Approach, LLC

Taylor's interest in dementia began when she started working as a CNA for a Memory Care unit in her hometown of Pella, Iowa. While completing her graduate studies in Arts and Cultural Management at Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh, UK, Taylor's grandmother was diagnosed with Alzheimers. This inspired Taylor to write her Master's thesis on dementia-friendly practices in Arts organizations and to start a project called See Through Stories, where she captures life stories of those in the early stages of dementia. Today, Taylor is a Best Practice Lead for StoriiCare, a care coordination and family engagement software platform for senior care providers.



© 2019 Positive Approach, LLC