



Person-Centered and Growing Stronger

United Church Homes puts lifestyle, dignity and comfort first when addressing the growing need for memory care.

By Scott Langford

During 100 years in business you learn a thing or two about change. United Church Homes (UCH) has been transforming itself from the very start, but one thing has always remained the same: UCH is a place people could call home. In fact, since its inception in a Toledo, Ohio-area house donated to care for aging people from an area church congregation in 1916, the word “home” has always been in its name.

While a sense of home has been a constant, UCH has experienced tremendous growth and change. Serving more than 4,000 people at 69 communities in 16 states, with a focus on person-directed care—a term Hospitality Services Director Amy Kotterman has made part of the UCH culture. Administrators and staff are committed to encouraging residents to direct their own care as much as possible.

That goes for the foodservice and enrichment programs, which Kotterman oversees by not only paying special attention to caring for people in assisted living and skilled nursing, but to changing the vocabulary people use when talking about care communities. One of her key

areas of focus these days is memory care.

Offering choices and promoting independence

Of the 69 communities, 59 are senior housing and independent living, while 10 have some level of assisted-living and/or skilled nursing care. Much of that care involves older residents who are most likely to be living with dementia, a distinction Kotterman emphasizes.

“These are all people living with dementia, not dementia patients,” she says. “We put the person before the disease.”

She stresses the importance of recognizing people’s lives: their hobbies, former jobs, education, families and even the foods they like. That means no cookie-cutter approach to the menu or the service. Just like living at home, there are days when residents just want to open the fridge and choose from what’s inside, and that’s the goal behind making sure there are plenty of food choices at each meal.

Residents don’t have to cook, of course. They are served restaurant style in each community, with a special of the day (such as roast beef, baked potato and dessert) and à la carte selections (a chef salad, grilled chicken breast, soup of the day, hot or cold vegetables, etc.).

“Person-directed care is all about providing choices, making sure you get what you want and not having it chosen for you,” Kotterman says. “Our à la carte choices are based on preferences we learn about when speaking to resident groups.”



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That’s why people living at each UCH community have unique menu offerings. For example, the Parkvue community in Sandusky always has fish on the menu. That’s because many of its residents spent their lives fishing in nearby Lake Erie.

Connecting color to better eating.

Parkvue is one of the UCH communities undergoing a dining concept revolution, which involves the use of four court kitchens, which serve a smaller number >>

THE LANGUAGE OF COMPASSION

Kotterman introduced a “Word of the Week” at UCH to change the way people speak about their mission. For example, UCH buildings are no longer called facilities. They are communities. Other examples:

Patient = Resident or community member

Unit/Wing = Neighborhood

Elderly = Older adults

Confused = Trouble thinking; living in the past

Dementia resident = Person/resident living with dementia

Create the Right Memory-Care Dining Environment

Kotterman recommends several ways to enhance the mealtime experience for people living with memory care:

REDUCE CLUTTER

get extra items off the table to avoid distractions.

HAVE STURDY CHAIRS

some residents may need armchairs.

TURN OFF THE TV

it can create a sensory overload.

PLAY SOOTHING MUSIC

if there’s background music, make it wordless.

SOLID-COLOR PLATES

patterns and white plates make eating more difficult.

HOSPITALITY: I LIVE IT!

United Church Homes provides all staff with memory-care training to promote a resident-centered approach. In addition, they have recently trained all staff members on a new Hospitality program, Hospitality: I LIVE IT!

L: LISTEN

I listen intently with compassion to understand others' needs.

I listen with an open heart and mind.

I: INSPIRE

I inspire creative hospitality through teamwork.

I inspire others by my example.

V: VALUE

I value and respect our resident choices.

I value myself, others and the contributions we make.

I value a community environment which is safe and clean.

I value integrity and transparency as shown by my words and deeds.

E: EMPOWER

I empower a culture of caring.

I am empowered to take action.

I am empowered to be a steward of the trust given me.



The Role of Nutrition Service

Long-term care is the second-most regulated industry in the U.S., right after nuclear power. Following the rules is a given, but there's more, Kotterman says:

See the big picture. Go beyond client and nutritional assessments and really get to know resident eating patterns.

Go for eye appeal. Evaluate mechanically altered foods for appearance. Fortifying real food may be a better solution to give residents choices and nutrition.

Play favorites. Know a resident's breakfast, drink, comfort food and dessert preferences so they can choose what they like.

of residents, and the creation of a family kitchen in the memory-care neighborhood. The goal is to make each "neighborhood" feel more like home. Although large meals are prepared in Parkvue's main kitchen, the courts have an individual refrigerator and steam tables on premise to stimulate appetites.

Among the dining changes that address memory care is the use of adaptive serving ware, such as colored plates and small soup-like bowls that prevent food from falling onto the table. Kotterman cites statistics that show people with eyesight and dementia challenges eat 25 percent more when they are served food on colored plates. It has been such a success that Kotterman said money has been budgeted to buy colored plates at a number of communities.

"Our job is to promote as much independence for as long as possible," she says.

The colored plates enhance the décor and add warmth at each dining room, Kotterman

says, with two goals in mind. One goal is to create a sense of home. The other goal is to generate interest in eating.

"No one ever shouts, 'hooray, I'm going to the nursing center,' but everyone gets excited about a trip to the dining room if you make it enjoyable," Kotterman says.

Building a bridge to the senses

That sense of home carries over into UCH's person-centered care. The organization's mission—"To transform aging by building a culture of community, wholeness and peace"—has led Kotterman and UCH leadership to embrace a number of dementia-care practices.

One such practice is Comfort Matters, a holistic approach to improving care and the quality of life for people with dementia created by the Beatitudes Campus in Phoenix, Arizona. Kotterman says the program stresses providing pleasurable moments for people living

with dementia. "We might not be able to change the way people think, but we can change the way they feel," she says. This can mean anything from reducing clutter or turning the music off at meal times to reduce distractions.

Addressing sensory issues also is part of two other UCH programs: Music Memory and Opening Minds through Art (OMA). The music program is part of a national initiative started after a UCH leadership team screening of the documentary film *Alive Inside*. The program provides personalized playlists residents can listen to using headphones. "Songs are one way everyone connects to their past, and this is very effective for people living with dementia," Kotterman says.

Kotterman and UCH stress that every activity, from the dining area to the community center, needs to consider the resident first. "We have to remember that residents don't live in our workplace, we work in their home." ■