Library Services and Programs

Are Essential for Nursing Home Residents

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Libraries provide an important service to residents of skilled nursing facilities. They offer services and programming to enhance the lives of the elderly and allow the residents to remain a part of the community. Reading is a part of life for many people, well into the eighth or ninth decade of life. Bookmobiles, book depositories, storytelling, and reminiscence programs are all examples of some of the services that are provided to many nursing homes in Colorado. Assistive devices are also available to help people read or listen to interesting, entertaining, and relevant material, and to enrich the lives of the elderly who cannot live independently. Many of these resources are available to the elderly veterans at Colorado’s five State Veterans Nursing Homes.

Our Aging Society

As of 2003, 35.9 million, or 12.4%, of the U.S. population was age 65 or older. Statistics show that those who reach 65 can expect to live to age 83. In Colorado in 2003, the over-65 population was 441,371 (9.7% of all ages, a 23% increase from 1993). Of these, 9% were living below the poverty line. (http://www.nia.nih.gov/) Economic status often is a determining factor in where an elderly person resides.

The Census Bureau projects the numbers of older Americans by 2010 to be 40.2 million, and by 2020 to be 54.6 million. This population is growing because of improved health care and the aging of the “baby boomer” generation. In 2003, approximately 1.6 million older Americans lived in nursing homes because they need skilled nursing care, help with Activities of Daily Living (ADL’s), and/or suffered some form of dementia. (A Profile of Older Americans, 2004.)
American Library Association Guidelines

Since Americans have begun to live longer with increased literacy, The American Library Association established guidelines for library services to seniors. “Library Services to Older Adults Guidelines” was written in 1975. They have been revised and the latest version, from 1999, is entitled “Guidelines for Library Services to Older Adults”. The main points are as follows:

1. Integrate library service to older adults into the overall library plan, budget and service program.
2. Provide access to library buildings, materials, programs, and services for older adults.
3. Treat all older adults with respect at every service point.
4. Utilize the experience and expertise of older adults.
5. Provide and promote information and resources on aging.
6. Provide library services appropriate to the needs of older adults.
7. Collaborate with community agencies and groups serving older adults.

(Guidelines for Library Services to Older Adults)

The implications for our subject are many. Public libraries should be sure to budget for appropriate services and programming for outreach to seniors, including those in nursing homes. In conjunction with the facility and other community resources, the library should come to residents through bookmobiles, reminiscence kits, book discussions, and an in-house library whenever possible. Libraries would also do well to provide transportation to the library for those who are able, most likely in partnership with another community organization or agency.
The Need for Skilled Nursing Homes

Ideally, an older person can and should live in his or her own home or with family but this is not always possible. Nursing homes were established, and will most likely continue to exist for the foreseeable future, in order to care for individuals in this circumstance. (Britannica Concise Encyclopedia) This includes the growing number of individuals in our nation with dementia, as well as military veterans who have honorably served the U.S. in wartime.

Current Programming Available Nationally

\textit{The Eden Alternative}

Much more than programming, this is a transformation in how a nursing home is viewed and run. Developed in the early 1990s by a medical director of a nursing home in New York, the approach is holistic and has become almost a movement across the country. Care facilities using the Eden Alternative approach now exist in almost every state in the nation, as well as in Europe, Australia and Japan.

The organization’s stated mission and vision are “to improve the well-being of Elders and those who care for them by transforming the communities in which they live and work….to eliminate loneliness, helplessness, and boredom.” The Eden Alternative Ten Principles (see Appendix A) are its values. (http://www.edenalt.com)

Of these ten principles, libraries help particularly with principles 1, 3, 6 and 9 in the following ways:

- Offer reading and listening materials help to relieve or alleviate loneliness, helpless, and boredom.
- Enhance a sense of community and companionship through reminiscing programs.
• Create meaningful activity by reading and sharing information.
• Contribute to the growth of the individual resident.

Dogs, cats, birds, and other animals live within the “Edenized” homes and are cared for by the residents and staff, who are rewarded by their comfort and companionship. Plant life is abundant throughout the facility. Some homes also include children in the daily lives of the residents. For instance, one home built an adjacent classroom and a playground so that a struggling school could hold kindergarten classes there. Many children visit the residents as a regular part of their day, which is good for everyone. (Bruck, L. 1997.)

Although libraries or reading materials are not specifically mentioned as a part of the Eden Alternative, such a home must involve libraries. Plants and animals improve mental and physical health; a good book and storytelling feed the soul. Library services promote the mental stimulation and mental health of the elderly. (St. Lifer & Rogers, 1995)

**Bi-Folkal Kits**

These kits, available through many libraries, include various items to stimulate discussion among seniors and particularly to evoke memories. Each kit has a theme and includes a video or slide-show presentation, hints for discussion, and an object or objects to touch or smell. For 30 years, these kits have been widely used across the country. They are effective with the elderly because their multisensory format encourages participation. By remembering and sharing stories, the older person helps their family and society to understand and appreciate its history while the elder puts his or her own life into an historical perspective. The developers of these kits quote an African proverb: “When an old person dies, a library burns.” (Erickson and Leide, p. 23) Reminiscing and
storytelling enrich the lives of nursing home residents and their communities.

(http://www.bifolkal.org)

National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped

The U.S. has 57 regional and 77 local libraries providing free materials in Braille and taped materials for blind and physically handicapped persons. The Colorado Talking Book Library (CTBL) mails to eligible residents resources such as audio books (and the machines to play them), books in Braille, and large-print materials. In order for an institution such as a nursing home to access CTBL services, just one resident needs to be eligible and registered with the CTBL. (http://www.cde.state.co.us/ctbl) This is a wonderful resource to librarians, nursing home activity directors, and residents.

Library Services to Skilled Nursing Facilities in the Denver Area

According to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, as of November 2004, Colorado had about 221 skilled nursing homes caring for 17,000 residents. (http://www.cdphe.state.co.us) Librarians have been aware for many years of the need to reach out to the older population. Here are some examples of library services currently available in the Denver area.

A library in Jefferson County began a story time in libraries, which evolved into an outreach to nursing homes. Librarians or volunteers read short stores with “homey” themes and encourage the listeners to reminisce. This is best done in the mornings, when seniors are more alert and alleviates problems associated with Sundowner’s Syndrome. Jefferson County learned to tailor their programming to each group. (Tang, J.)

The Arapahoe County Library offers bookmobile service to 20 sites on a regular basis, including at least six nursing homes and assisted living facilities. They also have deposit
collections in 11 senior facilities within the District that are too small for a Bookmobile stop, and loan out the Bi-Folkal Kits.

The Denver Public Library’s bookmobile visits 19 sites, including schools, apartments and community centers, and apparently at least four senior centers.

Specific Resources for Nursing Home Residents

In addition to “regular” books, magazines, and newspapers, special resources available to nursing home residents can (and do) include large print books and magazines, and audio books either from the local library or from CTBL. Assistive devices can include magnifiers, special headphones, special book holders, and computers with large screen terminals. Special programming should include bookmobile stops, book discussions, storytelling, reading aloud, reader’s advisory, and conducting reminiscence programs or an oral history project. Programming can also include speakers, a summer reading program, and visits to the library. (Honnold & Mesaros, 2004) Most of these services are available to residents of Colorado’s Veterans Nursing Homes.

Colorado State Veterans’ Nursing Homes

Owned and operated by the State, the homes are approved by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). They care for veterans and some family members. The VA subsidizes construction or purchase of State nursing homes, and also makes per diem payments to the State for the care of eligible veterans. There are 114 State nursing homes in 47 states and Puerto Rico with over 21,000 VA-authorized beds. The VA is accountable to Congress for the quality of care provided in these nursing homes. An
application is required, and the home must first evaluate whether it can provide the care the applicant needs before admission.

Colorado currently has five State Veterans Homes. They are located in Aurora, Florence, Monte Vista, Rifle, and Walsenburg. Some statistics and available library services are referenced in Appendix B. It is encouraging to see that so many services are available, particularly the involvement of the CTBL. This brief survey also offers an opportunity to improve services and/or programs to the residents. A bookmobile could be especially useful to some of these homes.

Librarians have used bookmobiles for decades to provide service to nursing homes. They carry on a tradition of quality service to a population disadvantaged by lack of transportation, poor health, advanced age, or isolation. Individualized library service to this large and growing segment of the population enhances not only the quality of life for the library patron, but also gives personal satisfaction to the librarian. (Mielke, Eppenberger Menz & Rogers, p. 290)

Services Specific to Men

Because women tend to live longer, they generally make up the larger percentage of nursing home residents, so activities and services often are geared more toward them. Because men’s lives focused on, and were identified with, their work, many had little time for hobbies or other recreation and it can be difficult for them to enjoy leisure time. (Kavanaugh, K. M. & Quattrochi-Tubin, S., 1996). Residents of these homes all have the status of “veteran” in common. Activities could focus on literally sharing their war stories with one another and with others outside of their home. Patriotic activities around
Independence Day, Memorial Day, or other days related to war commemoration, would be especially meaningful to older veterans. (Honnold & Messaros, 2004) Other ideas to engage men in the veterans’ homes would involve understanding the backgrounds and values of the individual residents to create programs. For nursing home activity directors (and librarians!) it only takes some sensitivity to the needs of elderly men to successfully provide activities and resources for them.

Conclusion

“Libraries can contribute directly to the mental stimulation of the aged…. The quality of life for the aged is tied to the quality of library services…” (St. Life & Rogers, p. 17) Our society is aging. In the very near future we may have a tremendous increase in the number of individuals who must live in a nursing home. The best kind of facility would take a holistic approach to each resident in order to meet the various needs of each individual and enhance the quality of life. This could include having pets around, caring for plants, interacting in a genuine manner with children, being a part of the community, and continuing to be educated and entertained. The library can and should continue to be a part of the lives of nursing home residents by proactively providing resources for the staff and the residents of these homes. With human interaction and assistive devices for those with visual impairments, reading can remain a part of life for the elderly. As a free nation, we must especially care for and honor our veterans. Just as a library is crucial to democracy, so are men and women who are willing to serve in the military. Residents of the Colorado’s Veterans Homes deserve the best library services that our state can provide.
APPENDIX A

The Eden Alternative Principles

1. The three plagues of loneliness, helplessness and boredom account for the bulk of suffering among our Elders.

2. An Elder-centered community commits to creating a Human Habitat where life revolves around close and continuing contact with plants, animals and children. It is these relationships that provide the young and old alike with a pathway to a life worth living.

3. Loving companionship is the antidote to loneliness. Elders deserve easy access to human and animal companionship.

4. An Elder-centered community creates opportunity to give as well as receive care. This is the antidote to helplessness.

5. An Elder-centered community imbues daily life with variety and spontaneity by creating an environment in which unexpected and unpredictable interactions and happenings can take place. This is the antidote to boredom.

6. Meaningless activity corrodes the human spirit. The opportunity to do things that we find meaningful is essential to human health.

7. Medical treatment should be the servant of genuine human caring, never its master.

8. An Elder-centered community honors its Elders by de-emphasizing top-down bureaucratic authority, seeking instead to place the maximum possible decision-making authority into the hands of the Elders or into the hands of those closest to them.


10. Wise leadership is the lifeblood of any struggle against the three plagues. For it, there can be no substitute.
### APPENDIX B
**Colorado Veterans Homes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility Name (Location)</th>
<th>Licensed Beds</th>
<th>Residents (as of 3/31/05)</th>
<th>Library Services Available**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colorado State Veterans Home at Fitzsimons (Aurora)</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>CBTL. Volunteers, activities personnel read to residents. In-house library and books throughout the facility (mostly small print). Magazines donated from the community. Staff use library to check out videos for residents. Residents enjoy reading history. Facility does not have but would like bookmobile service, especially for videos and large-print materials. (Melissa Blair)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce McCandless Colorado State Veterans Nursing Home (Florence)</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>On-site library with a volunteer who visits twice weekly. Magniviewer, 2 computers, videos, VCR and TV. Popular periodicals are Country Living and Readers’ Digest. Receives audio books and machines from CTBL. Residents’ reading interests include romance, war, geography, mysteries, autobiographies. (Jim Barrows)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado State Veterans Center-Homelake (Monte Vista)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>On-site library of donated books, primarily large-print. Use CTBL resources. Residents enjoy wartime books and westerns. (‘Esther’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado State Veterans Nursing Home-Rifle (Rifle)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>Large print books and some donated books located in Activities Office. Resources from CTBL on a weekly basis, including 6 machines for playing the books. Large-print Readers’ Digest. Residents enjoy biographies, westerns, romance. Would like other large print magazines. (Beth Buster)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado State Veterans Home at Walsenburg (Walsenburg)</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>An individual comes from Denver 1-2x per year with large-print books and Readers’ Digest. Donated books on site. Use CTBL. Residents enjoy historical romance novels, westerns. Residents are also transported to the local library. (Sherri Kraxberger)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**This information was gathered via telephone surveys of the Activity Directors at the nursing homes.**
References


**Websites**

http://textonly.arapahoelibraries.org/FamilyofSite/OutreachServices.cfm

http://denverlibrary.org/phprint.php

http://www.cde.state.co.us/ctbl

http://www.bifolkal.org

http://www.nia.nih.gov/

http://www.cdhs.state.co.us/ADRS/VetNH/default.html
Additional Resources Used

http://www.askcolorado.org/
http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/hr/static/census2.htm  (7/31/05)
http://www.loc.gov/hls/reference/bibliographies/library.html
http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/dementias
http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/hf/hfd.asp
http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdelib/strategicplanforlibraries2005.htm
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