

## Success Story:

### Activities Program Engages Community Members to Reduce Isolation and Improve Quality of Life for Nursing Home Residents

An activities program at the New Horizons Care Center successfully reduced isolation and increased socialization for its residents. And in turn, the initiative also engaged the entire community of Lovell, Wyoming.

“Just like us, when the residents are happier, there is less depression and fewer health problems,” said Angela Hopkin, activity coordinator at New Horizons. “I think it’s important that the happiness of our residents is not forgotten just because they are in a care center.”

#### **Background**

“I have nothing to look forward to and everything I think about is in the past.” That powerful statement made by a resident cemented that change needed to occur, so Hopkin outlined goals and started brainstorming about how to create a more robust activities program. The primary goals identified were:

- reduce isolation
- increase socialization
- increase mind movements and thinking skills
- embrace existing skills and interests to motivate residents to learn new things

“I think when people are happier they feel a connection, a sense of purpose and they continue to learn more when they are happier,” said Hopkin, who has a background in learning. “We have to give people a reason to be here and feel like they have things to contribute.”

Hopkin started organizing activities and reaching out to community members and organizations. She also went to each resident to see what their interests are and what they like. When residents didn’t have the ability to do the things they enjoyed anymore because of physical or mental limitations, she suggested alternatives.

Members from the community were then encouraged to become more involved with visiting the center and interacting with its residents. After reaching out to many organizations and community members, the stars started to align. Third graders from the local elementary school come read with the residents monthly, young kids dress up for tea parties, school bands play concerts, local churches do crafts, the Powell College international students come and cook authentic foods from their countries, the park service gives presentations, local artists visit monthly and a chainsaw artist gave a chainsaw art demonstration.

The residents also take field trips often; they went to the Heart Mountain Relocation Camp and a boat ride down the canyon, among other places. Hopkin also created more customized trips for individuals who were reluctant to participate. For instance, one gentleman has a passion for working on airplanes, so he and others went to the local airport to visit and tour the old plane museum. Another person enjoyed Corvettes, so Hopkin engaged him by viewing Corvette documentaries. Technology and the internet has also provided great ways for residents to learn and grow. The center also runs an article in the local newspaper to keep the community abreast of what is going on at the center.

According to Hopkin, not only are the residents happier, more mobile and social, but the families and overall community have embraced the program. And to everyone's surprise, the two groups with more than a 50-year age span really made a connection.

"The first time the third graders came up they looked scared to death," said Hopkin. "But as the program proceeded they were able to laugh, were more comfortable and their eyes just lit up. The teachers said they really loved it too."

Before the program, resident activity engagement was minimal. Now, more than 50% to 70% of the residents attend the activities program three times a week or more.

**About Mountain-Pacific**—Mountain-Pacific is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation and holds federal and state contracts that allow them to oversee the quality of care for Medicare and Medicaid members. Mountain-Pacific works within its region (Montana, Wyoming, Alaska, Hawaii and the U.S. Pacific Territories of Guam and American Samoa and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands) to help improve the delivery of health care and the systems that provide it. Mountain-Pacific's goal is to increase access to high-quality health care that is affordable, safe and of value to the patients they serve. [www.mpqhf.org](http://www.mpqhf.org)