



SANDRA STIMSON
 Executive Director
[Alternative Solutions in LTC](#)
 and
 National Council of Certified
 Dementia Practitioners
<http://www.nccdp.org>

ABOUT SANDRA

Sandra Stimson has experience as a corporate consultant, Corporate Trainer and National Speaker. Her experience is in long term care, as Activity Director, Director of Alzheimer's Units and Assistant Administrator of a 550 bed long term care county home. She is Co-founder of Pet Express Pet Therapy Club, is a Life Replay Specialist. Sandra implements dementia units nationwide. Sandra has written several books, Volunteer Management Essentials for Long Term Care and Pet Express Pet Therapy Program. Sandra has been a facilitator for Alzheimer's support groups and is the Awards Chair for the NJ Association of Activity Professionals. Sandra is the Executive Director of **National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners**
<http://www.nccdp.org>.

[Alternative Solutions in Long Term Care](#) offers resources for health care professionals in many areas of dementia care, care plans, Snoezelen products, dementia activity calendars, adult day care calendars, sensory calendars, reminisce videos for dementia, activity books, and dates to remember, party supplies, resources and links



Each Norman Rockwell print is paired with a national standards of Resident Rights and is illustrated by a picture depicting the "Resident Right."
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Pathways to the Past

by Sandra Stimson ADC, CALA, CDP
 Executive Director, [Alternative Solutions in Long Term Care](#)

Pick Your Staff Carefully for Dementia Units

By Sandra Stimson CALA, ADC, CDP
 National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners
www.nccdp.org
 Alternative Solutions in Long Term Care
www.activitytherapy.com



It is important to pick and choose the staff to work on the dementia unit. The staff the Activity Director selects to work on the dementia units should possess the following attributes:

- Able to work as a team
- Able to think independently
- Self Directed
- Open Minded
- Creative
- Kind
- Patient

Additionally and most important is to select staff who have several years experience working with dementia clients. Often times, new employees with little or no training are hired for the dementia unit. The Activity Director should recruit seasoned, experienced and trained staff to work on the dementia unit. Seasoned and experienced staff will provide dynamic calendars, independent activities, appropriate programs, innovative activities, family involvement, and alternatives for lower functioning residents. They possess the knowledge necessary to adapt activity programs. Additionally, they are able to motivate the CNA's to participate in the activity program.

Inexperienced activity professionals lack the education, life experience, knowledge and confidence to work in this key role. Activity Directors should place new employees with little or lack formal activity training with their highest functioning residents. High functioning or independent residents will help guide a new employee and will also vocalize suggestions and concerns.

The activity assistant should have the opportunity to work with the person leaving the unit. If this is not possible, the Activity Director should devote one full week and work side by side with the assistant. This is important as the existing employee can offer valuable information regarding:

- Introduction to residents
- Resident routines
- Resident preferences
- Level of functioning
- Level of Cognition
- Introduction to staff
- Unit schedule and routine
- Location of supplies
- Documentation
- Elopement protocol and emergency preparedness
- Safety concerns
- Snack times

The new employee should be given one day to read the Dementia Unit policy and procedure. Additionally the new employee should be provided with the Federal and state regulations as well as any specific regulations regarding the Alzheimer's dementia unit. There may be specific regulations that pertain to pets and volunteers and those should be provided as well. If you're a nursing home or adult day care, provide the assistant with Dementia Care Plan Book.

The new employee after attending the facility general orientation should receive a job specific orientation and a dementia unit orientation.

The new employee should be given the schedule for breaks and lunch. Often times, the activity assistant is required to assist at meal times. This needs to be clearly explained. The activity assistant should receive proper training regarding special diets, transferring from wheel chair to chair, transporting, van protocol, toxic plants and precautions for aroma therapy, pet therapy protocol, feeding procedures and pain in-service. Additionally, the staff should receive extensive dementia education before beginning the job or within 7 days of placement.

Not investing in an appropriate activity assistant may have negative consequences.

- Within the community facility reputation affected
- Poor survey outcomes
- Increased family complaints

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Books, Videos, and Resources for Long Term Care Facilities



- Increased staff complaints
- Destruction to day rooms that are not adequately supervised

Activity Assistants with little or no training provide:

- Inappropriate activities
- Activities that are too difficult
- Demeaning activities
- Too much down time between activities

Negative consequences for residents are:

- Inappropriate activities
- Demeaning activities
- Lower self esteem
- Increased Boredom
- Increased agitation and restlessness
- Increased verbal out bursts
- Lower functioning residents completely left out of programs with no alternatives offered
- Lost residents during outside trips
- Accidents or incidents during activity programs

For the first 30 days, the Activity Director should be observing, monitoring and evaluating the morning and afternoon programs. Some of the areas to look at are:

- Appropriateness of program
- Supplies and preparation for the program
- Can everyone participate in the program
- Those who can not participate what else is offered
- Nursing assistants participating in the program
- Employee Adjustment
- Attitude of employee
- Safety issues

At the end of each day, the director should meet with the employee to go over observations, concerns and recommendations as well as seeking feed back from the employee.

The Director should also send the assistant to seminars and conferences specific to dementia topics. Any available resource specific to dementia should also be provided. There are many resources, web sites, magazines and organizations that offer free resources. Insure that part of the activity budget is spent on supplies for the dementia unit, such as reminisce products, relaxation videos, exercise props and music supplies such as CD's, bells, maracas and drums. Provide petty cash so the Assistant is able to pick up creative things to sort and fold at the thrift shops and dollar stores. Begin a notebook for the assistant and place articles and activity suggestions specific to dementia. This will be a valuable resource for the Activity Assistant.

Compliment often and provide positive feed back as the assistant needs to hear it.

The Director can avoid burnout and negative attitude if appropriate time is given for selection of employees and proper training is provided. This can only be a "win win" investment for the activity department, facility, family and most important the residents.

See www.activitytherapy.com for activity props, dementia care plans, sensory programs for low functioning residents and tons of books and resources.

See www.nccdp.org for information on Certified Dementia Practitioner, Certified Dementia Unit Manager (Dementia Unit Supervisors only) and Train the Trainer.




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 in Long Term Care Settings
admin@theactivitydirectorsoffice.com

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