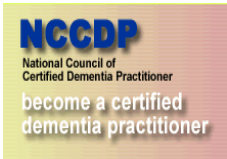


SANDRA STIMSON
 Executive Director
[Alternative Solutions in LTC](#)
 and
 National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners
<http://www.nccdp.org>

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."

Pathways to the Past

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



Wheelchair Dance? Yes they Can!

Sandra Stimson CALA ADC CDP CDCM Executive Director

"If dance is an expression of the human spirit, then it is best expressed by people of all abilities."



I was fortunate to attend the NAAP conference and a presentation by Michelle Nolta. During her presentation she mentioned Wheelchair Dancing. I have to be honest and mention I had not heard of this (in the nursing home setting) and decided this would be our feature article this month. I believe once you read this article, see the resources and watch the videos you will be blown away and inspired to add wheelchair dancing to the monthly activity calendars.

Dance programs are all the rage this year with TV shows such as Dancing with the Stars, So You Think You Can Dance and America's Got Talent.

Dance was a popular and inexpensive social event for our seniors in their youth. They went to dances, country club socials, military dance gatherings and ball room dance events. Many seniors met their spouse at the dance events.

The 1930 to 1950 era ushered in Big Apple Dance, Fox Trot, Swing, Tap, Waltz, Boogie Woogie, Conga, Jitter Jive, Cha Cha, Champagne Waltz, Jitter Bug, Tango, Mambo, Harlem Shuffle, Swing Trot and the Western Swing just to name a few. From 1950 to 1960 they were dancing the Bristol Stomp, Chicken Dance, Bop, Dirty Dance, West Coast Swing, Bunny Hop, The Pony and everyone remembers the Twist.

In the 1930's they were dancing to Irving Berlin, Rudy Vallee, Dorothy Fields, Ira Gershwin, Cole Porter, Noel Coward, Charles King. The 1940's are memorable for Glen Miller, Bing Cosby, Tommy Dorsey, Artie Shaw, Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra. The 1950's Fat's Dominoe, Charlie Parker, King Cole Trio, Al Jolson, Doris Day, Frankie Laine and Dinah Shore.

Activity Directors are well known for stepping outside their comfort zone and trying something new and innovative. But as with all programs, wheelchair dance programs should be a resident choice and not a program where everyone is just wheeled in to the day rooms and expected to participate. This type of program can be enjoyed by residents who have no previous experience in dance. It offers them an opportunity to step outside their comfort zone. But because of this, residents must volunteer on their own accord and agree to attend a dance / movement program.

For many nursing homes the majority of the residents are in wheelchairs, while Assisted Living may only have a few residents in wheelchairs. This is an innovate way to get your residents moving while at the same time have a great time learning about dance and movement.

For great examples of wheelchair dance that is sure to inspire you, please take the time to watch this video on YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/user/AmericanDanceWheels> Wheelchair dancing also referred to as adaptive dancing and can be coupled with an able body dancer. Think of the possibilities from networking with your local dance school students and teachers, high school volunteer groups and senior volunteer groups who love to dance. The Yellow Pages lists all kinds of dance companies who you could collaborate with to provide instruction and also bring their students to entertain and instruct your residents. The American Dance Therapy Association has Dance Movement Therapist in many states.

It is a lot easier to teach residents in wheelchairs dance styles such as ball room dancing, waltz and fox trot but all kinds of dance styles can be learned. Some may just need a little more patience for dance styles such as swing, hip hop, etc.

There are several types of Wheelchair dancing. Group Dance which includes wheelchair users as well as people who are ambulatory. Duo Dancers which is two persons each in their own wheelchair, free style dancing which is with a single person dancing in a wheelchair. There is also Duo (couples) dancing where a person in a wheelchair is coupled with an ambulatory person or a professional dancer.

There are many people who might be shy about dancing and quietly sit and just watch the fun. Hopefully, they will be inspired to put on their dancing shoes and give it a try, or just clap their hands, sway to the music, stomp their feet and waive their arms. But either way there are positive benefits to watching a performance or practice session. Not many will be able to just sit in their seats for long when upbeat, lively and moving music begins to play.

Every kind of dance is shown on YouTube that can help guide and instruct you. To make it more interesting, the Activity Director can design wheel chair dance classes around seasons and themes such as:

- Cinco De Mayo Day and teach Mexican Hat Dance or other dances

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- St. Patrick's Day and teach an Irish Jig
- May- May pole dance
- Mother's Day & Father's day invite the grand children in to watch a performance or participate.
- June-Senior Prom and invite the local high school seniors to ballroom dance.
- July- Luau and teach Hawaiian Dance
- August- Have a fair and a talent show to high light the senior's dancing
- September- Country Western Day and learn country line dancing.

Have cultural awareness day and each month learn a different style of dance such as African Movement Dance. Most states have dance studios specializing in different styles of dance and could provide a demonstration. See Anticipation of Dance- Amazing Grace Score Points Against Aging Video <http://www.dancetherapymusings.com/2011/03/anticipation-dance-game.html>

Invest in fun therapeutic props such as scarves and ribbons. There is also a product called Octaband that can be incorporated into the movement portion of your class. Octaband is fun, interactive and promotes individuality and group cohesion through movement for people of all ages and abilities <http://www.octaband.com/> www.dancetherapymusings.com

"Because dance also requires memorizing steps and working with a partner, the activity provides mental challenges that are crucial for brain health—including reducing the risk of developing dementia and Alzheimer's disease, according to researchers at Albert Einstein Center." Lori Batcheller www.Disaboom.com

There are many benefits to Wheelchair Dancing;

- Restore a sense of normalcy in a person's life
- Reduce stress
- Builds confidence
- Opportunities to socialize and reduce social isolation
- Toxins release through sweating
- Build stamina
- Maintain flexibility
- Build strength and muscle tone of arms and shoulders
- Increase endurance
- Improve coordination
- Manage weight
- Increase self esteem & personal worth
- Opportunity to be playful
- Pleasure
- Satisfaction
- Laughter & Joy
- When you exercise you feel better-dance is exercise and movement
- Elevate mood
- Diminish agitation
- Decrease blood pressure
- Increase level of excitement and anticipation
- Increase opportunities to be spontaneous
- Opportunity for Self expression
- Failure Free Event so it is purposeful and meaningful
- Movement relieves aches and pain
- Increase in appetite
- Increase alertness
- Sleep better
- Rejuvenate the spirit
- Reminisce
- Maintain long term memories
- More connected and awareness of the body
- Dance provides a safe place to express feelings

Jasmine Pasch wrote "We must not underestimate the effect of enjoyment. Having fun is a serious business, with dramatic effects on human well-being."

"Philosophically, dance therapy fits absolutely within a person-centered approach to dementia care. It is about acknowledging the whole person (physical, emotional, social and spiritual). It is about quality of relationship – reconnecting the person to him- or herself and facilitating positive relationships with others. It is about engaging in meaningful activity. In other words it is about enriching the quality of life for people with dementia. Dance therapy is particularly appropriate in working with people with dementia because dance therapists' training and skills in the non-verbal area enable them to meet the person with dementia in his or her world." Adapted from Movement is the Medium.

Watch for the magical moments and inspiration among your staff and residents as you incorporate this program into your weekly planned events. This will lead to not only anticipated events but to rehearsals, performances and maybe even competition at your state wheelchair dance competitions. If there are none in your state, why not coordinate with other nursing homes and assisted living facilities and begin your own dance competition.

There are all kinds of wheelchair dancing styles, Waltz, Tango, Fox Trot, Quick Step, Swing, Country Dancing, Latin Dancing such as Samba, Rumba, Cha Cha Cha, Jive, and Paso Doble.

Many seniors are competing in competitions such as



American Style Wheelchair Dancing
Latin Style Wheelchair Dancing
Ball Room Wheelchair Dancing
Country Dancing Wheelchair Dancing

Don't rule out the resources right at your front door, because watching community groups can be enjoyable and enriching experience to, dance schools (Irish, Jazz, Ballet, Tap, Ball Room Dancing, Hip Hop, Lyrical) country line dancing at local restaurants and pubs, senior dance groups at senior centers, university dance programs (students), local talent competitions, YouTube and Dancing with the Stars programs. Have a talent show and invite employees to show off their moves. One facility I consulted for, the MDS coordinator was a national champion ball room dancer...who knew! Have your own Dancing with the Stars program.

Eliminate old stereotypes about the elderly. Yes, they can learn and they have shown this many times to us over and over again. Expect more! This is the generation that loves to learn new things. Try all kinds of music from America and other countries, experiment! They will be more open to new types of music than you would have ever thought possible. You just might find that the residents will love the wheelchair dance program if you present the program with enthusiasm, passion and a commitment to succeed.

You can certainly teach your residents about Wheelchair dancing, but if you lack experience or comfort in this area you can contact American Dance Wheels Foundation for an instructor or a local dance school. If you want to have a trainer come to your facility and develop a cutting edge dance group program contact Donna Newman-Bluestein Med BC-DMT LMHC who is a board certified Dance Movement Therapist and Public Relations Chairperson for the American Dance Therapy Association. You can contact her at 617-969-2436 or dbluebird@rcn.com she can design programs not only for your dementia patients but also for your high functioning ambulatory patients. The American Dance Therapy Association has a database of certified dance therapists for your state.

There are several instructional videos through the Christopher and Dana Reeves Foundation Library that are free and they will also pay for the postage to ship it to you through their free lending program.

<http://www.youseemore.com/reevePRC/default.asp>
Introduction to Wheelchair Dancing-video
Two Step Wheelchair Dancing-video
Waltz Wheelchair Dancing-video

Try to involve the front line staff. Consider what countries your staff is from. For example, you might have staff from the Caribbean. Once you begin playing Calypso, Bob Marley or Steel Band Music, they won't be able to resist joining your group, they will become more playful, interact and dance with your residents.

Wheelchair dancing movement offers oceans of possibilities, endless rewards for you, your staff and especially your residents.

"If dance is an expression of the human spirit, then it is best expressed by people of all abilities."

www.DancingWheels.org

-END

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for Activity Professionals
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