



Coping with Dementia: Care partner as student

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Those of us caring for our loved ones at home can gain so much if we stop thinking of ourselves as caregivers who carry the whole load, but as partners whose task is to learn how to better provide the care our loved ones need.
MetroCreative



Recently, my partner Ed and I traveled to North Carolina to visit Soltys Place, a dementia day care center run by Teepa Snow, the founder of the Positive Approach to Care, which provides the core training for the philosophy and techniques of my company, Coping with Dementia LLC.

We asked if it was permissible to take photographs, and Teepa DRF of our dementia teachers families have signed a photo consent agreement.*



Debbie Selsavage
Coping with Dementia

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"Teachers?" She was speaking of the men and women living with dementia, and she referred to them as "teachers!"

Ed and I learned a long time ago that it is better not to ask Teepa a lot of questions, but to just stand back and watch and learn. What we saw that day was not a few health care workers entertaining and baby-sitting a group of men and women with dementia. We saw people – some with and some without dementia – working in teams to perform activities of daily living by supporting each other in a process that included both teaching and learning, simultaneously.

Definitely, it was a long shot from the dementia day care facilities we've seen where the primary task of caregivers seems to be keeping people with dementia quiet and "out of trouble" while their spouses or families enjoy a well-deserved respite somewhere else. To the contrary, while Soltys Place may have provided respite for those absent loved ones, its primary purpose was to engage its clients in ways to keep them active, happy and social.

It was much more than just fun and games. Groups of "teachers" and care partners were organized in teams that rotated hourly through different rooms and meaningful tasks. For example, there was a team that prepared breakfast while others were in supervised physical exercise, and still others engaged in mental exercises of math and language. Then when the hour was up, they would rotate and one of the teams would do dishes and clean the kitchen while the others had fun.

Once things were running smoothly and Teepa had time to talk to us, she said, "We think of these living with dementia as our teachers. Their real job here is to show us what they need and help us improve our understanding and skills as care partners. We are not here to teach them anything. We are here to learn from them."

I think it is a beautiful idea, and we don't need a professional day care facility to apply it. Those of us caring for our loved ones at home can gain so much if we stop thinking of ourselves as caregivers who carry the whole load, but as partners whose task is to learn how to better provide the care our loved ones need.

And they are the teachers who will teach us how to do this if we are patient, attentive and attune ourselves to their language, which often is not verbal.

What we saw at Soltys Place was not a group of experts – and, admittedly, they are the best in the business – but a team of "students" operating a living laboratory to be shown better methods of care by their "teachers" living with dementia.

Observing this relationship reminded me that we all deserve the best!

Debbie Selsavage is a certified independent trainer and consultant in the Positive Approach

to Care, a certified dementia practitioner and a Florida-licensed memory care administrator. Contact her at deb@coping.today.



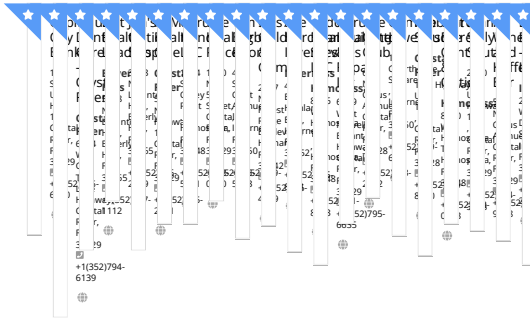
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- A. People will use it, but not in full force to begin with.
- B. It's a great idea, it will relieve traffic on U.S. 19.
- C. It'll bring business here, but it needs to be career-class jobs.
- D. It's a waste of money.

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- Six arrested after Lecanto drug bust
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