

Family Council At the Motion Picture & TV Fund Home - A Positive Force for Change

When you hear Motion Picture and TV Fund Home (MPTF), you might think of a retirement community for the stars, and you would be right. Some of the residents there were stars, but many worked behind the scenes as writers, sound technicians, costume designers, and film editors. The real stars, however, are the family members, friends of residents, and residents who stood up to stop the closure of their nursing home in January 2009. This closure directly affected the lives of 136 residents, and the lives of hundreds more who counted on the commitment of the industry to “take care of its own.”

A Family Council was formed by Nancy Biederman who brought together residents, family, friends, and supporters from the motion picture and TV industry to fight the closure. During this three-year crisis, one of the major efforts was to support residents and families and to maintain quality of care. The outcome of the struggle was a commitment to maintain a nursing home and special care unit providing dementia care. There were also major changes in leadership and administration. In reflecting on this experience, Ms. Biederman believes it is “more effective to form a family council to prevent problems rather than to wait for a crisis to do so.”

As Ms. Biederman explains, “this fight left some wounds on all sides that needed to be healed. It was important to find common ground and to drop labels and start talking to one another so we could rebuild trust and cooperation.” This healing and trust-building process took time; but out of the conflict and sense of betrayal has emerged a community rededicated to promoting the quality of care and life for residents.

The Family Council has an informal structure with Ms. Biederman acting as the Council’s Facilitator. It meets monthly and holds special meetings when necessary. The Family Council asks members to volunteer as ambassadors to greet and welcome family members and friends of new residents. The Family Council is promoted in a variety of other ways: information on the Family Council is included in the admissions packet for new residents; notices of Family Council meetings and events are featured in the facility newsletter; and Family Council activi-

ties and speakers are displayed in a case dedicated to the Family Council. They have also developed an email list and telephone tree to stay in touch with one another between meetings.

Another unique feature of the Family Council is to invite Resident Council members to all Family Council Meetings. The Resident Council also invites a member from the Family Council to attend its meetings and to make reports on Family Council activities. This hybrid approach, Ms. Biederman believes, adds to the vibrancy and relevancy of the Family Council.

In addition to inviting guest speakers, the Family Council sponsors a periodic “round table” where they invite persons from administration or key departments, e.g. nursing, dietary, etc. The focus of the round table is to have a frank sharing of what is and isn’t working from the viewpoints of family members, residents, administration and key staff with the goal of finding mutually acceptable solutions. This approach has helped shift family members’ and residents’ perceptions of administration and key staff as the adversary to a partner in creating positive change, and the administrations’ and staffs’ perceptions of the Family Council as troublemakers to collaborators.

Ms. Biederman believes that the different approaches described in this article have all helped make the Family Council “a legitimate, and positive force for change at the Motion Picture and TV Fund.”

Please share with CANHR how your Family Council is a “positive force for change” so we can continue to promote and support the development of Family Councils.

Request a free DVD – Organizing Family Councils – and download a guide to “Organizing Family Councils in Long Term Care Facilities” by going to: <http://www.canhr.org/familycouncils/>.