Above and Beyond the Call of Duty

Call of duty may be military terminology, but it reminds me of Full Life Care’s participants, staff and volunteers. Three stories come to mind.

1. Last year, adults with developmental disabilities were forced to choose between staying in a DD system waiver (a way to access support and job services) or moving to the long-term care system to continue to receive adult day health services. Surprisingly 50 percent of our participants chose to leave the DD system in order to continue using our adult day health programs.

   Many of these participants live with their parents (or in adult family homes) and had job coaches through the DD system, enabling some of them to hold employment. But they left that behind because of the enormous benefits they gain from our Life Skills program, where they participate in exercise groups, learn nutrition and weight loss strategies, receive nursing and rehabilitative services, and acquire social skills appropriate for job settings.

   Adult day health was developed by the long-term care system to help manage chronic diseases and prevent unnecessary use of hospitals and nursing home placements; historically it did not focus on employment. A notable exception is our Heads Up Program. This specialized adult day health program serves adults who have acquired brain injuries, and some of the participants have successfully worked with Neurological Vocational Services Unit (NVSU) out of Harborview and been placed in jobs.

   My staff members with Life Skills and Heads Up joined forces to set up a training with the head of NVSU (aka my husband, Bob Fraser, Ph.D.). He presented on employment and placement services for which many of our clients may now be eligible. Many of them flocked to the front of the room to express their interest. As a result, we are better able to refer interested participants to NVSU to help them prepare for finding a job.

2. One of the inconveniences for many frail elders is their difficulty in getting their hair styled.

   Haircuts aren’t covered by the long-term care system and sometimes, particularly for those lacking financial resources or strong family support, hair care simply doesn’t happen.

   At some of our adult day health centers, staff and volunteers set up monthly grooming sessions, cutting hair and grooming beards and mustaches. Just last week, I walked into a room filled with beauty school students braiding, cutting and styling hair for many participants who had not been to a beauty shop or barber in a long time. And at Gaffney House, a resident’s daughter (who is also an experienced beautician) volunteers to offer a monthly beauty salon. Everyone looks fabulous.

   When Anna, a long-time resident of Gaffney House, was on hospice and nearing the end of her life, her children were able to fly in from out of state to spend the weekend and say goodbye to their mother. After they left, Jennifer Herrmann, manager of our memory care homes, increased staffing so that Anna always had someone at her side. Staff members like Alison Lotspeich, dementia care specialist, welcomed the opportunity to spend time with Anna and ensure that she did not die alone. Alison lay with Anna on her final night, comforting her until she died early in the morning.

   Later, Alison said how glad she was to be able to be there for Anna.

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