Developing a healthy work environment: An action learning approach to improving quality of life for people living in residential aged care

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Large Regional University
Project Aims

- Improve quality of life and end of life care for older people living in residential aged care homes managed by HHS

- Provide health care staff with an opportunity to participate in action learning workshops facilitated to meet their learning needs

- Develop a sustainable program to improve quality of life for residents, relatives and staff based on a successful model developed in the United Kingdom
My Home Life UK' is a unique well established program that assists with culture change, team work and leadership development. The focus is on relationship centred care that includes residents' relatives and staff. Resources are freely available from the web site. These evidence based resources resonate with and are compatible with current Victorian aged care standards that promote continuous quality improvement, choice and decision making and resident centred care.

http://myhomelifemovement.org/
The project was organised in three phases:
1. Pre questionnaires and interviews
2. 3 x 4 hour workshops at 3 residential care homes
3. Post workshop interviews and questionnaires
Approval to conduct the project was provided by the University of Ballarat’s Human Research Ethics Committee.

Thirty one health professionals (Registered Nurses, Enrolled Nurses, Managers, Patient Care Attendants and Life style coordinators) consented to participate in the project.
Action learning supports a healthy work environment and that can lead to improving quality of life for older people living in residential aged care homes.
What is action learning?

It is a continuous process of learning and reflection, supported by colleagues, with an intention of getting things done.
Why this approach to learning?

Action learning creates a space for reflective learning amongst peers and can assist in individual and organisational development. It is a simple and cost effective means of supporting change and development of programs by enhancing individual performance (Honey, 2012).
How do we do it?

As individuals we learn with and from each other by working on real problems and reflecting on our own experiences.
The action learning set

- Action learning involves a group of people (a ‘set’) working together for a concentrated period of time.
- The focus is on the individual.
- The set enables the individual to learn from their experience (shared with others) in order to move on to more effective action.
- Each individual (presenter) has an opportunity to focus on their experience (issue, project).
The process for the presenter (participant)

- I can explain/recount
- I am listened to attentively
- I can discuss/observe
- I am helped to identify for myself, the next step
- I can then act decisively in order to move forward
The process

- Ground rules
- Time allocated for each individual presentation
- An individual chooses to present
- Presenter can choose a style of presentation
- Presenter reflects on process
- Group reflects on process
- End of session evaluation/overarching themes
Significant skills in action learning

- Listening and attending
- Reflecting back and questioning
- Disclosure and assertion
- Empathy
- Giving and receiving back
- Reflection on my practice/process of the group
- Time management
- Personal planning
Ground rules

• Confidentiality and anonymity
• Respecting other set members
• Openness and honest - only if I want to
• Commitment
• Recognising our status as professionals and obligations to abide by our relevant code of conduct
• Not to advise explicitly unless invited to by presenter
• **Defined by the group**
In Summary Action Learning:

• Is led by individual needs

• Is action focussed

• Considers the process (development of learning)

• Fosters development of interpersonal skills
Activities contributed to improved quality of life for residents

Sustainable changes in practice

Transferable skills changes to the work environment
Activities

- Memory boxes/life books
- Observation and improving the dining experience
- Developing a palliative care education program
- Becoming a home/name change
- Spa and massage
- Keeping chickens
- Individual activities/morning tea with residents
The residents love the boxes, absolutely love the boxes. [resident] holds hers very close to her heart and protects it like it’s a complete part of who she is, which it is. She hides it in the cupboard and she knows where it is. She gets it out and she’ll look at it, or if you ask her to get it out she’ll go to get it…she just literally will trawl through hers for hours on end and just look at every piece (Participant).
Yeah… more of a relationship with them (residents). That's what I noticed after I had that morning tea with them (residents), that they'd come up to me… (Participant).

They are only little steps though, but I am so much more conscious of the fact that hang on let’s take another five minutes and just chat and think the world is not going to fall apart. I am reinforcing the fact that it is their home…you become almost a little bit institutionalised. You don’t mean to but it just becomes that way after years of that’s the way we have worked (Participant).
I think that action learning gives you a whole framework. There's that rule making that goes with it yet it doesn't contain you. The rule making just keeps the relationships happening well and then your own experiences can keep coming in, you respect another person's experiences...you don't have to be taught to respect - but it shows you how to - the tools then show respect but still question (Participant).
Yeah, change management meetings rather than staff meetings. So what we're going to do is to try and sort of change things around a bit and swap things around a bit, and let's have a guideline on how we present ourselves at these meetings.
Conclusion

I actually would say that that’s probably the most enjoyable way of learning I’ve ever been involved in. I think because it was just so personal really… I imagine everyone else would agree with that (Participant).

It actually changed some of my philosophy when it comes to working in aged care (Participant).
References and Resources

Honey, P. (2012). What is action learning?  
http://www.actionlearningassociates.co.uk/actionlearning.html

My Home Life  www.myhomelife.org.uk
