



Partners In Quality

LEGISLATIVE ADVISOR • ISSUE 2 • 2007

Changing the Culture of Older Adult Services in the 21st Century

For over 50 years, Life Services Network (LSN) has been a driving force in fostering quality and innovation in older adult services. The voices of older adults coupled with advances in medicine, research and technology are serving as a catalyst to transform the culture of aging services. At Life Services Network, through education, the development of best-practices and exposure to ground-breaking models of service delivery, we have been the champion of culture change for over a decade. We know that people are living longer and that “Baby Boomers” will soon be entering retirement. In 2030, those over the age of 65 will double to



around 70 million: 20% of the population will be 65 plus. How will these demographic shifts affect the roles and services of older adult service providers? How are we going to change to accommodate today’s elders who want more control, autonomy and person-centered, relationship-based, person-directed care? All facets of aging services should be critically analyzing their organization’s mission, policies, and practices to determine how well they are meeting these consumers’ demands.

What is Culture Change?

Culture change is a movement within the field of aging and society as a whole. It is not a fad or a trend “du jour.” Rather, “culture change” is about profound system change that transforms organizations to be truly driven by the choices and desires of elders. This transformation has person-directed, relationship-based care as the heart of its vision.

If culture change is the goal, what are we changing from? The old culture of elder care services reflected an institutional, hospital-like approach that viewed the delivery of care and services from a medical perspective. The medical model is grounded firmly in the cement of a task-oriented, less flexible approach that requires the consumer of care to conform to the institution’s routines and preferences. Generally, nursing homes are considered the bastion of ‘old culture’ practices. The hallmark of this old culture includes rigid medication, meal, bathing and sleep/wake time schedules, all structured to meet organizational management needs, not individual resident preferences. This culture tells elders what services they need and how they are going to get them. Regulation and reimbursement have fostered a paternalistic approach and driven a clinical focus that often equates quality of care with quality of life. But this old culture paradigm is not the purview of nursing homes alone. Most areas of aging services have fallen short of putting the elder at the center of planning and directing services.

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Many of the organizations within the aging services field are working to transform to a new culture of person-centered, relationship-based care; however, this is not an easy task with a straightforward, clear-cut path. The fundamental values driving this cultural shift are:

- seeing the elder as an individual
- committing to knowing each person
- trying to see the world from the perspective of the elder
- providing services and care within a community that is about relationships and human connection
- believing that all employees, empowered, can make a difference

Changing the shape of aging services is complicated. We know that older adults want what the rest of us want: relationships, autonomy, the opportunity to control our surroundings and make decisions. This may sound simple, but the road to achieving this is not without bumps and wrong turns.

Culture change is about seeing the big picture and also taking the incremental steps to become more person-centered and person-directed. Program changes like enhancing the dining experience, allowing people to choose when they wake up, creating permanent staff assignments that allow for relationships to flourish, and creating more choice over all decisions in daily life are important first steps. But they are only steps in changing the processes of care and service delivery. Organizations that embrace culture change have an ongoing commitment of transforming culture, a process that is evolving and ever-changing. LSN pledges our support to all who embrace this philosophy and will walk with them on their journey.

About Life Services Network

For over 75 years, Life Services Network, has represented the leading providers of the complete continuum of services for older adults, including nursing care, supportive and assisted living, senior housing and home and community based services. With a diverse membership now numbering over 500 providers, LSN is the largest eldercare association in Illinois. As one of the largest and most respected trade associations of its type in the country, LSN is nationally recognized for its innovative programs, leadership and expertise on issues related to long term care and senior housing and services.

Committed to the advancement of quality and innovation in older adult services, LSN is also the state affiliate of the American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging (AAHSA) and the Assisted Living Federation of America (ALFA).

Current Membership Statistics

- ▼ *Eldercare service providers:* 510
- ▼ *Eldercare service sites:* 610
- ▼ *Elder persons served, yearly:* 65,000
- ▼ *Member employees (FT/PT):* 120,000

For more information on Life Services Network, contact us at 217.789.1677 or visit our website at www.lsn.org.