



### **Life Enriching Activities Add Color to Life**

Quality of life means different things to different people. “The opportunity to do “things” that we find meaningful is essential to human health.” (Dr. Bill Thomas-Eden handbook). Participation in these pursuits influences our mood, our feelings of self-worth and our actions. Understanding and honoring an individual’s habits and routines, lifestyle preferences and interests is the mission of the activity/life enrichment program in a senior living community. Quality of life means making choices that impact our daily life, maintaining our sense of self and identity, sustaining meaningful relationships, and having a purpose. A comprehensive life enrichment program is comprised of opportunities for involvement that promote these critical needs.

The activities that are scheduled on the calendar of events are the “tools” of the life enrichment professional. The tool may be a challenging word game, a morning coffee social, a life review scrapbooking session, a poker club, book review or a music program. The benefits to the participant are varied. For instance, attendance at an exercise/fitness session may improve muscle tone and flexibility, promote endurance and help to release tension, while also encouraging interaction and bonds of friendship among participants. Opportunities are offered to reinforce the “Whole-Person” Wellness Model. This model is a lifestyle approach for both physical and psychological well-being. Residents are offered choices for activities in each of the 6 dimensions: social, physical, spiritual, intellectual, occupational and emotional wellness.

Involvement in social relationships is a vital aspect of life. Meeting others, sharing conversation, establishing friendships and belonging to a group are fundamental goals of each activity. Engaging with others socially increases one’s resiliency; the ability to cope is strengthened. A relationship with others increases our sense of worth and identity. It improves our mood.

Sharing a memory in a group is a way for a person to recreate a special time, embellish it, and relive a moment of their life that has given them great pleasure. Reminiscing validates a person’s special strengths and interests. It helps us to understand life patterns and legacies, to recognize the contributions we have made to others and gives us support when facing difficult challenges. When families continue to participate in life together at the organized events, bonds are strengthened. Positive emotions are triggered along with memories through activities such as music and dance.

Activities that are meaningful and purposeful are essential. Activities are meaningful when they reflect a person’s lifestyles and interests. Opportunities are offered to give back to the community. Projects to make tutoring kits for kids, send messages of support to those in the military or collect coats for those in need are organized. The life enrichment program at a senior facility is like a kaleidoscope. It is continually evolving and changing. Each group is unique and has its own image. Each time a group gets together a new pattern emerges and some programs are more attractive to a person than others. To make new patterns there must be energy or movement from an outside force. The role of the staff is to be the outside force to **encourage, empower, energize, and engage**.

If someone asks you “What do you do?” What will you say and how will you explain the role of the activity/life enrichment department?