



The “Language of the Activity Profession”

“Language change” is defined as the variation of many of a language’s features over time. (Wikipedia). A good example of language change is the Declaration of Independence. It was written and approved July 4, 1776, 238 years ago. As you read the following excerpt, note how the style and composition of sentences are different from contemporary writings.

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. The Declaration of Independence: July 4, 1776. www.archives.gov

Language change can be seen in the 1930s with popular phrases such as “riding the cushions” or “sallies” In the 1950s phrases like “peter pan collar” and “sputnikburger” evolved. “Keypunching” and “floppy disk” were new words of the 1970s and are not used much in conversation in 2014.

Language change also occurs in professions. As advances are made through research and technology, words and phrases are developed to effectively communicate the changing times. In 2014 the “language of the activity professional” is quite different from that of the past. Terms such as “senile,” “chronic brain syndrome” and “adult appropriate” are now obsolete. As the activity profession has grown and evolved, the language that we use in the discipline has also evolved. The use of professional language is vital to promote a better understanding of the role of the Activity Professional.

The way we communicate has been influenced by research in Alzheimer’s Disease and dementia, the Wellness Movement, regulatory changes and focus, and generational dynamics. As we write proposals to present to community groups, write progress reports towards our goals, compose recruitment letters or notes of thanks, the terminology we use must reflect our professional foundation.

In recent workshops I have asked participants to list the top 10 words that accurately describe the work we do. Consider doing this exercise with your staff or at an association meeting. Determine the language that portrays and describes your work. Brainstorm categories such as:

- words that reflect the benefit of activity involvement
- words that describe the process of building a relationship
- words that describe the activity interview process
- words that describe positive psychosocial outcomes
- words that describe person centered care



Review and discuss the following words and phrases:

- Opportunities
- Endeavors
- Structured/Unstructured
- Spontaneous
- Meaningful
- Outcome
- Transition behavior or transient trauma
- Self-directed
- Person appropriate
- Psychosocial outcome
- Identity
- Autonomy
- Inclusion
- Dignity
- Person-directed
- Companionship
- Growth
- Partner
- Familiar Routine
- Lifestyle preferences
- Dimensions of wellness
- Strength/Retained abilities
- Engagement
- Spiritual support
- Building community
- Home
- Memorable moments
- Triggering memories
- Habits of a lifetime
- Validate life themes

Add other examples and use them in writings and reports. Develop or redefine your mission statement. Critique the following examples to help expand your thoughts.

“We (activity department) partner with staff and volunteers to create structured and non-structured opportunities for the pursuit of lifestyle choices.”

“We (activity department) empower each resident by creating opportunities for meaningful relationships, choice and validation of life patterns and habits.”

“The activity professional serves residents of care communities and strives to enable each to be self-determining and independent: challenging the mind and body while nurturing the spirit. The activity professional creates structured and non-structured environments that build confidence and self-esteem in the face of declining health. The activity professional works with other members of the health care team to support remaining abilities, reinforcing the integrity of the person’s identity. The activity professional plans and coordinates opportunities for each individual of the community to exercise their strengths. Opportunities are created for socialization, choice, the accomplishment of tasks, use of retained abilities, life-long learning and validation of life patterns and habits” Written by Natalie B. Davis ACC

As you present your ideas both verbally and in writing, pay attention to the powerful use of the words that you choose. Continue to review the rapidly changing language of the activity professional.