

Connections!

step *change*
Design Ltd.
drawing you outside

We are always keen to promote the inter-connectedness of the indoors and outdoors at care settings. After a long winter it can be understandable that you may have forgotten to think much about the outdoors and spending more time out there with your residents, but by building on simple tasks and reviewing old habits and routines you can create enjoyable and sustainable activities both indoors and outdoors that give a sense of purpose and meaning to the lives of your residents and staff alike.

Check out this list of prompts, packed with thought-provoking questions and ideas to help make your care setting more outdoors-focused and able to make the most of all those fantastic opportunities to engage actively and meaningfully with your outside spaces:



Blurring the boundary between indoors and outdoors

Reducing the distinction between the indoors and outdoors in your care setting can create an environment that is clearly outdoor-aware and outdoor-ready and makes your outside spaces feel like a valid and proper part of your overall care setting:

- ✓ How can you weave comments and observations about what you see and what is going-on outside into more of your conversations with residents?
- ✓ How can you help make it easier to see the outdoors from doors and windows? Have you cluttered your windowsills or obscured the views outside?
- ✓ Do you need to review your Open-Door Policy so that the emphasis is on ease of access and resident-driven engagement with the outdoor space?
- ✓ Do your entrances and exits to the garden look inviting? Take a fresh look at the condition and state of repair (and the signage and labels) on those doors that lead naturally and easily to the outside. Do they create fear or hesitation in opening them or do they clearly show that you can go outside from them?

- ✓ How can you help signpost the way to the outdoors more clearly?
- ✓ What items would you naturally find near the entrances and exits that say clearly that you are welcome to go outside and that you are prepared for any weather? What about a coat stand with room for brollies, shoes and wellies and coats and hats?

Becoming an outdoors-focused care setting

So now that you have taken a fresh look at your entrances and exits to the garden, the onus falls on staff and families to actively promote the outside space and encourage residents to engage with their garden as and when they wish. This can take time as new habits and attitudes embed themselves into the overall care culture, but this is the most important factor in creating an outdoors-focused setting. How can you strengthen your residents' connections and relationships to their garden?



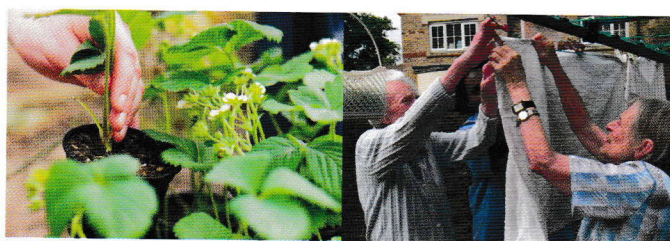
- ✓ Do more things outside and where you will be noticed! We have a saying that 'activity breeds activity'.
- ✓ To draw people outside, excite their interest and curiosity about what is happening there by being outside yourselves: do your care notes there, arrange a tea break there, enlist help to do some tasks there, meet with residents and their families outside...you will be amazed how effective this shift in your practices will be!
- ✓ Make sure there are places to sit and relax, and that they are comfortable for your residents, and don't fix benches to the ground – the more flexible your seating areas are the better!
- ✓ When visitors come, why not take a 'tour of the grounds' with your residents acting as tour guides? Point out what is new or different in the garden since last time, find out what they would like to see improved or introduced, talk about the stories behind some of the items and objects there.
- ✓ And listen closely to your residents outdoors, they may share new information with you that you did not know before and extend your knowledge base about their needs and wishes, like and dislikes.
- ✓ Help residents to know that the garden is theirs, act on their suggestions and wishes, they may know more about gardening than you do!
- ✓ Do you often end a garden visit to come inside for a cup of tea? Arrange for tea to come outside!

Is it nice outside?

Despite all your encouragement to engage with the outside space, a subtle factor that can hinder engagement with the outdoors is the weather. Or more accurately, misperceptions about what it is really like outside. How many times have we found the weather forecast to be unreliable or not accurate for our local area and thought it to be cooler or wetter outside than it is? How can we make sure we don't let a great day outside go to waste?

- ✓ Talk about the weather – and emphasise the positive aspects of what is happening outside – watching raindrops on the bird table or puddles forming can be really energising, and spotting rainbows after the shower has passed can be quite magical.

- ✓ One of the best ways to know for sure is to go outside and check the weather for yourselves, or get residents involved in checking this daily. What does it really feel like out there today?
- ✓ Create a weather board somewhere prominent and update the forecast and the 'real feel' every day. There are activities to suit every weather condition, find out from residents what they like to do outside in different weather? (for example, hanging out the washing on a windy day, bringing the washing in when it rains, feeding the birds in the colder weather).
- ✓ You'll know those residents who will want to go outside during their day so why not think about how to dress them in appropriate clothing for the weather that day in readiness for visits to the outdoors?
- ✓ Have you noticed areas of the garden where the wind blows particularly strongly? Consider sheltering or protecting those areas a little more, or is it a perfect spot for a wash line?
- ✓ In hot and sunny weather make sure you have umbrellas and shady areas.



Start indoors and finish outdoors!

When the weather is particularly cold or wet (or any time really), there are many gardening activities that can take place indoors (whether in the care setting or the potting shed). Let's think about those gardening-related tasks and jobs that we tend to do indoors before the weather warms up or when it is particularly cold and wet and that we can continue outdoors when it's dry.

- ✓ Go online and order seed catalogues and garden brochures, browse through them, choose the flowers and vegetables you like and order the seed packets. Start them off by sowing the seeds indoors, labelling them and putting them on the windowsill to germinate? That way you can all keep an eye on them and keep them watered. They should then be ready for planting out at the right time. Then when they are ready, step outside and involve residents in planting out into pots or the garden to enjoy.
- ✓ You could also decorate the plant pots before you use them outside for an eye-catching display.
- ✓ Do you need to clean your tools ready for the new season? Get the canes and labels ready. Organise a washing and cleaning session.
- ✓ Some plants make great competition activities. Sunflowers can grow inches by the day and monitoring them can be an exciting and satisfactory activity across the whole care setting for months on end. Start them off inside and then plant them out and check on them regularly.
- ✓ Fill the washing basket, and get some pegs together, then head out to hang them on the line. Keep an eye on the weather, though, in case you need to bring them back inside.

Connections!

Connect with creatures that create a lot of commotion!

It's not just humans that can excite curiosity and interest in the outside space, Birds and other creatures are giving a show every day of the year. They provide so much entertainment and interest in the garden and with a little ingenuity you can bring their antics and activities a little closer to the indoors too and even use them to entice people outside. How can your residents connect more strongly to birds and other creatures in the garden?

- ✓ Move feeding stations and bird baths closer to key windows and patio doors and set up a bird watching station.
- ✓ Put up a bird identification poster and record how many you see during the morning cuppa or the mid-morning tea break.
- ✓ Sign up to free annual surveys such as The Big Bird Watch and involve everyone in the activity (usually in January) www.rspb.org.uk
- ✓ Why not extend this activity with bird food making activities, such as fat balls and filled coconuts?
- ✓ Outdoors, you can encourage residents to take part in regular tasks (e.g. to fill the bird bath, replenish the bird feeders and tidy beneath the bird feeding areas).
- ✓ And perhaps you could get some help to put together some bird boxes and fix them outside too?
- ✓ For the more tech-aware among you, why not think about a camera hidden inside a bird box and connected to the TV? This could provide a great deal of entertainment as you watch them make a nest and hatch their fledglings over the spring months.
- ✓ And don't forget other creatures that entertain such as squirrels. In one care setting we worked with, they put a rope between trees for the squirrels to race across and be more easily seen by residents from their windows. Instead of them being a garden pest, they became really entertaining creatures for residents to watch.

Maintaining meaningful connections to the wider world

There is a world beyond the care setting that many residents still want to connect with. How can you widen the connection (and relationships) that residents have with the local neighbourhood and the wider world beyond your garden and grounds?

- ✓ Look at opportunities where residents can sit and enjoy views beyond the setting.
- ✓ Could you arrange to visit the local park, play area or encourage family visits there?
- ✓ How can your residents enjoy and participate in the comings and goings near entrances and reception areas to the home? This may mean that you review how well the front areas and main entrances are used by your residents. What stops you from using them more?
- ✓ How can you encourage daily visitors and contractors to engage more meaningfully with your residents, some of whom might want to lend a hand or have a conversation with them? What do you notice about your residents when they interact with these people?
- ✓ How can you help residents to retain their local identity and sense of place, continuing to interact with their local neighbourhood as they used to?
- ✓ Is there a local post office or post box that could be incorporated into regular walks beyond the grounds of the care setting? Is there a local café, shop, park or swimming pool that your residents used to go to regularly and would still like to visit?

Connections that help people to have purpose, resilience and identity can be lost over time as they become less mobile and less independent. And yet those connections to the outside world can play a powerful role in maintaining health, wellbeing and quality of life in older age.

As the weather warms up and we shrug off the effects of the long winter, take a good look at the wonderful resource you have outdoors and plan for spending as much time as possible out there! For more ideas and insights into using your outside space more actively and meaningfully, and looking more deeply at your care culture, look at our website: www.stepchange-design.co.uk



For more information, tips and insights to help you engage your residents more actively and meaningfully with your outdoor spaces, visit: www.stepchange-design.co.uk. And for a practical, easy-to-follow tool to help you look at your care culture practices, you can purchase Debbie and Mark's Care Culture Map and Handbook at the NAPA Activities shop page at: <http://napashop.mamutweb.com/Shop/Product/Care-Culture-Map-and-Handbook/100132> (NAPA benefits from the sale of this product)