Strategies for Engaging Residents and Families

What is a Living Classroom?

The Living Classroom is a model of learning and practice for healthcare education alongside residents, families and team members in long-term care (LTC). Students build confidence and gain hands-on experience to grow their skills. Residents, families and team members enjoy the extra support, and often become mentors themselves. Everyone benefits from this vibrant and collaborative environment. For more information about the Living Classroom, visit our website.

What is in this resource?

The Living Classroom (LC) model emphasizes a culture of **shared** learning for students, faculty, and those living, visiting, and working in LTC homes. Aim to involve residents and families in all parts of implementing an LC program.

Below, you will find strategies to help engage residents and families in the following areas: planning, communication, student-resident interaction and learning activities, and gathering resident and family feedback.

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If you have any questions on this resource or the Living Classroom program, please contact livingclassroom@the-ria.ca.

Planning for your Living Classroom

While you and your partner are in the planning phase for the LC, remember to find ways to get feedback from residents and families on the curriculum, program, and spaces. Some effective strategies for engaging residents and families in planning are included below.

Connect with Resident and Family Council

Establish clear processes for engaging with the Resident and Family Council regarding planning, curriculum, and space decisions. This involves regularly presenting the LC program decisions to the council for discussion and feedback. One example is seeking the council's advice on curriculum areas where resident or family member perspectives would be valuable.

Create a variety of forms of engagement

Implement a strategy to include residents and families in the planning and design of the LC program and spaces. This will include dedicated time in the project timeline to solicit resident and family feedback on the planning of your LC program. For example, create a community forum, like a town hall, where residents and families can share their LC program design ideas and discuss the construction schedule.

Communicating about your Living Classroom

Keeping clear lines of communication open is essential to building strong relationships with residents and families. A key to clear communication is ensuring that you find ways to keep residents and families informed about planning, running, and participating in your LC program.

Set a schedule for updating the Resident and Family Council

Develop a consistent schedule for LC program representatives to provide updates to the Resident and Family Council. These updates should include information on resident and family involvement opportunities, student learning activities, and how residents and families can support student learning.

Plan for resident and family participation

Implement a process where the LC team actively identifies and plans for resident and family participation in LC program activities. Also, consider student integration into existing resident activities.

Make it highly visible when students are in a neighbourhood

Strategically use highly visible communication methods, such as shared calendars and notifications, to keep residents, families, and staff informed about student involvement in daily activities. This could take many forms, such as students having different colour uniforms or announcements of students in neighborhoods on the team board.

Communication planning

Integrate dedicated LC program and activity information into the existing communication plans for residents and families.

Make use of existing communication channels with residents and families, such as:

- Share details about the LC program in admissions packages and during tours of your home.
- Make sure to include updates in resident and family newsletters.
- Circulate shared calendars so residents and families know when students will be in the neighborhood.

Interactions and learning activities

Residents and family members are an important part of an LC program. Formal and informal engagement between students, residents, and family members is expected. The strategies below could help engage residents and families during interactions and learning activities.

Sharing resident and family knowledge

Strategically leverage the wealth of knowledge residents and family members possess to enrich student learning experiences. This involves actively consulting with residents and families on student learning activities, enabling them to provide valuable insights and suggest methods to share their expertise. A key component of this strategy is inviting residents and family members to serve as guest speakers during class time, offering first-hand accounts and perspectives on curriculum topics.

Create a variety of interaction settings

Cultivate an environment that encourages formal and informal knowledge sharing between residents, family members, and students. This includes fostering casual interactions in shared spaces and designing structured activities for direct learning engagement.

Formal interaction

Develop an experiential learning strategy that utilizes resident and family member participation. This will include a range of activities such as interviews, care plan reviews, shadowing care, participation in conferences, and organizing events like vital-sign clinics and culture fairs. Detailed suggestions can be found in the LC Curriculum Integrated Toolkit.

Have clear and informed consent

Develop a strategy that prioritizes resident autonomy and ensures ethical practices by consistently securing resident consent before involvement in student learning activities.

Gather feedback from residents and family members

Actively address and respond to resident and family member concerns regarding the LC program. Taking their concerns seriously and acting upon them is crucial for maintaining positive relationships.

Formal and informal feedback

Integrate formal and informal feedback mechanisms for residents and family members into the LC program.

Satisfaction and evaluation

Ensure an inclusive evaluation process by developing a strategy to actively seek and incorporate resident and family feedback in satisfaction surveys for the LC program.