

Practical care: open up to the great outdoors this summer

As I arrived at a care home I visited last week, I saw an elderly woman armed with a jug of water emerging from the front door on her way to fill up the bird bath. This is a 'job' she said she does regularly. A beautiful red robin sat expectantly on the bird bath and it seemed as if the bird and the lady were familiar friends!

This simple daily task illustrates how one resident at least has regular exercise and access to the fresh air and stimulation outside the four walls of a care home lounge. Yet the reality is that time, staffing levels and increased frailty of residents, means that going outside is a much less regular occurrence than it used to be.

Everybody has a right to fresh air

The National Association for Providers of Activities for Older People (NAPA) has previously quoted the fact that prisoners in HM prisons have a statutory entitlement to one hour outdoors daily, yet many care home residents may not go outside for many months at a time. One shocking example was revealed by a new manager in a care home who discovered that none of the residents had outside shoes because 'they never go out here—we're a nursing home and they're too frail.'

I would argue that even those who are very advanced in their illness or disability have a right to enjoy the air and sunshine on their face and sense of being outdoors.

It can be done

One family carer still managed to assist her mother onto a sun bed on the roof garden, despite her being at the end of her life, bed bound, living in an upstairs flat and unable to do anything herself. Her mother could

With the summer well and truly here, this is the perfect opportunity for an outing. Sally Knocker explains how trips do not have to be big, but that imagination, planning and risk assessment can make going out a success.

see the blue skies and watch the birds and planes pass.

This same carer in the past has helped her mother to paddle in the sea. Negotiating a sandy beach with a wheelchair isn't easy, but she doesn't let these obstacles deter her. If she can do this as an individual with no specialist qualifications or organisational resources, surely we can overcome the barriers and make things happen?

A short walk with a purpose!

In one care home, a weekly visit from the ice cream van provides an opportunity for

a short walk outside. Residents enjoy going and talking to the ice cream man and choosing a treat. Another home is able to escort two of their male residents to watch the local cricket match on the village green.

Small trips can be better than large outings

Big whole day trips out, such as the coach full of residents going to the seaside, become less relevant for those who are more dependent. They can be exhausting experiences even for those of us who are feeling fit and well! Activity organisers, nursing and care staff need to think of creative ideas for assisting just a few residents at a time to enjoy time outside for shorter periods of time.

In one of the homes where I worked, I used to take a few residents out to 'wedding watch' for an hour. We would sit on a conveniently situated bench in a park opposite the local town hall and watch people coming out of the wedding ceremonies, providing a chance to comment on outfits and remember weddings in the past. Going to a local park or pond to feed the ducks can be another popular short outing.



Sally Knocker
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A family carer helps her disabled mother negotiate a sandy beach

Warwick de Winter



With kind permission from Tracey Hanham

Residents who visited the farm enjoyed close contact with the cattle and nature

Box 1: Case study of free sensory rich farm visits

'Let nature feed your senses' is a nationwide initiative that organizes free farm visits for children, older people and disabled people. It is a Big Lottery-funded project run in partnership between LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) and the Sensory Trust.

The project organizes sensory-rich visits to a network of farms and nature reserves across England, with trained and highly motivated host farmers. Visits are bespoke, hands on, and help connect visitors to nature through food and farming. See further information to find your nearest participating farm or nature reserve. Sue Padfield, South West Regional Coordinator says:

'Let Nature Feed Your Senses can offer access to the wonderful sights, sounds, tastes and artefacts of past times spent in the countryside. It positively reconnects those with dementia to food, farming and nature. Each visit we have hosted has been so rewarding for residents, care home staff and also ourselves.

For one resident, the smell of freshly pulled carrots and peas eaten straight from the pod brought back memories of special times spent in her Dad's garden as a young girl. Bottle feeding baby lambs and feeling their soft fleece was a delight to another resident, who spoke with great compassion and joy of time spent on a farm in Suffolk in her youth. This lady was usually asleep in her chair at the home, saying very little.'

But the reality is that these kinds of small trips out still need an investment of staff time, even if they don't cost in the same way as hiring a coach. They also need to be embedded in the way that care workers see their role. Staff will then take the initiative to assist someone to go for a walk in the garden or to a local shop or cafe, without always being directed by a manager.

Positive risk enablement

Sometimes, risk averse cultures can get in the way, and make some people fearful of stepping outside the door in case something happens to a resident. Clearly, risk assessments do need to be carried out, but the starting point needs to be how we can support the person to go out and enjoy the outside. New Department of Health guidance *Nothing Ventured, nothing gained* (2010) takes a more positive approach to risk.

As well as generally risk assessing the location you are visiting, you must also analyse any risks associated with residents' individual needs. Many companies now have their own risk assessment policies and procedures. What is important is to identify the risk and the benefits of undertaking an activity first and then assess whether the risks involved are high, medium or low. A high risk is where a person has quite a high likelihood of coming to potential harm by participating in an activity. Obviously, if this is the case, a senior member of staff will need to carefully consider the individual's mental capacity to decide to take part.

Individual risk assessments must be documented to evidence the fact that you have considered both risks and benefits. Consultation with the family members of a person with dementia, for example, may also be important.

What happens if residents don't want to go out?

It is not uncommon for older people to lose confidence and prefer the safety of staying inside, particularly if they are suffering from depression. However, think about different ways of motivating individuals to go out.

It might be who or how the resident is asked that makes a difference. A favourite male care worker inviting a female resident, for example, might be all that is needed! Others will need reassurance that they will not be going out for too long and that they will have regular visits to the toilet—a very common concern. They may want to know if a particular resident, relative or member of staff is going with them. Some might be enticed by the possibility of something nice to eat or drink, such as a cream tea, fish and chips or a pub visit at the end of the outing. It is obviously important to know your residents well enough to understand the particular 'carrot' that might encourage them to participate.

Make links with local community organizations

If you don't know the local area well, you may find leaflets or posters about interesting places or events at the local tourist office or library. Garden openings, outdoor concerts or festivals could all offer possibilities. Where there are entrance fees involved, don't be afraid to ask organizers about group discounts or for free entrance for care staff. Organizations like The National Trust and English Heritage usually supply information about access for disabled visitors.

A few Ideas for places to go out are:

- Markets
- Car boot sales or school or church fetes—check out local papers
- Garden Centres with cafes and toilet facilities
- A railway station or an airport for a train or plane enthusiast
- A cricket match or other sporting event
- A local park or children's playground to watch children playing.

Newsletter version

Let's open the doors and windows to the great outdoors this summer!

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Introduction

I was visiting a care home last week and as I arrived, saw an elderly woman armed with a jug of water coming out of the front door on her way to fill up the bird bath, a 'job' which she said she did regularly "sometimes twice a day in summer." A beautiful red Robin sat expectantly on the bird bath and it seemed as if the bird and the lady were familiar friends!

This simple daily task is a lovely illustration of ensuring one resident at least has regular exercise and access to the fresh air and stimulation of outside the four walls of a care home lounge. Yet the reality is that time, staffing levels and increased frailty of residents, means that going outside is a much less regular occurrence than it used to be.

Everybody has a right to a breath of fresh air

NAPA has previously quoted the fact that prisoners in HM prisons have a statutory entitlement to one hour's fresh air and exercise daily, yet many old people living in care homes may not see outside the building for many months at a time. One shocking example was revealed by a new manager in a care home who discovered that none of the residents had outside shoes because "they never go out here - we're a nursing home and they're too frail." I would argue that even those who are very advanced in their illness or disability have a right to enjoy the sense of air and sunshine on their face and the colours, smells and noises of being outdoors.

It can be done

One family carer looking after her mother, who at the end of her life was completely bedbound living in an upstairs flat in London and unable to verbally communicate or do anything for herself, still managed to assist her mother to lie in a sunbed on the roof garden. Her mother could see the blue skies and watch the birds and planes going by. This same carer in the past has helped her mother to paddle in the sea. Negotiating a sandy beach with a wheelchair isn't easy, but she doesn't let these obstacles deter her. If she can do this as a single person with no specialist qualifications or organisational resources at her disposal, surely we can also overcome the barriers and make things happen?



A short walk with a purpose!

In one care home, a weekly visit from the Ice Cream Van provides an opportunity for a short walk outside to go and talk to the ice cream man and choose a treat to enjoy. Another home is able to escort two of their male residents to watch the local cricket match on the village green.



Small trips can be better than large outings

Big whole day trips out such as the coach full of residents going to the seaside become less and less relevant for those who are more dependent. They can be exhausting experiences for even those of us who are feeling fit and well! Activity organisers, nursing and care staff need to think of creative ideas for assisting just a few residents at a time to enjoy time outside for shorter periods of time. In one of the homes where I worked I used to take a few residents out to “wedding watch” for an hour. We would sit on a conveniently situated bench in a park opposite the local town hall and watch people coming out of the wedding ceremonies, providing a chance to comment on outfits and remember weddings in the past. Going to a local park or pond to feed the ducks can be another popular short outing.

But the reality is that these kinds of small trips out still need an investment of staff time even if they don't cost in the same way as hiring a coach. They also need to be embedded in the way that care workers see their role. They will take the initiative to assist someone to go for a walk in the garden or to a local shop or cafe, without always being directed by a manager.

Positive risk enablement

Sometimes ‘risk averse’ cultures can get in the way, to the extent that some staff in homes seem fearful of stepping outside the door just in case something happens to a resident away

from the home. Clearly risk assessments do need to be carried out, but the starting point needs to be “How can we support this person to go out and enjoy the outside?” rather than look for all the reasons why they shouldn’t.

New Department of Health guidance ‘Nothing Ventured, nothing gained’ on risk takes this more positive approach. Go to www.dh.gov.uk and search this title to download detailed guidance.

As well as doing a general risk assessment on the place where you are visiting, you will also need to look at risks for individual residents in relation to their particular health needs and circumstances. Many companies now have their own risk assessment policies and procedures. What is important is to identify the risk **benefits** of undertaking an activity first and then to assess whether the risks involved are high, medium or low. A high risk is where a person has quite a high likelihood of coming to potential harm by participating in an activity. Obviously if this is the case, careful consultation with a senior member of staff and consideration of an individual’s mental capacity to make a decision to take part will be needed. Individual risk assessments will need to be documented to evidence the fact that you have considered both risks and benefits. Consultation with family members if a person has dementia, for example, may also be important.

What happens if residents don’t want to go out?

It is not uncommon for older people to lose confidence and prefer the safety of staying inside, particularly if they are suffering from depression. However, think about different ways of motivating individuals to go out. It might be who or how they are asked that makes a difference – a favourite male care worker giving an invitation to an older female resident, for example, might be all that is needed! Others will need reassurance that they will not be going out for too long and that they will have regular visits to the toilet, a very common concern. They may want to know if a particular resident friend, relative or member of staff is going with them. Some might be enticed by the possibility of something nice to eat or drink like a cream tea, real fish and chips or a pub visit at the end of the outing. It is obviously important to know your residents well enough to understand the particular ‘carrot’ that might encourage them to give the trip out a go.

Make links with local community organisations

If you don’t know the local area well, you may need to investigate where might be interesting places to visit. The Tourist Office or local library might have leaflets or posters about places of interest or forthcoming events. Garden openings, outdoor concerts or festivals could all offer

possibilities. Where there are entrance fees involved, don't be afraid to approach the organisers and ask for a group discount or for care staff to have free entrances. Organisations like The National Trust and English Heritage usually supply information about access for disabled visitors.

A few Ideas for places to go out

- Markets
- Car boot sales or school or church fetes – check out local papers
- Garden Centres with Cafes and toilet facilities
- A railway station or an airport for a train or plane enthusiast
- A cricket match or other sporting event
- A local park or children's playground to watch children playing



CASE STUDY

FREE Sensory rich farm visits for older people and those with dementia

A nationwide initiative would welcome the opportunity to organise a free farm visit for your clients! 'Let nature feed your senses' is a Big Lottery funded project run in partnership between LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) and Sensory Trust. The project organises sensory rich visits to a network of farms and nature reserves across England. Host farmers are trained and highly motivated. Visits are bespoke and hands on, and help connect visitors to nature through food and farming. Find out more at <http://www.letnaturefeedyoursenses.org/letnature/farmvisits.eb>

Sue Padfield South West Regional Co-ordinator reports:

'Farmers and nature reserve managers involved with the 'Let Nature Feed Your Senses' project can offer access to the wonderful sights, sounds, tastes and artefacts of past times spent in the countryside.

It's positively reconnecting those with dementia with food, farming and nature. Each visit we have hosted has been so rewarding for residents, care home staff and also ourselves.

For one resident, the smell of freshly pulled carrots and peas eaten straight from the pod brought back memories of special times spent in her Dad's garden as a young girl.

Bottle feeding baby lambs and feeling their soft fleece was a delight to another resident, who spoke with great compassion and joy of time spent on a farm in Suffolk in her youth. This lady was usually asleep in her chair at the home with little conversation to share.

Some residents have enjoyed bread making on the farm visit and shown greater interest in eating - nothing quite like the smell of freshly baked bread especially when they have helped make it!

I encourage all care managers and activity organisers to check the web site and locate their nearest participating farm or nature reserve. The forthcoming warmer weather is the perfect opportunity to enjoy the abundance of nature that's available on a farm - for free!

Sue can be contacted on 07792 520902 or visit the website for local farm details

Things to think about when planning an outing

- It is important to visit a place first to make sure you have done a proper risk assessment. Some properties open to the public for example can have a lot of gravel areas which make pushing people in a wheelchair very hard work! Are there shaded areas for those who don't like the direct sun?
- It can help to find a contact person to help you at a venue on the day, for example arranging to have an area reserved in a café, museum or art exhibition for example, where people can sit when they arrive.
- What is the access like? Check out steps and how much walking is required and whether toilets really offer disabled access. (including space for a carer to assist a person who is a wheelchair user for example)
- What is your 'wet weather' plan - will you still go on the trip? Are you prepared with umbrellas, raincoats etc?
- When are you going to have toilet stops on the trip? Many older people are anxious about not being able to get to a toilet regularly, and this can sometimes make people reluctant to go out of their familiar environment.
- Take plenty of water and snacks with you, as well as changes of clothing, wet wipes and medication or continence pads if needed.
- Have you thought about what to do in the event of an accident or emergency? Do you have a mobile phone with all the appropriate telephone numbers you might need?
- There should always be at least two members of staff in case someone needs to be taken to hospital and the other member of staff can remain with other people in the group.
- Think about inviting family members to help out on the day. This is a good way to build up relationships with relatives who can be valuable members of the care home or day centre community.

Conclusion

Supporting residents in care homes to get out and about more often can involve taking initiative, good management support and some hard work and careful preparation. However, fresh air, sunlight and a change of scene can bring many rewards – for older people and for staff alike! The weather forecast is looking good, so it is hoped that many care homes throughout the country will be making plans to enjoy the summer months ahead.

Further information

NAPA's new Living Life DVD, Activity Ideas and Activity Planning guides offer many useful ideas for ensuring older residents can continue to enjoy life inside **and outside** the home. Visit www.napa-activities.co.uk in the publications section for more information about the Activity Toolkit.