

Recreation, Socialization, Community Resources, Social Services and Activities in the Community



Introduction:

In this module you will learn about your role in helping consumers to develop social connections to others within the home and in the community.

Consider a group home consumer who rarely sees family members and friends, and who has no relationships with other consumers in the home. With whom can the consumer share his/her feelings, stories and personal experiences?

It is important that each consumer has people to care about and people who care about him/her. Being involved in community groups and activities provides many opportunities for important social connections.

Direct care staff persons need to be aware of the importance of social contact in the lives of consumers. Whenever possible, interaction with other consumers and with family members and friends should be encouraged. Such interaction can contribute to physical as well as mental health.

Encourage socialization among consumers:

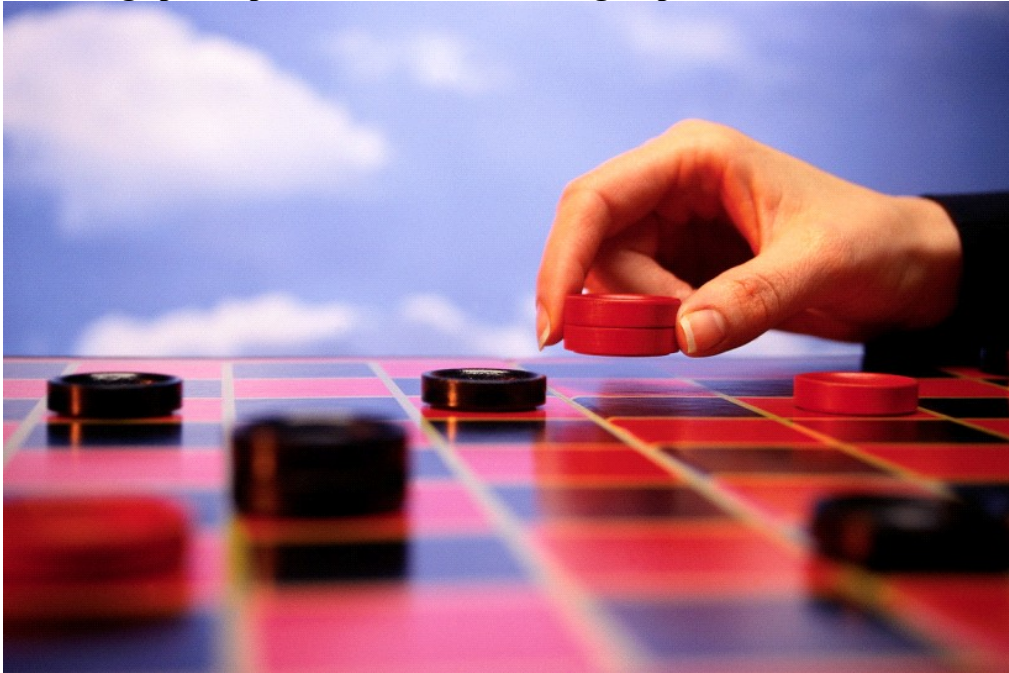


For some consumers, adjusting to life in a group home can be very difficult, particularly when having limited contact with family members and friends. It is not always easy to make new friends and adjust to new people, new stores, new food, new activities and a new routine.

Here are some things that a direct care worker can do to encourage consumers to socialize with one another:

- Introduce a new consumer to other consumers.
- Introduce consumers with shared interests.
- Promote activities in the group home. Constantly encourage and remind the consumer to participate in activities. Find and provide activities that the consumer enjoys.
- Talk with the consumer's family and friends to find out more about his/her interests and hobbies.
- Check the consumer's support plan for special interests.
- Encourage the consumer to join interest groups, activity groups or social committees.
- Honor the consumer's rights to choose activities.

Encourage participation in activities at the group home:



Many of us take for granted the opportunities we have for changing things we don't like. We can replace the furniture in our living room, speak to the manager of a store where we are treated badly by a clerk or become a member and supporter of a community organization devoted to making the community safer and cleaner.

Life in a group home, however, often provides limited opportunities for consumers to be involved in decisions that impact their lives. Meal routines are set, staffing decisions are made by others and consumers typically have little input on purchases of furnishings.

Yet, there are some exceptions. Some group homes have "consumer councils" that give consumers a chance to suggest ideas for new activities and to give input into decisions about things like furnishings, meal policies and home rules.

If there is no such council, there may be other opportunities for consumers to share their ideas for making changes in the home, such as hobby/interest groups, smaller committees focused on planning activities and group meetings with the management. The direct care staff person has an important role to play in terms of encouraging consumers to join such committees and helping consumers participate in such meetings.

Encourage participation in the community:



The direct care staff person helps consumers have access to “formal support systems.” This refers to services received from other service systems, such as MR (mental retardation) workshops, MH (mental health) outpatient programs and substance abuse (drug and alcohol) services. The direct care staff person helps consumers to get to and from these programs.

Besides taking part in community-based programs that offer formal services, consumers can be engaged in the community in many other ways. Some examples include:

- Going to church, temple, mosque or synagogue.
- Attending the local senior center.
- Visiting a local museum.
- Visiting a beauty salon or barber shop.
- Joining a gardening club.
- Volunteering at a local school.
- Going to the movies.
- Going shopping.

In addition, many local community groups will often come into the group home to provide activities and to help connect consumers with the local community. The home should contact local groups such as schools, religious organizations, Lion’s Clubs, fire departments, musical groups and others and invite them to come into the home to visit, teach and entertain.

Direct care staff have an important role to play in terms of sharing information about local recreational opportunities, helping consumers to get ready for community activities (for example, getting bathed and dressed) and, if necessary, assisting with transportation.

Things to consider when planning activities for consumers:

- Pay attention to the consumer's abilities and interests.
 - The more you get to know the consumer, the better you will be in recommending that he/she participate in activities that match his/her interests.

- Find ways to support the consumer's interests in various activities.
 - Some direct care staff persons believe that their jobs are easier when consumers are less active and not involved in activities. However, over the long run, the opposite is the case. An inactive, socially isolated consumer is more likely to be dependent on staff attention and will miss out on the physical and mental health benefits associated with being active with others. Direct care staff persons have an important role to play in terms of letting consumers know about various activity options and in encouraging them to participate.
 - You can't do it alone. Try to enlist the support of the consumers, other direct care staff persons, family members and community members in helping the consumer to learn about and be able to participate in activities in the home and in the community.

- Ensure that the consumer's health and safety needs are met.
 - A consumer may be fearful of getting involved in a community activity due to concerns about being able to get around, being able to take a rest when necessary and being safe. Ensuring that the consumer will be safe and comfortable in the activity is likely to increase his/her motivation to participate.

- The activities in which a consumer participates should be consistent with his/her support plans.