

Glencroft Center for Modern Aging faces COVID-19

BY SCOTT McCLINTOCK
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What a different world it is this year!

A year ago, our independent living residents at Glencroft were “turning back time” in the ZOE performance center, learning new things at ZOE University, and eating ZOE healthy foods. During 2019, residents in four ZOE Life Beta groups had gotten stronger and more agile and taken back control of their lives.

One resident said she felt so strong that she might have to hurt someone to prove it! We were having fun. Employees and residents alike were twisting and grunting and generally complaining about the physical “torture” they endured in our performance Center, but they were getting stronger and were also enjoying lectures and ZOE foods. Enthusiasm was contagious.

Many of our long-term care residents in Providence Place are constrained physically making standard ZOE activities difficult, if not impossible. Nevertheless, the team designed an appropriate program and together with Providence Place activities staff selected seven residents to form our beta one group. ZOE activities included therapy and virtual reality twice a week, time in the Peacekeepers Garden, communal dining, swimming and walking.

It’s rather ordinary sounding, but for some long-term care residents swimming and walking are practically aspirational, and the hope it gave them was inspiring. Together we took baby steps toward the residents’ goals, and some residents swam for the first time in years; other residents took their first real steps in a long time.

They were no longer just surviving, but in important ways they were thriving. They had hope and excitement.

Then, in the spring of 2020, COVID-19 hit and it all stopped.

COVID-19 hits hard

By mid-March we had to close our nursing center to all nonessential visitors, and by late April we began to suffer COVID-19 infections in the building. It was a frightening experience, especially for our memory care residents, many of whom could not understand what was happening.

Without regular contact with family, some memory care residents can quickly lose their familiarity, making the estrangement particularly costly for the family.

One of our activities nurses’ aides, Tammy Garfield, described how residents might in this way truly be “lost” to their family through rapid memory loss.

With grants from BHHS Legacy Foundation, Thunderbird Charities and Del E. Webb Foundation, Providence Place staff put together a FaceTime visitation program in which families can participate in virtual visits with their loved ones on a regular basis.

Now their communication is better planned and more frequent. Garfield dons a gown, gloves, mask and face shield; regularly hosts these virtual visits; and will often give a hug to the resident on camera on behalf of their family.

Tommy Medina was one of the Glencroft staff members to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.



Tammy Garfield, a Glencroft activities nurses’ aides, helped residents reach out to family members. (Photos courtesy Glencroft)

Of course, the personal protective equipment has become ubiquitous for all of our caregivers in Providence Place; and even with the protection it provides, some of our workers could not abide the risk of spreading the infection to their own families at home, and they left the company.

But not Garfield. She and her husband discussed the matter and decided that it was just part of the nursing job and she’d always faced some level of risk in her career.

Garfield said that her residents tended to become like family to her and that she could not just leave them due to fears about possible infection. In fact, our caregivers often become so close to the residents and their families that their caring effectively extends to the families who struggle mightily with the gradual separation that accompanies memory loss.

Indeed, one of the hardest things for memory care residents has been the clinical need to temporarily move them to an isolation ward due to COVID-19 infection.

By late summer the Providence Place team had won their battle with COVID-19 and no longer had any infections in the building. It was a hard fight and they lost some dear friends, but the care team is filled with people

like Garfield who love their residents and will not leave them over any concern about infection.

Garfield’s philosophy is that we can’t let COVID-19 ruin our lives and we have to find ways to continue caring for our residents, helping them to visit with their families, and living life as best we can.

Surge and vaccines

As this is written in January 2021 COVID-19 has surged back in the state with infection rates that are nearly 10 times those of September/October.

For this surge we have better practices and better tools to fight COVID-19, and we have suffered no infections in Providence Place.

We have opened a COVID-19 isolation ward and have a handful of recovering patients there; and the hospitals are asking us to take more, but none have been infected in our building.

What’s really different now though is the availability of vaccines. On Jan. 7 and 12, all of our long-term care residents and most of our staff were vaccinated, giving us clear optimism about soon returning to a more normal life without the ever-present fear of COVID-19.

Without COVID-19 our ZOE Life team will resume the beta one program at Providence Place. Our residents’ hopes both depend on and flow from their ZOE work. We are anxious to return to ZOE Life programming for our residents who so dearly need it to help them to thrive.

The mantra of ZOE Life, “Pursuing Vitality Through a Full Active and Purposeful Life,” proven so important for our independent residents, needs to be offered again to our long-term care residents as well.

Creating a platform of safely moving, safely learning and safely engaging on a day-to-day basis gives us the opportunity to create hope for our long-term care residents, and as we all know a little bit of hope goes a long way. GS

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