

Sundance: An Innovative Program for Advanced Dementia Care

Do you care for a family member or loved one who has advancing dementia?

An estimated 76,000 Oregonians have Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia and the numbers are growing as the state's population ages. Over 40% of those with dementia are in the advanced stages; as dementia progresses, individuals experience severe cognitive decline and quite often have demanding behavioral patterns. Not only is the need for care increased, but providing care is more stressful and difficult for the caregiver. For these individuals with advancing dementia, participation in a regular day program and engaging in other activities outside of the home becomes difficult or no longer viable. There are few options available for assistance with care, and there is a growing need for more options in this area as more people choose to keep their family members living in the community. Volunteers of America is pleased to announce Sundance, an experimental, evidence-based day care program in advanced dementia care. The Sundance program will operate Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3pm-8pm at Lambert House at 2600 SE 170th Avenue in SE Portland.

The program is intentionally designed to capture the time of day when individuals with dementia may experience an increase in challenging behaviors known as "sundowning". These behaviors can include wandering, resistance to care, confusion, and agitation; many of these behaviors have been shown to stem from unmet needs, including boredom and frustration from inactivity. Sundance will focus on two primary evidence-based interventions for this population: music therapy and a multi-sensory environment. Interactive live music therapy, which has been shown effective to decrease agitated behaviors, will be provided at each session. A controlled multi-sensory environment will be set up to stimulate all of the senses, utilizing lighting, aromatherapy, peaceful music, and opportunities for tactile engagement. This type of environment has been proven to improve mood, decrease negative behaviors, and facilitate interaction with others by providing stimulating and interactive engagement without making intellectual demands. A ratio of 1 care-giver to each 3 participants will support facilitative care between trained staff members and participants with many opportunities for one-on-one interaction. In addition, there will be many activity stations set up throughout the facility to promote sensory engagement and support individual exploration both indoors and outdoors in the secure garden area. Dinner will be served, focusing on easy-to-eat finger foods; diets can be modified to meet textural dietary needs.

The Sundance Program is free to participants; individuals must apply and complete an intake process in order to qualify. Twice weekly participation is required in addition to a weekly survey to be filled out by a primary caregiver as a requirement for involvement in this innovative program. If you would like more information about this exciting new program please contact:

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