

Human Right to Family Life



A Slice* about Exploring and Enhancing Connection

* Over 20 different strands of work took place between March and October 2022 as part of Rights Made Real Phase 2. Each of these strands was situated under one of 4 Human Rights. This Slice offers a slice of insight into one of those strands.

HUMAN RIGHT TO FAMILY LIFE

A Slice about Exploring & Enhancing Connection

The Exploring and Enhancing Connections opportunity was a collaboration with Suzie Ferguson, a therapeutic clown practitioner. Therapeutic clowning focuses on people as human beings; being with the other person in the moment, from a place of beginner's mind, free of expectations and with the hope to connect.

As someone enters the later stages of dementia their ways of connecting may change. The opportunity involved the following:

-Suzie Ferguson coming alongside 4 families in different care homes in Scotland during visits to their relative, who is living with dementia. Suzie modelled her ways of connecting and engaging with the resident.

-Follow up reflective conversations with the families to explore what they had noticed, and valued in these visits.

-Development and piloting of a workshop for a small group of families in another care home to share what we had learnt from the work with individual families and to explore further enhancing connections with people living in a care home with a dementia. A particular focus of the workshops was:

- To explore feelings, celebrations and curiosities about our engagement with people living with later stage dementia,
- To look at how we can recognise and build on current strengths we have in making connection and.
- To explore how we might use our experiences to develop some new ways to make connections that feel reciprocal and nourishing.

The workshops involved a mixture of practical exercises and discussion.

Creating Connections between Right to Family Life and the 'Be Included' Principle from the National Care Standards

Some key elements of this opportunity connected with the right to family life and 'be included' were:

- The approach used aimed at supporting family members to consider moving from a question and answer approach in their connections to one centred on stories, appreciations, wonderings and noticings.
- The approach encourages letting go of expectations which relates to how we respond when the response from the other is not what we expected – the letting go can make space for new responses or way of being.
- The significance of tuning into the person with a dementia and following their lead.

What we've Heard

Stories from families about their experience of exploring and expanding opportunities for connection with the person with later stage dementia.

The stories describe some new ways of preparing for, connecting during visits, that the relatives tried out, based on what they had learned and experienced from being alongside Suzie during her time with their relative.

'We went to care home with pictures Dad had painted - in the past we had maybe been a bit sad that he had not shown much interest in his pictures or even recognised they were by him. Inspired by noticing that Suzie got a very good reaction from him when she complimented him on his lovely hair, I decided to make a big deal about showing him the picture (he had painted) and that we'd brought for hanging and asking him if he knew who the artist was. "Can you find the signature?" He did indeed love reading his own name and being praised for being such a good artist. We said to him: "We've brought a hook and hammer and will hang it somewhere you can enjoy it." "Do you want it here? Here? Here?" When he chose "There" I kept asking Here? Here? Here? to make sure I got the position exactly to his liking, then asked him to tell me when it was straight and then made a big deal of trying very hard to line it up in front him - but I deliberately left it a wee bit squint. Dad enjoyed giving instructions about just how to tweak it till it was completely level. He has always enjoyed his skill of precision. I think he felt he had really helped us to get the picture hanging right'.

'I went to the care home around lunchtime and sat with my husband while he was having his dinner. He was trying to pick spinach or lettuce or something with his hands and I said jokingly it might be easier to lick the plate. He started to do this and we both laughed. I would never normally have encouraged this before but it was fun and playful – we had a laugh'.

'I went to the care home and found Dad was quite alert, animated and talkative, whereas recently he'd been very quiet and often asleep. I have been trying to pause in the car park before I go in and ask myself how I would like to be on the visit – and remind myself not to have any expectations. Today he was taking interest in the view outside his room on the top floor of the home. He's got a great view of hills he's loved his whole life, much to our delight. For several months now, despite us often admiring the view during visits and attempting to draw Dad's attention to it, it really felt like he couldn't care less'.

So today when he says "the thing is - I'm quite confined up here and I really need to be on the ground floor" there was quite a temptation to say 'oh no you don't want to be down there, it's much more interesting and lively up here. You've got a view of the beautiful hills and the sky; you can watch the buzz of the traffic and watch all the students coming and going all day right under your window". Instead, some of the ideas from the work with Suzie came to mind and I said "That's interesting. What happens on the ground floor?" He looked at me like I was daft and replied, "Well, that's where it all happens!" "Would you like to go there? I asked. "Yes! he answered.

"Well come on then, let's go together." I suggested and started to move my chair.

That's when I noticed his laces were undone, so before setting off I drew this to his attention, saying "One of your laces is undone. I wouldn't want you to trip and hurt yourself. Are you going to tie them?" I had to hold onto myself a bit here as I could feel that urge to bend down and do it for him. But today felt different, and low and behold he bent down, pulled the two ends of the laces very meticulously so that they were even lengths, and proceeded to tie a perfect, and very

functional bow.

It was a small thing but just watching him do that, a simple act that we all take for granted, with his own unique technique and method, watching his hands manipulate the laces in a very "dad" way before we went on our adventure downstairs was the treasure I found and took away from that visit'.

1 Thing you Might Want to Do

Check-out the Right to Family Life Tab in the Resources page of www.rightsmadereal.org.uk, and click on the link to [The Treasure We Seek Treasure Hunt Resource](#)

Something you Might want to Ask or Think more About

What did you like in the two stories above?

Have you or someone you know done something a little bit similar?

What has thinking about these stories sparked in you?

