

# TIPS (Team Improvement Program System) from Algonquin Nursing Home

At the Algonquin Nursing Home in Mattawa, Ontario, TIPS are a team effort. The Team Improvement Program System (TIPS) is a method for continuously finding ways to improve the building, employee well-being and resident care and service.

"We believe the people who work here are the people who know what is best for the Algonquin Nursing Home," says administrator Vala Monestime Belter. TIPS ideas are placed in a locked wooden box decorated with hearts.

"We organize and implement these ideas and they translate into improved employee well-being," says Monestime Belter. "The ideas of staff are respected and valued and the work atmosphere is changed according to how they want it changed."

"No matter how big or small the ideas may be, they have all been equally considered," say resident and family service coordinator Angie Douglass, who is in charge of the program.

## Putting up the numbers

"The operation of this program requires a financial and human resource commitment," says Douglass. "We are committed to implementing 20 to 29 per cent of the gold ideas, but it goes without saying that TIPS ideas help to make our nursing home a better place."

In a three-year period at the Algonquin Nursing Home, 250 TIPS ideas have been submitted. A total of 145 of these received a gold rating, with the remaining tips getting a silver or bronze rating. Amazingly, 98 gold TIPS ideas—68 per cent—have already been implemented at the home. These numbers speak strongly to the fact that the ideas submitted by staff are life enhancing, logical and practical.

### by Gerry Therrien

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"It's an amazing tool," says Monestime-Belter. "It keeps us improving and gives the staff the opportunity to have a strong voice in the day to day life of the nursing home, to help direct long term planning and to work together as a team."

The TIPS teams consist of seven to eight members representing each of the departments—nursing, dietary, laundry, activity, maintenance, office and housekeeping. Teams are reshuffled once a year.

In this team-oriented environment, individual staff not only contribute to the overall improvement of the nursing home, but also work with fellow staff members to produce these results. Even though staff have specific job functions and belong to specific departments, they are unified with their colleagues in accomplishing the overall objectives. And the results are tangible.

## Implementing ideas for improvement

Improvements are selected according to a clearly defined process, with criteria established by motivational speaker and writer Barry Spilchuk and the home's staff, who sat down together to draft the vision and mission statements for the Algonquin Nursing Home—A Place Called Home.

Ideas are sorted by category: building, residents, staff, safety and marketing/public relations. Interestingly, changes to the building continue to dominate the list of suggested improvements, followed by ideas focusing on residents and staff. Few ideas relate to safety, which attests to the high priority given to this issue at the weekly meetings of the management group and the monthly meetings of the risk and health and safety committees.

"Resident care issues are not the focus of the TIPS program, as these are addressed directly, daily and throughout all shifts," says Douglass.

Judges—not members of any team and without knowledge of who has submitted the ideas—rate the suggestions and decide which ones to implement.

"There is complete anonymity," says



Douglass. "I am the only one who sees the hand-written suggestions."

## Recognition

Every three months, the suggestions are read and evaluated by a jury. The teams are all applauded and the members of the winning team are awarded with gift certificates at a quarterly staff appreciation presentation. As well as the individual gift certificates, the team members are listed on a colour-coded plaque in the hallway. There have been 45 presentations since TIPS was initiated.

The number of presentations and written reports indicates the success of TIPS. With the program in place, staff will continue to generate quality improvements that benefit everyone who lives and works at the Algonquin Nursing Home.

It has been said that imitation is the highest form of flattery. This is certainly true of TIPS. During a recent accreditation, says Monestime Belter, the surveyor suggested that the program is a best practice idea that should be given consideration by other Canadian long term care homes. LTC