



## **“Senior to Senior”**

**Administrator:**

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## “Senior to Senior”

***In 100 words or less, briefly describe your Best Practice:***

“Senior to Senior” is a program connecting senior high school art students with the senior citizens (residents) of a nursing home. Twice a month, both sets of “seniors” meet during the scheduled activity time and create art together. If the resident is physically not able to create the art, the student then encourages the resident to contribute to the art by choosing colors or design. Some works have ended in collaborations of all the residents participating that day (i.e., vase of hand-drawn and painted flowers) or residents have taken individual works back to their room to enjoy.

***What problem does your Best Practice address, and what is its primary purpose?***

The project addresses getting residents engaged in an activity and in conversation, and actively contributing to the creation of art.

***What group(s) of residents and others are involved in your Best Practice and how does it work? (Who and how many are helped, what are the benefits to these people, and what methods or procedures/protocols are used to get results?)***

Mostly nursing home residents are participants in this collaboration with 12<sup>th</sup> grade art students from a nearby school. The number of residents participating depends on the number of students coming in that day to work with them. There have been sessions with as few as 4 students who worked a small group or residents. Our largest session had about 14 students and around 18 residents in attendance. Weather and illness seem to impact the number of residents attending a session on any given day.

***What has your Best Practice accomplished and how have you been able to tell this?***

Observing our senior residents interacting with the high school students has been very rewarding. The nursing home residents have enjoyed showing off their artwork, talking to the young seniors about their life, and connecting it with things that may have brought back memories to them. The young seniors enjoy listening to the stories our residents tell and have witnessed them improve in their motor and social skills.

***What problems, obstacles, or challenges might other facilities face in replicating part or all of your innovation? Were there any adverse effects or any ways that things turned out differently than you had planned? Do you know of any other facilities which have tried this or a similar best practice idea?***

I can't see many challenges in another facility replicating this program. I think everyone one involved was pleasantly surprised how smoothly the implementation of the program happened. Even with temporary staff changes, the program continued. Both sides have to be willing to be flexible with dates. Students were unable to attend one planned session due to weather. The nursing home associates asked to reschedule due to some event that was planned beyond their

control. Having Senior to Senior twice a month allowed sessions to be rescheduled within a reasonable time frame. It worked out for the students to be able to come during the already scheduled activity time.

***What was the cost to implement your Best Practice (include dollars, staff, supplies, equipment, etc.)? How did you pay for it?***

The basic cost of the project was free for this nursing home, as the school paid for the supplies and brought the volunteers. Even if the school could not afford the extra supplies, the cost is very low (8 color watercolor sets and watercolor paper, Sharpies, scissors). Auxiliary members are contributing to the framing of the finished artwork and an art wall is being developed for all the hanging of the artwork. This gives the residents the opportunity to continue sharing their Senior to Senior experiences and be proud of their contributions.

***What are the reasons you consider this Best Practice to be excellent and innovative?***

Senior to Senior: When first presented with this idea, my own father was in early stages of dementia. The idea of connecting these two special groups of people touched my heart. One group is just beginning to live their lives as they prepare to go off to college, the other group having lived out a long life. After connecting with this particular facility, we met and were presented with ways to engage and connect with the elderly residents through creating art together. We set out to pilot the program with the nursing home's assisted living. Quickly, associates began to see the residents were capable of doing more than they anticipated. The residents were trying watercolor painting or sharing memories triggered by the particular theme. The first four trial session went well and sessions for the next school year were planned. Shortly after the program began, one woman who had never left her room to participate in an activity, joined in to come make art. I particularly enjoyed watching the nursing home activities associates stand behind the hall window and rejoice over each of their residents engaged in conversation, actively creating, or simply smiling.

During one of the sessions before Christmas, our "seniors" were drawing and painting watercolor ornaments to attach to a tree. One of the students asked his partner a question about going back and doing anything she wanted to over again. (He was creating the artwork for her because she was blind.) She replied she wanted to sing. After a little coaxing, she broke into a beautiful spiritual. It was so quiet except for her voice and the voices of the women who had quietly joined in song with her. Shortly after this, a gentleman stood, professed his love to his wife of over 60 years and proceeded to serenade her. What gifts of the season! The blind woman shared her beautiful voice and the man showed the students what a lifetime of loving looked like! So much has been given on both sides of this program and everyone is looking forward to continuing this beautiful relationship.



