

Horticultural Therapy Reaction Paper

by Daniel Smith, GERO2620, 4/12/09

Going to Seashore Gardens Living Center was a new and exciting experience for me. Being part of the horticultural therapy exercise is something I will never forget. When I got to Seashore Gardens, the first thing I noticed was how nice the outside and the inside of the living center were. Seashore Gardens looked nothing like any other nursing home I have been to. The objective of going to Seashore Gardens was to do horticultural therapy with older adults. Horticultural therapy can be defined by Soderback (2004) as "interventions mediated by nature-oriented views and spaces such as gardens and everything associated with them, the plants and material related to them, garden tools and garden occupations performed among disabled people for healing and for restoring or improving health and well-being or for rehabilitation or simply for general benefit." The emotional goals for our horticultural therapy sessions were to reduce stress and mental fatigue, and enhance mood. The physical/sensory goals were to enhance visual/perceptual skills, and to stimulate all senses. The social goals were to increase engagement with others, and enhance verbal and non verbal skills.

The first step for the therapy session was to set all the supplies for the older adults. The supplies included moss, tree bark, soil, mushrooms, pine cones, and twigs. We were told by the instructor to let the older adults touch and feel all of the materials. We did this so the older adults will know what all the materials felt like and it could bring back old memories they had when they were younger. Next the older adults started to come in. Once we got them seated and situated, we put all of the material in front of them. When the older adults were ready, we asked them to scoop some soil and put it in a paper bowl. If they chose not to do it, we did it for them. Then we let them choose the different materials to put in their little moss garden. The older adult I was paired up with chose moss, a mushroom, and pine cones. I let her feel and hold all of the material she was working with. Once she put her moss garden together, she was very satisfied with the work she did.

The next thing we made was a planter with flower seeds. The material included soil, a 20oz plastic bottle cut in half, and flower seeds. The plastic bottle was cut in half to be used as a pot. First we filled the plastic bottle with some soil, then we asked the older adults what kind of flowers they wanted in their pot. The seeds came in a pouch that had a picture of what the flower will look like. Then the older adult dropped the seeds in and then we covered them with more soil. After that we put some water in it so the flowers can grow. If they wanted, the older adults could decorate the bottle with stickers.

Before taking therapeutic arts for the older adult I did not know of horticulture therapy. Kim (2004) stated, "The horticultural therapy profession is relatively new as compared to other therapy professions such as physical therapy and occupational therapy, and it is not readily acknowledged by the conventional medical community. However, the concepts on which the profession is based have a long history, dating to the

beginnings of ancient Egypt." The first time I experience horticultural therapy was at Generations, my service learning placement. There we made planters out of tin cans. The older adults loved this activity and enjoyed watching their plants grow. At Seashore Gardens the older adults had a great time doing this exercise. The best thing that came out of this experience was listening to the stories the older adults told me. I was able to learn about their life, where they been to, and what they experienced. The older adult I was paired up with told me about how she used to work in Atlantic City as a vender on the boardwalk. I learned how much the city has changed in the past years. This is something I could not learn in any class or text book I read before. Another older adult I talked to discussed how he served in WWII. I was able to gain first hand experience of what the war was like when he was my age. I found this to be very interesting because all of the times I was taught about the war were through a professor and a book. I believe this was a good experience for the older adult because they were able to share their stories to someone new and it was also good for them just to talk to someone. Through talking to the older adults I learned that many of them were put into Seashore Gardens by their children and some of them rarely come back to see them. At the end of the night many of the older adults told us to come back any time just to talk to them and share more stories about their life. Fried (2008) found in his study of using horticultural therapy with children with serious illnesses that, "Overall, horticultural therapy provides a treatment option addressing numerous needs for patients and their families at the SDHCC. Offering a variety of psychosocial interventions as part of the treatment team respects individual preferences and offers choice and some sense of control while battling a serious illness."

Not only does horticultural therapy treat physical and sensory problems but it gives the older adults a way for them to communicate with someone that they may not usually talk to. I also believe horticultural therapy does work and should be used in more places after going to Seashore Gardens. This experience for me was something I could never learn in any class room and will never forget.

Reference:

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