

Walk the Talk Award Entrant: Clinical Mentor Team, Elizabeth Knox Home and Hospital

The residents at Elizabeth Knox Home and Hospital are enjoying improvements in care and overall wellbeing, thanks to the inclusive leadership of the organisation.

The Clinical Mentor team, formerly called "Nurse Team Leaders" has developed inclusive leadership practices which have instilled more autonomy and trust.

"Each household feels more like a community, a family, and not like a team of staff in a hospital environment," says Knox Home CEO Jill Woodward. "There has been an emergence of household cultures which reflect the families, residents and team within that home."

The Clinical Mentor team is comprised of six individuals who have developed their leadership throughout the years on the Knox journey. They are: Manorma Shaheed (17 years with Knox), Edelyn Ramos (8 years), Frances Calapari (6 years), Nena Delos Santos (10 years), Lelanie Coloma (13 years) and Andrea Sy (9 years).

Elizabeth Knox Home and Hospital is a charitable trust based in Epsom, Auckland, which provides a home to residents of all ages and needs. It offers hospital level care to elders and young adults living with physical disabilities.

With 65 nationalities among a staff of just under 200 and approximately 800 volunteers, Elizabeth Knox Home and Hospital has evolved hugely since the organisation was set up more than a century ago.

With so many nationalities in the home (residents, family, staff, volunteers), fostering a culture of community and empowerment is not simple.

Clinical Mentors must understand and appreciate the cultural differences of their team.

Clinical mentors teach their teams to be understanding and appreciative, open minded, curious, creative problem solvers and community connectors, by treating their team this way.

The Clinical Mentor team has flattened the structure in their households in recognition that they need to empower the wider team to create a responsive culture. In daily handover meetings they rely on the group to make decisions. They nominate various team members to run daily huddles and speak up at staff meetings on behalf of their households.

"Responsibility for inclusiveness cannot sit at the top," says Jill.

The Clinical Mentor team has delivered extensive training around cultural differences, and provide ongoing opportunities for their team to discuss their different values, personal and cultural, and the richness that cultural diversity can bring to their teams.

They address the tough stuff too. The team addresses challenging situations arising due to cultural differences and models how to solve these issues. They hold Learning Circles with their team to discuss the issues and solve problems collaboratively, allowing each individual

the chance to speak. This can often be time consuming but it is integral to our Eden values of community and a flattened structure.

The weekly Eden Alternative sessions are an excellent example of how the Clinical Mentor team has encouraged the team to make the most of a diverse environment by discussing the challenges and triumphs that a diverse environment brings.

The Eden Alternative is explained by Jill Woodward. "The Eden Alternative is a fresh philosophy of personal, organisational and environmental transformation founded by Dr William Thomas, a Harvard-trained physician. The core concept of the Eden Alternative is simple: Care environments are habitats for human beings that should promote health, wellbeing and growth rather than facilities where the frail and elderly stagnate and decline.

"The Eden Alternative shows us how companion animals, children and plants help in providing an opportunity for a meaningful contribution and care. Essentially, it contributes to preventing and eliminating the aged care plagues of loneliness, helplessness and boredom," she says.

"Each Monday the staff, residents and family members are invited to meet to discuss our Eden Alternative journey, including the successes and challenges we face as a community," says Jill. "All sessions are culturally relevant to Knox, and we frequently discuss the cultural differences of each household.

"In 2015 the Clinical Mentors encouraged the care partners (health care assistants) to speak at these sessions, which is a big ask to some team members who've seldom spoken in front of a crowd. Last year they pushed them further, asking the care partners to facilitate each weekly session by interpreting the Eden Alternative values and solving complex issues.

There have been many examples of new team members who have blossomed into advocates for residents, for the environment and for the Eden Alternative. Increasing their confidence to speak up will enable care partners to better care for residents, to work with families and volunteers and to manage the challenges that arise from a culture as diverse as Knox.

"They have shown that there is no "right" answer and that our cultural and personal values create our worldview and we must come to learn and understand one another."