



Activating Potential for Communication

Newsletter

Winter 2009/2010

Issue 68

Welcome to the Winter 2009/2010 edition of our newsletter.

In this issue, Sr Mary Threadgold shares her thoughts on a DVD entitled *There is a bridge*, part of which was shown at our May 2009 conference.

Sr Mary also discusses the progress of the Dóchas project and how it has grown into the broader area of spiritual well-being.

Sarah Cairns, a Sonas Lead Tutor, reports on the first of four National Lottery-funded training programmes for family carers, which was held in St Vincent's Hospital, Athy.

Margaret Milburn, of the Newcastle Challenging Behaviour Service, presents *the Columbo Approach*, which considers behaviour from a needs-based perspective. Margaret will be presenting one of the parallel sessions at our May 2010 Conference.

On the back page we provide details of forthcoming workshops and events that may be of interest to readers.

We also enclose a booking form for the upcoming Sonas aPc/GOLD spirituality conference in Dublin.

Finding a memory bridge

By Sr Mary Threadgold

Those of you who attended our May 2009 conference will remember the recording we saw of an older lady in a nursing home. She was not only non-verbal but even non-communicating. Through a particular interaction with Naomi Feil, we saw her making eye contact and joining in the words of a hymn well known to her. In the circumstances, this was a dramatic breakthrough.

We were informed that the clip was from a DVD called *There is a Bridge* produced by an organisation called Memory Bridge, based in Chicago, USA. Having watched the whole of the DVD I would like to share some of the features of it that appealed to me.

If I was to select some key words and ideas that struck me, they would be **Identity** (and therefore personhood), our **Common humanity** with the person with dementia, **Communication, Emotion and Hope**.

In spite of what the person has lost in terms of memory, judgement etc. the person that they were is still intact. The 'bridge' to the discovery of that person is the opportunity to have relationships. You enter the world of that person by picking up on their emotions and possibly mir-

roring their movements. You may also give them the words that you think match these non-verbal behaviours.

According to Naomi Feil, having a loved one with dementia gives family and friends the opportunity to restore old ties and to fulfil some of their own humanity.

Communication brings about wholeness and makes the person feel good about themselves. This could apply to the person with dementia and the one who relates to that person.

Presence is our most precious gift to another.

We need one another for knowing who we are.

The founder of Memory Bridge believes that remembering a person's story (cf. reminiscence) is honouring the person they are. The theologian who contributes to this DVD focuses on the senses and comments that 'sensory intake is integral to who we are and for people with Alzheimer's it calls them out of themselves'.

A psychologist appeals to us not to shrink the boundaries but to keep the person in circulation and to maintain a positive attitude. Giving a person hope has a vivifying effect. Finally, a social worker tells us that there is much of life **to live**.

**Spirituality and Physical Wellbeing in
Later Life
Fourth Annual GOLD/Sonas aPc Conference**

Date: **Thursday 25th March, 2010**

Time: **9:30 am - 4pm**

Venue: **The Avila Conference Centre Donnybrook, Dublin**

Booking fee (includes a light lunch): €30

Places are limited so early booking is recommended.

In recent years Sonas aPc has jointly held an annual spirituality conference with GOLD (Growing Older Living Deeper). This year the conference takes place in the Avila Centre, Donnybrook, on Thursday 25th March.

The overall topic for the day is *Spirituality and Physical Wellbeing*. There will be two main presentations. In the morning Rev. Dr. Denis Robinson will present two sessions in which he will address the issue of Self Care. In the afternoon, Dr. Ursula Bates, a Clinical Psychologist who is attached to the Blackrock Hospice will give us “an experiential introduction to mindfulness based stress reduction”. The Exercises include mindful eating, short body scan, mindful breathing and poetry.

To book a place at the conference, send the enclosed booking form and payment to GOLD c/o CORI, Bloomfield Avenue, Donnybrook, Dublin 4. Cheques should be made payable to GOLD.

(Memory Bridge, contd)

Although identity changes, the person with dementia keeps a deeper identity. Their capacity for humour is retained. They can detect the mood of the person to whom they are relating, and feelings become more heightened. She ends by quoting a person with de-

mentia who says they do not support the dictat “I think, therefore I am” but rather “I HOPE, therefore I AM.”

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There is a Bridge is available from www.memorybridge.org.

Go to the Resources section of the site. The DVD costs €34.95 plus shipping.

**The experience of
family carers**

**By Sarah Cairns,
Sonas Lead Tutor**

The first SIMS (Sonas Individual Multi-sensory Session) Workshop for Carers, funded by the National Lottery, took place in St Vincent’s Hospital, Athy.

A smiling Cecelia Hayden CNM2 with a warm welcome showed myself and fellow Lead Sonas Tutor Jackie O’Toole around the hospital.

I had been thinking about the day’s workshop ahead on the hour and a half drive there. I was feeling excited to be spending the day working with people on the front line of one-to-one care in the community, a chance to pass on the SIMS material to carers giving them a tool or a base to work with.

The morning began with an introduction, as with all our workshops, each participant offering some information about themselves. As each person spoke it was clear this workshop was like no other we had facilitated before. Jackie and I were humbled by the human recollection, the honesty and the willingness of the participants to share their wealth of experience. What I didn’t expect was the extraordinary heartfelt connection that followed such sharing.

After lunch everyone practiced the SIMS session and we had an open Question Time.

The day concluded with many hugs and confirmations of all seeing each other in a month’s time for day 2.

Driving home I was unsure who taught whom the most, as I had learned so much from these people’s rich experiences.

I look forward to day 2.

Taking a needs-perspective: The Columbo Approach

By Margaret Milburn of the Newcastle Challenging Behaviour Service

In keeping with a number of other services (Cohen-Mansfield), the Newcastle team examine challenging behaviours in terms of people's needs. Behaviour is not the main focus of the analysis. Rather, people's needs are seen as the features that drive their behaviours.

Using this 'needs framework', therapists are required to function like detectives, finding the clues that allow them to identify people's needs. The involvement of staff and carers is a critical part of the process. As well as the staff being important sources of information, collaborative work can help them to gain a better understanding of the person's behaviour. It also gives them ownership of the therapy, making any therapeutic strategies more likely to succeed.

In order to promote collaboration, the Newcastle team favour a 'Columbo' type of sleuthing rather than a Sherlock Holmes style. We think the informal and disarming style of Columbo is more suited to engaging the help of staff than the rather condescending manner of Holmes.

The framework concentrates on the individual with dementia, but this focus is not exclusive. Contextual features (staff communications, environmental aspects) are paramount in determining the way a person expresses his or her needs in a particular setting.

The needs-perspective engenders a more positive and proactive way of seeing someone's

situation. It also allows staff and therapists to identify and empathise better with the person's situation. Thus it clearly gives staff the opportunities to reflect on what their own hypothetical needs would be if they were in a similar situation to the person with dementia.

In the past, when staff were confronted with 'difficult to manage behaviours', their main focus would often be the action component. However, on reflection, it is evident that the behaviour of the person is often a poor indicator of what they are attempting to communicate. For example, someone's 'wandering' might be a reflection of them trying to communicate discomfort; alternatively, it might arise from a desire to explore, be due to boredom and/or frustration, or many other possible reasons. Cohen-Mansfield suggests that one should see a behaviour as a strategy employed by the person to communicate his or her needs. She suggests that in order to understand what is driving the person to act, one should gather clues from the person's background as well as observing their behaviour closely.

The process of gathering data is called conceptualising, a term used widely in the therapeutic literature. In many respects the conceptualisation process is very similar to detective work. In the case of Columbo, he would examine background features and events that occurred just prior to

Margaret Milburn is one of the presenters of a parallel session at our May 2010 Conference. The topic is The Columbo Approach.

Ian James, Director of the Newcastle CB Service, is also one of the key speakers at the event.

the murder. He would review each suspect's personality, their circumstances, abilities, means, possible triggers, and whereabouts and activities during the time of the incident. He would gradually piece together a coherent story based on the clues available, and then finally come up with a hypothesis.

The framework we use borrows heavily from Kitwood and from cognitive behaviour therapy. At its heart is the goal of trying to conceptualise the needs of the person with dementia. A collaborative process, involving staff and therapists, is used to gather the information, devise the conceptualisation and develop the interventions. It is critical to the success of the programmes of care. *(References for this article available from the Sonas aPc office)*

The Newcastle Challenging Behaviour Service is a community team, which works in homes. It assists staff and carers to deal effectively with people with dementia who are exhibiting challenging behaviours.

Spiritual Well-being and Dóchas

By Sr Mary Threadgold

In 2009 and with the involvement of a number of individuals using the experimental Dóchas sessions, this project firmed up on its identity and paved the way for the finished product.

We now have three areas included in 'spirituality'. The first two involve more structured sessions based on a religious approach (Roman Catholic, Christian). The third is more open ended and comprehensive and includes whatever could be considered spiritual well-being without an identifiable religious basis.

Sonas aPc has been asked to present Spirituality in Older People at two upcoming courses, one on post graduate gerontology and another for activity personnel. Preparation for these presentations has helped us to articulate our own approach to spirituality and assess the present point of development.

At present the work in progress is in drawing up the Dóchas session in preparation for production which will involve studio recordings, text preparation and production followed by exploration of what is needed by way of training or other initiation for those who will implement our spirituality sessions and approach.

Forthcoming Events

Bealtaine Festival. Registration Deadline 14th Feb, 2010. Age and Opportunity is currently registering events for this, its fifteenth annual Bealtaine Festival. Bealtaine, which takes place in May, is a month-long celebration of creativity in older age. Last year, an estimated 57,000 older people participated in more than 2,000 events during the festival. If you are interested in holding a Bealtaine event, go to www.bealtaine.com or tel 01 805 7709 for information and registration forms.

DSIDC Spring Seminar in 2010, Thurs 29th April, 2010. This seminar will focus on recent research findings that have the potential to make a difference to the practice of providers of dementia care. To book a place at the conference, contact the DSIDC at (01) 416 2035. Full details also available on the DSIDC website at www.dementia.ie. Attendance free but limited to two people per organisation.

Design School. Dementia Services Development Centre, Northern Ireland Office, Belfast, 3—5th March, 2010. To book a place at this event, contact Maria McManus on 028 9581 0510 or email maria.mcmanus@stir.ac.uk

Forthcoming Workshops

Dates for a Sonas workshop in Galway are currently being discussed, and will be confirmed shortly.

Another Sonas workshop in Dublin is currently in preparation for April-June.

Forthcoming workshop dates along with downloadable booking forms are available directly from our website at www.sonasapc.ie/workshops.

If you are interested in attending one of our workshops or wish to discuss in-house training, please contact Myriam Vacher, our Workshop Administrator.

A date for your diary Sonas aPc Conference Tues 11th May 2010

Behaviours as an expression of communication in dementia

Venue: the Royal Hospital Kilmainham, Dublin.

Key speakers: Professor Brian Lawlor, David Sheard, Ian James, Penny Garner. Tbc: a HIQA Inspector and a member of the Scottish Dementia Working Group.

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