An Explanation of the Butterfly Approach

What does it mean when one is told that a care home is following the "Butterfly Approach?" How is the home run? What might one expect to be distinctive? How might it feel to live there? Although, the Butterfly Approach is typically associated with people living with dementia in care homes, some of the core principles could be aptly transferable to services that support people with disabilities, people who receive day services, or those in hospital settings. The Butterfly Approach is both a philosophy of care and a clear road map on how to achieve this in practice. Yes, there are other models of care which might include some similar features, but the Butterfly Approach is one of the most comprehensive culture change models which has been implemented thus far in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, Australia, and the USA.

Whilst every Butterfly Home is likely to look and feel a little different, there are some core 'essentials' which they will all share. These include:

- A sense of home versus a place of work – uniforms, staff notices, nursing stations, etc. are removed so that the space feels like a real family home, not an institution
- Words and actions which emphasise a divide between "them and us" between people living and people working in a home are removed. The jargon of 'work talk' are avoided in the home areas (e.g.'shifts', 'breaks', 'units', 'feeds' etc.)
- Team members are recruited with a strong focus on emotional intelligence and can be seen to be sharing the day like caring friends of those who live there.
- Team members are comfortable with 'being with' people rather than 'doing for' people. They focus on the feelings behind words and actions moment by moment.
- Those working in the home share meals with those living in the home. Mealtimes are regarded as social events in the day, not scheduled routine tasks.
- People live in small groups or households, often linked to where they are in their experience of dementia, in order that those with very different needs aren't all muddled up together. All people are acknowledged for who they are now. No one is forgotten.
- The environments are colourful and have lots of pictures, sensory objects and everyday items to prompt conversations and memories. They connect with people's life stories and interests and offer invitations for people to be meaningfully occupied.
- People living in the home can be involved in the domestic activities of the day and there is a kitchen area which is accessible for people to use.
- There is a real sense of acknowledgement; individuals being seen, understood and encouraged to be themselves and to enjoy doing the things which make sense to them.
- Activities are organically integrated into all parts of the day and all team members play a role (including housekeeping, food services and maintenance); not just predetermined and structured groups at set times.

- Children and animals are welcome informal and regular visitors; i.e. not just for an arranged 'therapy' or special occasions like Christmas.

There are many quite superficial changes which can be made to a care home, for example painting more colourful walls or increasing the range of sensory and naturally engaging reminiscence objects with which to engage. However, these will only make a meaningful difference when the whole team understands what it truly means to be with people like friends and family. The impact of this "being truly together" has a significantly positive impact on quality that is both deep and lasting for all involved.

The Butterfly Approach, infection control, and meeting fire regulations

Some regulators are critical of Butterfly Home environments with their 'busy' feel and lots of things in hallways and on tables to invite interactions. However, there are now lots of examples of how a bright and engaging environment can meet regulatory requirements in terms of safety, but also feels like a home rather than a clinical setting. Butterfly Home Teams now have extensive experience of putting in place appropriate fire safety checks and cleaning regimes which support this. During the Covid 19 pandemic, there is developing evidence that the small self-contained household approach made cross-infection less likely, and that focusing on people's emotional wellbeing and social connections also promoted better physical health.

Other things you can expect from a Butterfly Home:

- ✓ A specialized late-stage dementia care service is offered, far too often a neglected focus.
- ✓ People are supported to feel purpose; busy, valued, and involved in life. This involves every member of the team throughout the whole day, rather than just Recreation/Activities staff.
- ✓ 'Behaviours' in both people living and working in a home are understood as expressions of emotion, i.e. a need to be met, not problems to be managed or controlled.
- ✓ Care teams are confident & compassionate and have exceptional communication skills.
- ✓ Visiting families feel part of the community of the home and enjoy spending time there.
- ✓ Getting to know individual life stories is more than a tick box exercise or a written chronology in a care plan. It can be witnessed to play out in how people spend their days meaningfully and how they connect with others.
- ✓ There is a positive approach to balancing rights and risks, in the context of promoting freedom and choice whilst keeping people safe.

Getting to the roots of things

The Butterfly Approach can be compared to a tree. Many approaches offer lovely decorations for the branches of the tree, but the Butterfly Approach focuses on the roots so that the tree is really embedded and will thrive long term. The roots are ensuring that the whole organisation believes, nurtures and demonstrates every day that each individual needs to be supported to be free to be themselves and that emotional care is as important as physical care.

Those who visit Butterfly Homes often become very emotional because, to put it simply, 'they feel the love'. When you enter the door, you should feel uplifted by the sense of people living and working in the home, sharing the day like a family. It will also be significant what you **won't** see; "staff" rushing around focusing on tasks, large metal tea trolleys/carts and circles of chairs round a television with people sleeping, perhaps merely out of boredom. The change the Butterfly Approach can bring is both simple and miraculous. You will instantly feel that this is a place where you would want to spend time or would trust it as a home for your own loved one.

The principal focus has always been on increasing the quality of lived experience for people and measuring this throughout the culture change process through regular observations using a validated observational tool. We are also increasingly gathering evidence with our partners of other significant outcomes of the Butterfly Approach including:

- People eating better and increased healthy weight gain
- Reduced staff turnover and less staff absenteeism
- Improved team morale
- Reduction in 'expressive behaviours' as people feel more purpose, comfort and fun in their daily lives

What does it take to become a Butterfly Home?

The journey to become an accredited Butterfly Home with Meaningful Care Matters requires driven commitment over the year of initial change and the ongoing need to sustain the approach. Some people won't want to be part of it because they prefer the predictability of a task focused traditional model of care. However, having completed the journey, people always report that they got so much more than they had ever dared hope for and would never go back to how it was.

Testimonials

"As a person living with dementia the opportunities, choices and activities I am given should be meaningful and be a reflection of a culture underpinned by my unalienable Right to dignity and respect. Moreover, it is paramount that those who interact with me are aware of my social, psychological, and emotional needs. The Butterfly Approach to care embraces all these principles. Very few would choose to live in residential care. However, if we ever need more support, we would hope that there would be a real sense of a 'home away from home' atmosphere."

John Quinn, Brisbane, Australia

"The most challenging element of any culture change is getting people to understand, accept and sustain the change. In addition to being a care model that is intuitive and inclusive of both staff and people living in the home, it is also easily layered on top of a validated change methodology. Wanting the incredible outcomes from the Butterfly Approach is a 'no brainer', being able to affect real, sustained change is invaluable."

Mary Connell, Butterfly Model Project Manager/ Dementia Advisor LTC, Region of Peel, Toronto, Canada

"You don't know how good this approach is and what a huge difference it makes until you do it! I remember Deborah, the Butterfly Project Consultant visiting at the start of our culture change journey and saying, in her usual very direct way; 'Well, I wouldn't want to live here would you?' I was working so hard and thought it was a lovely home, so couldn't help but feel a bit offended. The thing is she was SO, SO right. I see it when I visit other homes now - the Manager running herself ragged and can't see how her 'challenging resident' would improve by going elsewhere. They are asking themselves what could someone in another home possibly do as we have tried everything? I really notice and feel that institutional care now and watch and hear the hard-working but miserable carers and want to educate them. I want to say it doesn't have to be like this! The problem is that you have to want to listen and change – that's the most difficult thing."

Diane Kehoe, Registered Manager, Coombe House, Reading, UK

For more information about the Butterfly Approach, please contact admin@meaningfulcarematters.com or visit www.meaningfulcarematters.com