

Nursing Home Initiative

Case Study: Ms. L

The Scenario

Ms. L. is a 52-year-old woman who was admitted to a nursing facility in 2005 following a decline in her health status characterized by frequent falls and an unsteady gait. At 17 years old Ms. L. sustained a traumatic brain injury as a result of a motor vehicle accident. Related diagnoses include atypical psychosis, depression, and schizoaffective disorder. Moreover, Ms. L. has a history of self-degrading comments, suicidal ideations and has historically refused interventions.

During the intake process, the Nursing Home Initiative (NHI) case manager learned that, prior to her accident, Ms. L. was valedictorian of her high school class, aspired to attend the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and become a veterinarian.

The Solution

To meet Ms. L's current clinical, social and vocational needs the case manager arranged a package of services that included involvement of two "specialized service" providers. One of the providers, with an expertise in employment supports, was engaged to assist Ms. L. in finding employment. These employment supports enable now her to volunteer at the cat adoption center in a local pet store. In her volunteer role she socializes with the cats, fills food and water bowls, and cleans cages. Ms. L. reports that she loves this work.

The other provider, with expertise in brain injury, was engaged to assist Ms. L. with her emotional and social needs, specifically to increase her self-esteem, communication and socialization. Since she loves horses and once aspired to become a veterinarian, a plan was constructed to explore horseback riding as a therapeutic modality. The provider located a therapeutic horseback-riding farm in the area and arrangements were made for Ms. L. to visit the horse farm every other week.

During these initial visits Ms. L. cleaned and organized the tack boxes. Over time, the frequency of visits increased to weekly and Ms. L. increased her responsibility, assisting in grooming the horses. During this time Ms. L. began to express her desire to ride a horse again. The team reviewed the clinical benefits of a hippotherapy program and agreed to pursue this.

The Outcome

Five months after her initial visit to the farm a hippotherapy evaluation took place and her primary care physician approved her participation in the therapeutic program. Ms. L. began her eight-week therapeutic riding program in earlier this year.

It is important to note that the consistency of these supports and their therapeutic benefits proved to be instrumental when Ms. L. was recently transferred to another unit in the nursing facility. Like many individuals with brain injuries, Ms. L. struggles when changes to her routine are made. During this period of change Ms. L. continued to receive supports from her providers, including activities outside of the nursing facility. These activities proved beneficial in her need to express her frustration regarding the change, as well as to enable her to shift the focus of her thoughts onto productive and enjoyable pursuits.

About NHI

Commonwealth Medicine's Nursing Home Initiative helps public agencies provide coordinated supports to individuals residing in nursing facilities, to maintain their functioning abilities, increase their independence and improve their quality of life.

Using a person-centered approach, Nursing Home Initiative case managers determine the 'specialized services' from which each individual will benefit most—whether day habilitation, employment opportunities, independent living skills or continuing education. We then work with multiple provider agencies, nursing facilities, guardians and families to arrange the supports needed, provide ongoing oversight and continue to advocate on the individual's behalf.

Our highly skilled, hands-on case managers bring an expertise in working with people with developmental disabilities, including training in clinical social work, gerontology, rehabilitation counseling and occupational therapy. We draw upon this varied skill set, as well as the clinical resources of the University of Massachusetts Medical School, to develop creative, personalized service plans for each individual in the program.

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