

LIFEWORKS' SPOTLIGHT

February 2021



February was National Heart Health Month, we would like to acknowledge our nursing staff, clinicians and therapists for keeping us ALL healthy.

SUPER NURSES TO THE RESCUE!

Featuring Interviews by Kathy
Montal. Written by Kathy
Montal and Susan Tufts Kagan



This spotlight focuses on a group of professionals who work tirelessly behind the scenes – the Lifeworks nursing staff. Nursing Director Tess McDonald oversees residential nursing and consults with nursing staff at the William F. Abel Day Habilitation Center and the Connections program at Lifeworks' Boston location. Lifeworks has a team of traveling nurses who visit Lifeworks' residences to educate staff on medical protocols, such as G-tube care, diabetes or oxygen management, and to lead the Medication Administration Program (MAP) training required by the Department of Public Health (DPH). All residential program staff must be MAP certified in order to administer medication to the individuals we serve.

The frequency of visits is highly dependent on the needs of the residents. While some houses only require a few visits each month, others are visited twice a week. One of the newest residences in Westwood requires 24-hour nursing care for individuals with complex medical needs and is led by Mary Theresa Lee, RN along with non-medical program staff.

For years, parents have advocated for their children to receive nursing care in a residential setting, and in the fall of last year, the Department of Developmental Services, MassHealth and Lifeworks collaborated to make that dream a reality for families. Mary Theresa Lee is the Clinical Lead of the Westwood House, overseeing the medical needs of the program, while Tara Hulme is the Program Manager and oversees the non-medical day-to-day needs of the program. Mary Theresa, Tara and the staff at the Westwood house were featured in a video produced for The Arc of Massachusetts Endless Possibilities Gala. You can watch the entire video on our website www.lifeworksarc.org.

During the past year Tess has been laser focused on her administrative role providing guidance and directives to the nursing staff agency wide based on DPH protocols. Tess is essentially "the messenger and enforcer" of DPH COVID-19 guidelines. As Lifeworks coordinates the vaccine rollout with CVS Pharmacy, Tess coordinates the administering of COVID testing by her nursing staff. Lifeworks' staff are regularly tested, and an impressive 80% of our employees have received the COVID-19 vaccinations.

Tess, a Lifeworks nurse for nearly 10 years, reflects on how much the agency has grown, "When I started there was one registered nurse and MAP training was done by an outside contractor. My job has allowed me to be creative and build an outstanding team of nurses."

Following is a closer look at the day-to-day routines of our nursing staff, and in their own words, what nursing at Lifeworks has meant to them.



"I HAVE SO MUCH APPRECIATION FOR DIRECT SUPPORT STAFF AND WHAT THEY DO."

Tess McDonald, RN



"DURING THIS PANDEMIC WE HAVE REALLY COME TOGETHER TO SUPPORT OUR COMMUNITY AND I'M REALLY EXCITED ABOUT THE FUTURE AND OUR OPPORTUNITIES TO BLEND AND GROW OUR NURSING STAFF."

Tess McDonald, RN

It's just before 9am, Healthcare Supervisor, RN Dianne Schnabel, along with LPN Susan Moore, greet participants at the William F. Abel Therapeutic Center. They help participants sign in and take temperatures as part of the daily pre-screening COVID-19 protocol. The nurses quickly jump into their daily duties of triage; handling medical issues and following up with phone calls to the homes of participants not in attendance that day. Nurses take calls educating parents and residential program staff needing medical advice.

For Dianne and Susan, their nursing duties have evolved due to limitations on program capacity, and they find themselves assisting program managers with different activities. This has afforded staff more time to form bonds with program participants. Susan loves the opportunity to interact more with participants and enjoys coming to work for the simple smiles that come through the door each day.

Susan leads "Super Nurses to the Rescue!" a weekly virtual event that participants can join at their Day Program or from home. This virtual program touches on a variety of topics including educating participants on proper hygiene habits, building social skills, practicing healthy eating habits, and tips for managing stress.



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Susan Moore,
LPN at Lifeworks

Susan said, there is a plus side to "Zooming" with individuals participating from their home. Normally quiet individuals open up and you can observe the interaction with their family members.



Dianne often finds herself advocating for individuals when their doctor is unavailable. She is the calm, reassuring voice on the other end of the phone that both participants and their families have come to rely upon when dealing with medical issues. For Dianne and Susan, working alongside caring and supportive staff that work so well together makes their job enjoyable. The level of energy is high and it is an incredibly positive atmosphere. "I find this job enriching. There's never a day I wake up and don't want to come to work".



Another staff member who thrives on high energy is Physical Therapist Assistant, Deb Reckert. The former physical education instructor and home care worker says it is easy to build relationships with the participants. She sees 15 Day Program participants on a regular basis, helping them maintain their balance or flexibility, providing ambulation therapy (walking with assisted devices) and working on rehabilitation with individuals recovering from an injury. Her exercise classes focus on upper body movements with upbeat music.

Deb looks for special ways in which she can connect with individuals. For example, Michael O. enjoys a special song that Deb sings while doing ambulatory therapy. They easily communicate with the proper technology and even a simple glance or a smile. she loves to see the progress participants have made after months of therapy.

"I'M WITH THESE INDIVIDUALS EVERY DAY, SOMETIMES MORE THAN MY OWN FAMILY. THEY ARE LIKE FAMILY TO ME."

Michele Kehling, RN

For Michele Kehling, RN at the Lifeworks Connections Program in West Roxbury, it is about taking a team approach while caring for and supporting the whole person, helping them be at their best mental, physical, and social/emotional health. It is important to be aware of an individual's baseline behavior or medical conditions to be alert to sudden changes.

Michele spends thirty hours at Connections and ten hours a week making visits, primarily virtual now with Lifeworks' Adult Family Care clients. She educate families about COVID-19 or the best diet to prevent heart disease. She has developed a bond with every participant over the past six years.

To Michele, nursing is so much more than administering medications and dealing with emergencies. "I take the time to really understand what they are going through, acknowledging their struggles, and helping them express themselves, by asking the right questions or just letting them chat during a one-on-one activity when they just need someone to talk to", says Michele.

"We joke around with each other. I call one of the participants "Pa". Another non-verbal participant is like a gentle teddy bear. You start to see what the participant is truly capable of and it makes you smile knowing the individual has gotten comfortable over time and become more relaxed."

Having a supportive and accommodating staff has made her job easier. "Since expanding our program, we have welcomed participants from ages 23-90, a more diverse clientele. Everyone brings their own personality and lightens up the mood." That is a plus when engaging participants in virtual and in-person activities like "Name That Tune," 'Jeopardy,' 'Arts and Entertainment', 'Friday Morning Club House', basketball, exercising and painting.

"Every nursing job has its challenges, but what's great about this job is you can do so many different things."

For more information our Connections program, visit our website.
www.lifeworksarc.org/connections

