

Innovations in Dementia Care



Every seven seconds someone in the U.S. is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Ohio Living is passionate about implementing innovative approaches to memory care and brain health for Ohioans who live with dementia. Here are a few of our newest initiatives.

The Montessori Method

Marie Montessori, an Italian physician and educator, developed the Montessori Method in 1897 for children with special needs — those whom many in society considered “unteachable.” At Ohio Living Llanfair, we're using the latest application of the Montessori Method for individuals with dementia who are too often viewed as “unreachable.”

The Montessori Method engages the five senses to tap into muscle memory; skills still present in people with Alzheimer's. Montessori tools help people maintain those skills, stimulating their brains for engagement and reconnection.

There is already evidence that the Montessori Method can reduce anxiety for individuals with dementia by providing engaging and rewarding activities in a supportive, thoughtfully prepared environment. Hallmarks of this environment include soothing lighting, easily accessible activity items, dedicated spaces for indoor and outdoor gardening, writing and typing stations, and bins with items to rummage through, sort and feel. The goal of all Montessori-based activities is to help seniors with dementia rediscover the world around them.

Donor Mary Ann Jacobs funded implementation of the Montessori program, including the initial consultations and assessments, staff trainings, and program tools. Her father lived in The Grove, Ohio Living Llanfair's skilled memory care unit. “My father received amazing care at The Grove before he passed in 2008. When I was approached with the idea of funding this innovative program that would help residents with dementia, I knew it was something he, too, would have benefited from.”

Her thoughtful gift allowed Ohio Living Llanfair to train its entire memory care team — housekeepers, activities, social services, nurses, nursing leadership, and nursing assistants. That's because in memory care, every person who interacts with a resident plays a critical role in keeping them engaged and connected. “After my father was diagnosed with dementia, he needed to constantly be engaged,” said Mary Ann. “He needed something that would help stimulate his brain and tune into the nostalgia he would experience. I believe the Montessori method would have done just that for him.”

“We strive to find ways for residents to have meaningful interactions,” said Jean Morgan, Corporate Manager of Memory Care with Ohio Living. “We find things residents respond to. We assess each resident to determine their baseline cognitive and physical functioning levels, and in addition we assess their overall quality of life. Once these assessments have taken place, we develop concrete measures for each resident. Our goal is to stop the downward spiral of dementia by maximizing opportunities for them to plateau. The hope is that people will begin to function at higher levels.”

Virtual Reality

Immersive training is taking center stage through virtual reality at Ohio Living Westminster-Thurber. Christine Bush, Director of Independent Living, describes the benefits of the training.

“Through simulations, staff and family caregivers are experiencing first-hand what it’s like to live with dementia and other life-altering conditions. They gain understanding and empathy, leading to more effective and compassionate care.”

Ohio Living Westminster-Thurber is using software and a virtual reality headset from

Embodied Labs, which provides first-person virtual simulations for Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease, Lewy Body Dementia, and more. These experiences allow our users to embody a person with a specific condition and learn what it’s like to walk in their shoes.

Christine shared that participants often get emotional. “For most of them, this is the first time they’ve truly understood what the person they care for is going through and how their behavior towards that person can change how they react.”

Jantrea Marlow, one of our most tenured LPNs in Westminster-Thurber’s Bridgewater memory care neighborhood, was teary-eyed at the end of the three Alzheimer’s training modules. “I’m really good at caregiving, but I don’t know if I’m as good at understanding our residents’ situations on a personal level...what it must feel like every day. This training helps me think about it much more deeply.”



Dementia Live®

Staff at numerous Ohio Living locations have been trained in Dementia Live, an experiential sensitivity training for people who care for individuals with dementia. This high impact experience immerses participants into the environment that a person dealing with dementia might face every day. Participants wear glasses that reduce peripheral vision and skew depth perception, headphones that create white noise, and gloves that impede the sense of touch. The result is a deeper understanding of what it’s like to

live with cognitive impairment and sensory change.

Several of our team members found the experience so meaningful that they have become trainers for the program, offering the experience to family members, healthcare workers, social services, and other caregivers who wish to connect more meaningfully with someone who has dementia.

The Future

Ohio Living will continue to explore new approaches in

dementia care. “We’ve convened a memory care task force to evaluate new methods and systems to provide clinical tools for staff as well as brain wellness programs for those receiving care,” said Laurence Gumina, Ohio Living CEO. “Memory care is a priority for Ohio Living. Ultimately, we plan to create unified, best-in-class services across the Ohio Living system. We’ll be sharing more about these plans as they develop.”