

# *Florida Lutheran Health Center*

*“In Christ’s Love, Everyone is Someone.”*

## ***THE LIFE ENRICHING GARDEN FOR ELDERERS***

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### **FINAL REPORT**

#### **Project Description**

Florida Lutheran Health Center applied for and received a grant from AHCA to bring to reality a vision we had of providing a safe and beautiful outdoor area for our residents to be able to enjoy nature out of doors in relative freedom. Florida Lutheran has been dedicated to the Eden Alternative process and for over five years. And we have become a model for others interested in “culture change” in the long-term care of elders.

There was an area in the rear of the facility that had some natural as well as some man-made elements for our residents to enjoy. But the space was not really user friendly. A water element was located near the large windows of each wing, but it was very difficult for staff to take residents outside due to the lack of walker and wheelchair friendly space. We began to dream of an enclosed area that would be easy for residents to negotiate using walkers, wheelchairs or canes. We envisioned covered areas to protect our elders from extremes of sun or wind that would yet allow them to enjoy the outdoors with minimal supervision. We did not want the garden area to appear to be another closed in space, rather we wanted it to give a feeling of freedom from institutionalization.

It was our vision to create a sanctuary for elders and staff to experience the cycles of life and renewal. Surrounded by natural sounds, smells and sights the human spirit is renewed. Since we are an Eden Alternative facility dedicated to the eradication of the three plagues of loneliness, helplessness and boredom the garden would serve as a vehicle to help eliminate these plagues.

As stated in our grant proposal our goals were:

- To eradicate the three plagues of loneliness, helplessness and boredom.
- To expand living area for elders, families and staff.

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- To provide an enhanced view for elders and staff by beautifying the rear entrance to the facility.
- And to provide a model of culture change to the wider community.

We envisioned the garden as a benefit to the elders, their families, friends and visitors as well as the staff. Other long-term care facilities interested in culture change comprised the third clientele group to benefit. We felt that the creation of this garden would inspire other facilities to begin to move in the direction of culture change in their own environments and to begin to look at poorly utilized spaces with a creative eye toward enhancing the lives of their own elders and staff.

On August 24, 2005, the Life Enhancing Garden at Florida Lutheran was dedicated by Dr. William Thomas the founder of the Eden Alternative and the author of several books on culture change and elder care. Barbara Dombrowski, representing the State of Florida Agency for Health Care Administration was also a featured speaker at the dedication ceremony. There were 25 persons representing twelve different long-term care facilities from Volusia and other counties at the dedication ceremony. Every long-term care facility, ALF and elder care entity located in Volusia County was invited to come and listen to one of the foremost speakers on culture change in the United States, free of charge and to come and learn how they too might be able to benefit from available grant monies provided by the State of Florida for creative ideas for culture change in long-term care. It was a little disappointing that of the 475 invitations sent out only 12 facilities sent representatives. There were about one hundred and fifty people in attendance for the dedication.

## **Benefits Realized to Date:**

**Goal #1** was to help to overcome the three plagues of loneliness, boredom and helplessness. There are two wonderful stories that illustrate how the Life Enriching Garden has done just that!

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## **Resident #1**

This resident suffered a fracture during a fall that made it necessary to remain bed ridden for a long period of recovery. The resident gradually began to improve and was able to be up in a special wheel chair for short periods of time. The resident was however not really responding well to treatments and the residents nutritional status also started to deteriorate. When construction on the Life Enriching Garden began the resident would spend a great deal of time sitting at the large window to the gardens watching the workers and the progress. As weather permitted the resident began going out into the garden in a wheel chair and spending time “sunning”. The residents health has dramatically improved and the resident takes every opportunity to show off a tan to other residents and visitor. This story is only one of many.

## **Resident #2**

This resident suffered strokes and was marginally communicative when coming to us. This resident too spends a great deal of time outside in the garden. The resident was very interested in the construction phase of the project. With the availability of access to outdoors the resident has become much more alert and reactive with the environment. The residents general health has also improved.

We present these two specific cases as representative of the benefit to all our residents. We have a fairly large group of our residents on Hospice and it is not uncommon to see many of them outside enjoying the fresh air and flowers and sunlight and general freedom from the reminders of their limitations.

**Goal # 2** was to expand living area for our elders, families and staff. This expansion has taken an area that was only minimally useful to a few residents with intensive caretaker assistance and made it easily accessible to residents with minimal caretaker assistance.

Employees have also benefited by having an area to go for meals and other rest periods. Most days both residents and staff are in the garden together. We are a learning facility

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and nursing students from Daytona Beach Community College have clinical experiences here. The students and their instructor often use the garden as a place to have their post-clinical conferences. Some advanced nursing students from the University of Central Florida also have clinical experiences here.

The Activity department has been able to plan and carry out many fun activities in the garden which have included children interacting with our elders. As an example of the many experiences that we have been able to offer our residents, families, friends and staff we have included some photographs of the ongoing usage of the garden area.

**Goal #3** was to provide an enhanced view for elders and staff by beautifying the rear entrance to the facility. This area was used as a loading area for delivery of supplies and trash removal. The Life Enhancing Garden was designed in such a way as to allow for continued delivery in the area through a large gated area. The entire garden is enclosed with a special fence that is unobtrusive and allows a feeling of openness while still providing security for our elders. The gate can be opened only by those who have been instructed in its use. The enclosure contains special flowers that are known to attract butterflies. There are bird feeders, water elements, a gas barbecue grill and a shaded gazebo as well as other benches and chairs that make this a focal point now for our elders. There is also a special area set aside for meditation. We have been able to provide an enhanced quality of life for our elders that was not possible before the development of this garden area. The DeLand Chamber of Commerce awarded Florida Lutheran Health Center the Beautification Award for the month of December 2005.

**Goal #4** was to provide a model for “culture change” to the wider community. Florida Lutheran Health Center continues to attract administrators and directors of nursing services and social workers from other facilities throughout the area who come to see first hand how this facility has been able to implement and maintain the ideals of culture

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change promulgated by organizations like the Pioneer Network, the Eden Alternative and our own Christian Communities of Care programs.

This Life Enriching Garden should continue to provide a safe place for our elders to interact with nature, family and friends for many years to come.