



Using “The Morning Light Way” To Make Senior Housing Choices

Like many seniors who have downsized out of the familiar, Alice appeared frustrated a bit when she first arrived at the brand-new Pennwood Place in 2011. Although she was extremely happy at the upkeep and safe surroundings, she felt like something was missing.



That was before Pennwood Place became the hub for “*The Morning Light Way*.” With apologies to Butler basketball which invented “The Butler Way”, Morning Light likewise adheres to basic tenets for the senior community it oversees in Indianapolis. Do those guidelines mean anything? As someone once said, go ask Alice. “I’ve been here almost five years,” she recently confided, “and I wouldn’t think of living anywhere else.”

The senior care industry has also taken notice. Moynahan Williams is one of Indiana’s premier property management firms for seniors and low income residents. It works with Morning Light to manage Pennwood. “The main difference we have seen displayed by Morning Light, compared to other service providers, is their complete dedication to serve their populations and carry out the mission they have promised to provide,” says Mike Williams, a Moynahan Williams Vice President. Similarly, as a Federal Home Loan Bank of Indianapolis Vice President, MaryBeth Wott has helped finance hundreds of projects. Morning Light stands out regardless. “I am so impressed with the empowerment initiatives at Pennwood that assist residents with their health and financial stability.”

By reading this white paper you are invited to use *The Morning Light Way* as a guide when seeking the next housing options for your loved ones. It’s almost a checklist of sorts of what families should search for, *ask* for, and expect. It is also a refresher for other facilities that may have forgotten that stressing the basics solidifies the overall resident experience.



The Morning Light Way Hits

The Target

The nationally-known *Mather Lifeways Institute on Aging* recently surveyed 600 senior living organizations in 15 states and uncovered five senior living trends. As Alice can attest to, the most prominent trend was that consumers want choice and value. Mather states “this includes customized programs, and access to on-demand services and engaging activities.”¹ As you read about *The Morning Light Way*, you will notice that it meets this trend head on, providing guidelines for families to consider when relocating a loved one into senior living. Four “must dos” from your senior living provider staff follow.



Step 1: Do They Listen? Morning Light has relied on a Tenants Advisory Council, complete with bylaws, to address this issue. Every other month the meeting puts Morning Light management directly in front of residents, who bring concerns such as parking, grounds maintenance, and every day activities to the forefront. The goal is to have these discussions become so appreciated and valuable that the formal structure is no longer needed. The gatherings can evolve into Tenant Meetings, becoming another social activity with a communications focus.

This face to face aspect is extremely valuable because senior residents come from a generation that communicates in that manner. Most still do not have internet access. Morning

Light’s believes a willingness to listen is crucial for the other three steps that follow.

¹ www.matherlifewaysinstituteonaging.com



Step 2: Do They Act? Once management listens, *something* has to happen. So acting upon what was heard is the next crucial step in developing “community feel” and lending credibility to this ongoing relationship. Consider these real life issues and Morning Light solutions. *More handicapped access needed?* It just took a few new parking signs. *Like to celebrate birthdays?* A monthly Birthdays & Bingo event was created. *Take us to a game?* A few Morning Light Board members were willing to donate pro basketball tickets which also happened to be part of a larger Morning Light promotion.

As with any new relationship a “quick fix” is a crucial component to this second step. For Morning Light it was establishing an exercise room that was open during the week. Prior to Morning Light’s arrival, the equipment lay dormant in a large room that was not conducive to a regular workout schedule. Morning Light proactively solved the problem by moving the equipment to a little used conference room. It also instituted insurance checklist forms to limit liability. The key was regarding “Act” as a positive step, and not just as an additional expense.



Step 3: Do They Engage? In any senior community there will be a core group that seems to appreciate every activity. The challenge is to engage most of the residents on some level, taking into account ethnic backgrounds, life experiences, physical condition, and interests. The key to engagement is to expect one participant and be happy when two show up. A senior or his/her family should not be surprised when a small fee is charged. In fact, it should be viewed as a positive or a proven way to ensure buy in. After all, that’s where the term “buy in” originated!

Accountability is also another underappreciated aspect of engaging residents in activities and in helping to solve facility issues. For example: In many facilities, after-hours building access becomes a problem as unfamiliar people are seen in hallways. Morning Light addressed this through Tenant meeting discussions where residents realized that they were causing some of the problem by simply not telling potential visitors that they had to be expected, or had to be buzzed in, by a resident. The concept that “my behavior can help solve everyone’s problem” soon resolved the issue.

Step 4: Do They Inform? This Step leads back to Step One, which becomes a cycle of continuity that forms “community feel.” The typical Morning Light communication plan includes monthly and weekly flyers; predictable events, such as Birthdays & Bingo on the fourth Wednesdays of every month; and the aforementioned Tenant meetings. Just like a boss, seniors don’t like surprises. They must be trusted with knowing when an issue cannot be quickly solved, or even when rent must be increased.





Morning Light also takes pride in humanizing management which helps reinforce the relationship on a different level. Management cooks and prepares event food. They call out the bingo numbers and explain how they purchased the items given to the winners. When they miss a name or make an obvious mistake, they admit it and maybe even use it as a basis for an ongoing inside joke. What better defines “community feel” than the ability to know your neighbor and feel comfortable with them?

The Results

Remember the Alice who arrived at Pennwood several years ago and the Alice who lives there now? Last year she participated in computer classes, wellness seminars, grocery trips, and Birthdays & Bingo. She also used the exercise room because “It keeps me healthy and keeps my brain active.”

She is not alone. *The Morning Light Way* generated 356 hours of activities for the 40 Pennwood residents in 2015! The total was “0 hours” just two years earlier. As a Morning Light partner, Mike Williams appreciates the effort. “Morning Light jumps in with both feet and makes a real difference in the lives of residents.”

Should *you* expect a similar effort from those taking care of someone you love as she /he ages? Does facility management Listen, Act, Engage, and Inform? Based on *The Morning Light Way*, the two answers must be a resounding “Yes!”

Contact Us To Learn More

Morning Light operates the 37 unit Pennwood Place for seniors, as well as the 12 unit Abbie Hunt Bryce Home, for the terminally ill who have no other place to live out their lives. We would love to share more about our work and would be happy to talk with you about how you can help. Call 218 7554 ext. 101 or send Executive Director Tom Fodor an email at tfodor@morninglightinc.org.

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Morning Light, Inc. fosters nonprofit community services and programs in central Indiana for the terminally ill, seniors, and families of limited means in need of health, wellness or end of life care.