

the\_reading2connect\_story

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SUSAN OSTROWSKI: Most people in nursing homes are living socially and intellectually barren lives. We've developed a program that does not rely on the staff, but instead brings out the natural qualities of older adults, like humor and leadership and empathy for their peers. And it all begins with a book

FIRST READER: To dance a salsa, a couple takes steps to the front and to the back for many turns and fast movements.

SECOND READER: When people hear its rhythm, they begin to dance.

JOHN JOHL: I got into a discussion about people that seemed to be sitting and doing nothing all day. It didn't seem right. I found out Dr. Dixon and Susan Ostrowski had developed a program in which they asked the question, can people with dementia read?

DR. PETER S. DIXON: At the time we developed this program, it wasn't clear that people with dementia could read. And once we got one person to

read, a staff member was sitting beside them, or one of us was, and we were overjoyed. But it wasn't until my partner, Susan, put two people together with a book and then stepped back. And that's where Reading2Connect really took off.

OSTROWSKI: It became very clear to me, we could do so much with these people if we could capitalize on their ability to read. We've created this adapted material, a book that's set for them. Then we engineer the situation by setting up the book so that it's propped up. We've got them really close together. We've made sure there's good lighting, we made sure there's minimal distractions, and we trained staff about a gentle, indirect, discreet, facilitative approach.

JOHL: But in addition to reading, they're talking to each other, and they're sharing memories. And what this is doing is opening up a window for these people who, in my mind, have been living in isolation.

JOHN SADEK: I come, and I might be here an hour, and there might be five minutes of discussion. She had the book, bing, she was off talking. I mean and... Otherwise, I'd be here an hour and be very little said. And one of our sons said, "That's mom. She's doing her thing."

BONNIE NYMAN: It triggers some of the old-time memories for her. The time that

I saw her with the book of answering the questions, filling in the blanks on the old sayings, and she knew them all. Wow. And here we think, okay, she's blind, she's deaf, she's got dementia. Reminds me, there's still a person in there. My mom is... My mom is still here.

DIXON: They are overjoyed to see mom or dad or my wife or my husband, who is responding to them, who is excited about something. It's unlike any prescription. It's unlike any treatment for dementia. To watch somebody with one of these books wake up and start to interact with a book, and then interact with other people, and they haven't done that in months and months and months, is a big deal.

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