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### Interacting with Elders

The Four-Way Test asks you to question when making a decision, is this true? Is it fair? Will it build goodwill? And is it beneficial? This can be applied both to everyday decisions and also big concepts. The point is to consider if you are making a good decision or positive impact. One example of making a positive impact in accordance with the Four-Way Test is when in second grade, my teacher had our class travel to a nursing home every other week to interact with the residents. This was extremely beneficial for both parties which leads me to believe that if more elementary schools and nursing homes had programs where kids could come spend time with the residents, it would leave a positive impact on both generations.

The first question of the Four-Way Test is “is it the truth?” The truth here is that everyone will grow old, whether we want to or not. For some, this will mean ending up in a nursing home or care facility. The National Library of Medicine surveyed many nursing homes in 2019 by administering tests and questionnaires. They found that unfortunately, 40% of nursing home residents experience loneliness; which directly correlates to a decrease in quality of life. Additionally, the National Institutes of Health found that over 60% of residents do not get visits from family or friends, whether they are too busy, too far away, or a multitude of other reasons. While this is a sad truth, there are ways we can help. Once someone is put into a nursing home, it is likely to be their home until they pass away, so shouldn't we try to make living in a nursing home as enjoyable as possible? When residents are able to interact with the kids, those feelings

of loneliness are momentarily decreased. Residents we were with often shared that we reminded them so much of their own kids. While that is not the same as having their own children visit, I would argue it is better than nothing.

The second question is “is it fair to all concerned?” One way to interpret this question is in the literal sense: does everyone have equal opportunity? In order for this idea to be fair, every resident should be given equal opportunity to participate because without it, a socialization opportunity is taken away from those residents who are not included. I remember during one visit, the resident I was paired with chose not to participate and sat out of our activities. While she did not participate, she still had the opportunity to if she wanted. The other way to interpret this question is: is this fair treatment? I believe the answer here is yes. Residents in nursing homes greatly benefit from having social interaction. Attention and connections are very beneficial to the mental health of elderly people. Not to mention, humans are social creatures. People need other people. Providing residents with an opportunity to connect with other people and experience a form of social interaction in a place where they may not receive much is absolutely fair treatment in my opinion.

“Will it build goodwill and friendships?” is the third question. This question was the most obvious ‘yes’ for me. I know from personal experience alone that having children visit nursing homes absolutely builds goodwill and better relationships. We always referred to our residents as friends, which is overall a more endearing term than ‘resident.’ Maybe it was not the same kind of friendship as one between two 8 year olds, but friendship can come in many different forms. I always looked forward to every other Tuesday when we got to go make crafts and talk to our older friends. Additionally, everyone in that room walked away with positive feelings and emotions. One of my most prominent memories was when we performed at a Christmas concert.

We decorated the room with paper decorations that we had made earlier with our older friends, and then we lined up and sang a number of Christmas carols. Every single resident had a huge smile on their face. They sang along with us and even danced as they were able. I also left with a huge smile on my face just knowing that we made all of our older friends so happy. The relationships built in that room are ones that I will never forget.

Finally, the fourth part of the Four-Way Test, “is it beneficial to all concerned?” My answer again is absolutely. Both groups involved can benefit in multiple ways. First, the kids can learn social skills, respect, empathy, and understanding. By talking with the residents, kids can learn conversational skills and also have an outlet to tell many of their stories to. Additionally, kids can learn respect and empathy by being around older people who may not be able bodied, or have health conditions kids are not used to being around. This both normalizes aging in the eyes of kids and allows them to begin developing practical skills to help people who have differing abilities. The same is true for the older generation. Socialization can have multiple benefits for the residents. First, they are also provided with an outlet to share their stories and memories. Second, having people visit them decreases loneliness and increases positive feelings. There are positive effects for both generations which leads me to believe that having children and elderly people interact is very beneficial for all those concerned.

My experiences of traveling to a nursing home to make crafts, talk, and interact with the residents left lasting impressions on my life. I know first hand how beneficial this opportunity was to my life, and I know it positively impacted the residents as well. For these reasons, I think it would be a great idea for schools to work with nursing homes on a more frequent basis for the benefit of both generations. Having youth develop connections with the elderly is a great example of something that passes the four-way test.

Works Cited

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