

# Life Station 'Boutique' at Summer House at Villa Gardens Supports Resident Engagement

After Tanya Mazzolini set up a shelf with some knickknacks in one of the common areas inside Summer House at Villa Gardens, the community's memory care residences, she was surprised to hear a resident tell another resident ... "Let's go shopping!" It suddenly occurred to Tanya, the Summer House manager, to set up a "store," where residents could select items and "live out" this shopping experience.



*Summer House at Villa Gardens Life Station boutique*

The "boutique" at Summer House is modeled after a "life station," a unique tool used in memory care communities, meant to spark memories and create simple moments of joy for residents. They are designed to be interactive - encouraging residents to touch, feel, use and share the items that make up each life station.

Located in the activity room since January 2021, the life station "boutique" is the first of its kind at Summer House at Villa Gardens. To support engagement and independence, residents can stop by the boutique any time and take various comfort and personal items including stuffed animals, dolls, jewelry, books, packets of tissues, and fidget spinners. "This is helpful when residents are wandering or feel restless at night; staff can offer them an item from the boutique to ease agitation," Tanya said.

The life station model in memory care is for older adults with Alzheimer's and related dementias, who sometimes get "stuck" on either a facet of their life or memory of a task they did frequently e.g. getting the kids ready for school, getting ready for work, or going shopping. Creating places for residents to "complete the task" and live out their experience can be extremely therapeutic. It can also spark memories that create moments of happiness.

"Life stations are a tried-and-true form of engagement," added Tanya. "These interactive environments provide a feeling of independence to residents in a safe space without overwhelming them."



*Resident shops at Life Station boutique*

The boutique will continue to evolve as the needs of Summer House residents change. “We will add more life stations,” Tanya said. “I am currently working on a desk/office life station with files and binders. Workstations are particularly successful for those who spent so much of their lives working and building their career. These individuals often feel more comfortable when working.”

As suggested by a resident, there is also a caterpillar habitat in the boutique. The caterpillars are part of the Butterfly Project at Villa Gardens, in which residents care for caterpillars and check on their progress. Once the butterflies have all emerged, they plan to celebrate with a safe release party.

“Resident engagement is integral to memory care,” Tanya said. “As dementia takes hold, it diminishes the ability to interact not just cognitively but socially. Creating life stations are just one way Summer House at Villa Gardens encourages resident engagement to enhance our residents’ wellbeing and overall quality of life.”