

Nominee: Lucy Gonzales

Title: Activity Assistant

Place of Employment: Amazing Place

Name of Nominator: Diana Hernandez

Relationship to Nominee: Supervisor

It is with great pleasure that I nominate Lucy Gonzales for the 2011 Ready For Life Award. As an Activity Assistant of Amazing Place, Lucy leads activities for older adults with mild to moderate memory loss. She has served at Amazing Place for over a year and worked with older adults for over ten years. Participant comfort, care, safety and ensuring participants benefit from the activity program is Lucy's top priority. Her warmth, compassion for the participants and professionalism make Amazing Place a more enjoyable environment and a better place for participants to receive memory care, wellness and fellowship.

Many participants initially begin at Amazing Place in a socially disengaged state due to the progression of their dementia. Lucy, however, takes each new participant under her wing and actively works together with staff to ensure that all participants are engaged in the activity program. She is constantly willing to adapt activities each and every day to ensure programs are meaningful and enjoyable to participants. This is a great attribute as often times activities that appeal to a participant one day may not interest them the next day. Lucy does not allow herself to become discouraged by the participants' inconsistency. She views each of our 60 participants as an individual, and is always respectful in asking questions or making suggestions to enhance the care or comfort of the participant.

She often suggests methods to cater the activity program to each participant. Several examples include decorating for the Halloween party to provide an atmosphere that was fun for participants, introducing the Red Hat Society to improve and add direction to the women's group and playing games like Nintendo Wii to appeal to our steadily growing baby boomer population.

Lucy also recently designed a facial and beauty program to foster greater self-esteem and quality of life for our women's group. This was inspired through a discussion regarding beauty during which some of the women expressed facials would be a program they would enjoy. Lucy took the initiative to list the supplies needed as well as seeking music that would create a relaxing atmosphere. The program was and continues to be a great success thanks to Lucy's dedication to each participant!

Working with those suffering from dementia can be challenging, especially as the disease progresses. Lucy experiences pressure and occasionally hurtful comments from participants, who many times are unable to control these bouts of agitation. Lucy, however, continues to serve such participants joyfully and many times will sit or joke with the participant until he or she even forgets the subject of his or her agitation. Often, Lucy's intelligence and experience enable her to anticipate many problems and be

prepared to deal with them before they happen, or to respond instantly without the need for detailed instruction. Several times she noticed participants who were acting in an unusual fashion, which she immediately reported to the nurse. Recently, one participant appeared to be sleeping, but Lucy's intuition alerted her that something was amiss. In notifying the nurse, it was revealed that the participant was having a stroke! Without Lucy's keen observation, this participant may have been unable to function or even dead. Her quick action has saved many lives and inspires other staff to take such loving notice of all participants.

An additional dimension of Lucy's commitment to excellence is her view that every staff member, volunteer and participant has strengths which make Amazing Place such a strong organization and a kind and caring atmosphere. She is able to act as both a leader and a follower and often encourages other staff and participants to lead or assist with programs. Her support and nurturing of the participants' strengths allows for many higher functioning participants to benefit from the program from leading an activity that highlights his or her strengths. This fosters self-esteem in the participants as many participants are discouraged by their disability to perform other activities they once enjoyed. Lucy takes the time to assess each participant's strengths and weaknesses, and she possesses the amazing ability to know exactly how much to challenge each participant without overwhelming them.

Lucy's consistent calm demeanor mollifies all from the participant concerned about the method they will return home (a common worry of many of our participants especially as their dementia progresses) to an agitated participant ready to strike another over a game of dominos. Many participants have expressed that her loving and joyful attentiveness to them makes the activity program feel incredibly special. Each staff member also attests to the many outstanding characteristics Lucy displays. Her constant willingness to go above and beyond to do whatever it takes to benefit the participants plays a large role in making our activity program the success it is. On behalf of everyone who has benefitted from her service and positive example, I nominate Lucy Gonzales for the 2011 Ready For Life Award!