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# St. Anne's Mead helps enrich with gardening

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SOUTHFIELD - Every Monday, a group of residents at **St**. **Anne's** Mead looks forward to going outside and getting their hands dirty. These seniors are maintaining an organic vegetable garden they created themselves through a horticultural therapy program that aims to stimulate and soothe brains afflicted with various stages of dementia.

It's part of the new life enrichment program, which focuses on memory care, a product of the assisted living and nursing care center that was founded 45 years ago by the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan. **St**. **Anne's** is the only facility in Michigan to offer a nationally recognized life enrichment program, according to Amy Beltz, marketing and administration coordinator at the facility.

"Our life enrichment program is activity that focuses on the parts of the brain that are working, instead of the parts that are not," she said. "To minimize agitation and frustration commonly associated with dementia and Alzheimer's, we ensure that our residents experience purpose, pleasure and peace with all of their activities. When they complete an activity that they recalled how to perform and they feel success in their contribution, they do get purpose, pleasure and peace from it." For example, someone who suffers from dementia or Alzheimer's disease might not remember the names of their children, but they might remember how to fold towels.

"We'll have them fold or sort towels and they'll feel like they accomplished something and contributed something," Beltz said. "And it's something they know how to do, so they won't feel frustrated that they couldn't remember. We have many stations like that, for men and for women, to have them experience success with their day." The gardening project is carried out in such a way that embraces the positive aspects of the activity rather than focusing on the work it requires.

"I don't even think they realize they are doing something to stimulate their brain or body - to them it is just plain old fun," Beltz said.

**St**. **Anne's** Mead teamed up with master gardener Gail Lutzky of White Lake Township for the program.

"Gardening is therapeutic," Lutzky said. "It does wonderful things to your soul, your mind and your body." Lutzky said the activity is beneficial to the seniors not just because they're stimulating the muscles in their body and their mind, but also because they're being social and talking and sharing.

"I'm a good listener when it comes to seniors," she said. "We talk about anything and everything. It's just a lot of fun, and everyone has a good time." The seniors at **St**. **Anne's** planted tomatoes, lettuce, broccoli, peppers and cauliflower using raised garden beds that were built by a local Boy Scout troop a few years back and donated to the facility.

"Our raised garden boxes do make it easier for them to reach and work safely, but the movement involved is not something they do every day, so it keeps them physically working and promotes balance and coordination," Beltz said. "Gardening is also an activity that most, if not all, of our residents have done in the past when they lived at home. They easily can recall the actions required to produce a successful garden through their procedural memory, which is still intact. Continuing to exercise the brain and the body prolongs the health of both." The seniors will be involved with every aspect of the garden, from prepping the dirt and planting the seeds to everyday maintenance and watering to harvesting and dining on the fruits of their labor.

"It's a whole season of growing," Lutzky said. "And they can't get enough of it. It's a lot of fun." "They get very excited when they see the garden is producing and starting to grow," Beltz added. "And they can't wait for gardening day.

They get outside, they get fresh air, they feel success and accomplishment - they take pride in taking care of the garden." **St**. **Anne's** Mead is located at 16106 W. 12 Mile Road in Southfield. For more information, visit www.stannesmead. org or call (248) 557-1221.