

How Carmen Found Her Groove with Adult Day's Person-Centered Programming

Every Tuesday and Thursday morning, Carmen pulls into the Easterseals parking lot in Manchester, loud music blaring from her car stereo to signal her arrival. “My kids say, ‘I know you’re coming from two blocks away, Mama,’” Carmen says. So do her friends at Adult Day.

Carmen has been attending the program since February 2020. But it was last fall when she really found her groove there.

Carmen, a native of Puerto Rico, is the only one in her group who speaks Spanish. Easterseals staff thought that offering Carmen the opportunity to incorporate her culture and language into programming might make her feel more connected. “We thought perhaps she might like to teach others in the program to learn Spanish,” says Sue Reynolds, director of Manchester Adult Day. “As a person-centered program, we try as much as possible to offer activities that reflect the likes and interests of current participants.”

One staff member, Val, took on coordinating the classes with Carmen. The two frequently communicate over email to finalize content and lesson plans. It’s been a positive experience for both them and the six Adult Day participants who attend Carmen’s 45-minute class every week.

Class content covers Spanish vocabulary, food, music, and culture and reflects Carmen’s passion for music and dancing.

The warm relationship between Val and Carmen is evident as they exchange jokes



Val, (left) Adult Day Program Assistant/ Licensed Nursing Assistant, poses with Carmen, Adult Day participant.

and banter like close friends. Val, who is learning along with the rest of the class, jokes that sometimes Carmen takes her teaching responsibilities a little too seriously. “When she said there would be a mid-term, I almost walked out,” Val says with a laugh.

Val, who has worked for the Adult Day program as a Program Assistant/Licensed Nursing Assistant for almost a year, says it



Carmen, far left, poses with her class and Val, far right.

has been “the best experience of my life. I love going to work every day.” What is so remarkable about Easterseals to her is that “the people who work here live the mission.” Since she started teaching, Carmen’s enthusiasm for attending Adult Day has picked up, and so has her mood. “Being in the program gives me a reason to get up, get dressed, get out. Otherwise, I’d be homebound,” Carmen says. She considers fellow attendees and the staff like family.

“You can see the sense of pride Carmen feels in sharing her culture,” Sue says. “Organizing and teaching the classes helps with her cognitive ability and allows her to use different areas of her brain. It gives her purpose and helps her maintain her independence. She comments all

the time with tears in her eyes how much this program means to her and that she can share her culture.”

In addition to hosting her Spanish class, Carmen enjoys word games, bowling, and chair exercise classes set to Motown tunes. “I see how committed the staff is to seeing people involved,” she says. “That’s what Easterseals is about for me.”