

A Year in the Life of a Family Council

Apple Grove (AG) is a medium long-term care home in a community 30 minutes from a Large City in Ontario. Before COVID-19, the AG Family Council was highly active with monthly meetings, planning events to welcome new residents/families, fundraising to purchase new gazebo for the courtyard and baking treats for staff appreciation. They had an excellent working relationship with the Home Administrator and their Staff Assistant who worked under the guidance of the Council to support the implementation of their projects.

COVID-19 hit the home hard with severe outbreaks during the 1st and 2nd waves, triggering a high degree of turnover in residents and staff. The Administrator opted for early retirement and Staff Assistant has moved on to another home.

While the initial AGFC remained active shifting from in-person to virtual meetings, over the last 6 months they have experienced growing tension between members. The parent of the current Chair passed away and they are no longer able to enter the home. This creates challenges for recruitment and in building relationships with family/friends of new residents. Since their parent passed away, they have been highly critical of any communication they receive from the new Administrator.

As COVID-19 restrictions ease in the community, the Chair wants everything to go back to the way they were before and is unwilling to accept the 'new normal'. They don't see Hybrid meetings as something that is worth exploring. They want all communication between the Council and the Home to go through them, however members of the current AGFC are frustrated the Chair ignores shared issues raised during meetings. Members of the AGFC are frustrated with the amount of time wasted on complaints during meetings, with the same thing over and over.

Frustrated with the overwhelming negative environment of the current AGFC, a group of 10 families have opted to form their own Council. They have worked to create a new terms of reference to help them support the needs of ALL who want to be engaged on the new AGFC. They have started to explore the expectations about what meeting in person would look like (masking, vaccination, location) and how to balance those who can attend in person, while creating opportunities for virtual participation in a meeting.

While they have established a strong working relationship with home Staff, they are unable to develop a working relationship with the old/original AGFC who refuse any invitation to join their meetings.



Discussion Questions

1. Which meeting option should the AGFC implement?
2. What would you do if you were the AGFC?
3. Which recruitment strategies would work best for the AGFC?
4. What resources are available to support the AGFC during the storming stage?
5. How can the AGFC avoid the 'complaint trap' during a meeting?