

2026 MNSWAP Fall Conference

Session Descriptions

Wednesday October 7th

Opening Session: Leading the Way: Best Practices for Today's Activity Directors Presented by a Panel of Activity Professionals Facilitated by MNSWAP Board Members

This panel will consist of 3 seasoned professionals with close to 100 years of combined practice in Activity programming, education and leadership.

Each panel member will share a best practice for program content and management. The rest of session will be an open forum with questions from the audience monitored by a MNSWAP Board member

Vendor Spotlight

Facilitated by Stacie Oakland

Vendors are excited to be a part of our 2026 conference, and ready to share new resources, ideas and materials. This session will highlight some of MNSWAP's most dedicated vendors with a quick review of their current products. They will describe the therapeutic use of their products and how to incorporate them into your activity programs. This session will be followed by the Vendor Grand Opening where you can visit each booth and learn more about their products and services.

Thursday October 8th

Opening Keynote: Spark Your ARRC: Light it Up for those you Seve Speaker Sarah Ciavarri

Sarah Ciavarri and her husband built their own home. The fancy term for this is “owner-builders.” That meant from start to finish she had a saw, hammer, screw driver, paintbrush, or a bag of concrete in her hands at all times. As Sarah and her husband spent days wiring their house her mind wandered to the idea of staying grounded – important in an electrical run and important in life. Based on these insights, the concept of Spark Your **ARRC** emerged, **Awareness, Regulate, Reinvent, and Connect** participants will learn how leadership energy flows, when it leaks, and how to keep it moving. Each session Sarah presents is especially designed for each audience, she is excited to share her creativity and knowledge with Activity Professionals.

Regulation Translation

Speaker Tia Hovatter

Ever feel like regulations are written in a foreign language? You are not alone! Tia will translate the federal activity regulations and the intent of those regulations into understandable activity practice. She will help participants incorporate and monitor the regulations as part of their Quality processes in their activity departments.

Resident Council Meeting Madness

Speaker Tia Hovatter

In this session participants will learn the key principles and techniques for conducting Resident Council meetings that are both inclusive and effective. This includes learning strategies to address resident complaints, demands, and bullying while ensuring the meeting stays on track and fosters a positive and collaborative atmosphere.

Dementia Programming Back to the Future

Speaker Tia Hovatter

This session two key principles of meaningful engagement for residents with dementia will be explored. Understanding dementia resident's life stories, and enhancing person-centered care. Participants will learn how to tailor their interactions and care approaches, fostering a deeper sense of connection and dignity for those living with dementia.

From Loneliness to Belonging: The Java Project

Speaker Dr. Kristine Theurer

Loneliness is affecting a majority of older adults in care, despite best efforts of activity professionals. The Java Project consists of 3 standardized evidence-based peer support and mentoring groups facilitated by staff. This project has been implemented in over 2500 communities in Canada and the United States. Residents described the importance of their shared experiences as bringing meaning and importance back into their lives. Attendees of this session experience a live peer support meeting and leave with a take-away strategy on how to implement peer support and mentoring within their organizations.

Living Well: Mental Health Through Therapeutic Activities

Speaker Nancy Richards

Explore the unique strengths and desires of folks living with Mental Illness and how Activity Services support a person's wellness and recovery plan. This session shares, and demonstrates field tested activities that are highly adaptable and achievable with the goal being to design a living environment which minimizes potential barriers to activity participation and cultivates protective factors for wellbeing.

Imagine! Cultivating Life Enrichment Through a Lens of Creativity

Speaker Nancy Richards

Learn the vital role imagination plays in our personal development, and innovation in the workplace. This immersive session explores imagination through a series of "What If" activities designed to re-ignite curiosity and unleash expansive thinking. Albert Einstein said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge." Together, lets ignite and amplify Life Enrichment Services forward.

Play Matters

Speaker Nancy Richards

Specific, intentional movement can heal, maintain or strengthen. Cognitive games stimulate the brain, mobilize problem solving reasoning, humor, social manners and affirm individuals and/or aids in community cohesion. Play, which releases stress, is often the gateway to creativity. Explore the power and benefits of play across the lifespan, identify your play personality, strengthen communication and engagement in your community.

Doubling Activities and Personalization with YouTube

Speaker Jenny Barlow

In this session participants will learn how to leverage YouTube Premium to transform leisure programming for older adults, particularly those living with dementia. This presentation will cover practical, cost-effective strategies for creating and sharing customized video playlists that support both group curriculums and personalized interventions. Attendees will leave with a clear understanding of how this simple technology can be used to double activity offering, foster a more person-centered approach to care and empower resident to connect with their personal histories and interests.

(Presented as a repeat session on Friday morning also)³

Friday October 9th

The HAPPY concept: Unleashing the Power of Resident Activity Programming

Speaker Tia Hovatter

In this engaging conference presentation, we will explore the revolutionary HAPPY concept and its profound impact on senior living communities. The HAPPY concept is based on the understanding that resident activity programs play a pivotal role in fostering happiness among residents. Happy residents, in turn, positively influence the survey processes, resulting in enhanced satisfaction for surveyors, residents, families and staff.

Finding Wonder at the Intersection of Nature and Poetry

Speaker Nancy Richards

Nature heals, soothes, connects, and restores calling us to receive these good “gifts”. Studies show people are less depressed after going for a walk outside, blood pressure lowers viewing forest landscapes, and rates of healing increase when facing a window instead of a wall. Come explore color and light, texture, and patterns in nature and reconnect as we become “keen observers” of the earth. This session will share several practical nature and poetry projects for exploration and tips to support wellness for residents and yourself.

Closing Session – Celebrating Creativity with Excellence-

Presented by the MNSWAP Board and Members

This session will give participants the opportunity to learn about and participate in mini group sessions in a round robin type sequence. A session might be a new game idea, ideas for managing staff or volunteers, sharing a calendar method or special program. Participants will go home with hands-on ideas and resources to use in their daily program planning or department management. Join us for this fun and engaging way to end our conference

Speaker Bio's



Speaker ~ Sarah Ciavarri

Sarah Ciavarri, is president of Level Up Leadership, LLC, a coaching, leadership consulting, and curriculum design firm, also the author of *Finding Our Way to the TRUTH: Seven Lies Leaders Believe and How to Let Them Go*. She completed her Master of Divinity as a Presidential Scholar at Luther Seminary and concluded her tenure as Vice President of Spiritual Life for a senior healthcare organization.



Speaker ~ Tia Hovatter

Tia is the President & CEO of Health Consultants Plus, Inc. Tia has over 25 years of experience in long-term care providing education, regulatory compliance as well as management services. She is nationally recognized keynote speaker specializing in activities, recreation and dementia, she is dedicated to improving care quality and enhancing the lives of older adults.



Speaker ~ Kristine Theurer

Dr. Kristine Theurer is a researcher who is pioneering the use of peer support mentoring programs, including music groups and memory care groups to fight loneliness in long term care settings. She has a MA degree in gerontology from Simon Foster University and a PhD from the University of British Columbia. Java Programs was launched in 2011 and is going strong in both Canada and the United States.



Speaker ~ Nancy Richards

Nancy is a Pennsylvania native who lives in a small walkable town with plenty of wonder to explore. Nancy promotes the benefits of purpose, exploration and play, elements of human wellness. A graduate of Wesley College with an emphasis on Gerontology. Nancy speaks nationally, designs, and delivers education-based products, including 2 sensory activity engagement workbooks and currently is a member of the NAAP Education Council.



Speaker ~ Jenny Barlow

Jenny is an Activity Professional with years of experience and special interest in how technology can not only increase your activity calendar, services and program depth, but also bring community and innovation to your residents and community