

BINGO

Debbie Miller, RN

We play Bingo every Friday. We play Bingo every Friday *even though* it's a stereotypical activity. When I first became the Program Manager for the adult day center where I work, I remember another Activity Director telling me proudly, "We *never* play bingo."

"Uh-oh," I thought, as I regretfully placed the Bingo game in the dark recesses of a storage closet. After all, I wanted to be as creative and inspiring as my cohorts, and Bingo seemed to be *out*.

Then one day, an entertainer didn't make his scheduled appearance. Frantically, I rushed to the closet for something, anything, to make the afternoon activity session lively and entertaining. There sat the dusty Bingo box in a corner. I didn't hesitate; I pulled it right out and announced Friday Bingo would begin in five minutes. The response was overwhelming! We had a full house, and everybody seemed to enjoy themselves.

I began to take a look at bingo, a good, long look. Should Bingo be banished from the calendar, only to be brought out like a rare jewel at a cocktail party? Or does it have a rightful place on the calendar as a regularly scheduled activity? What benefit does Bingo have for older adults? (Besides being an exceptionally easy activity for the staff to run.)

Right away, I noticed people *like* Bingo. It is played in the community on a regular basis. There's even a local bingo newspaper publication in our community. So, why shouldn't people continue to enjoy an activity that they have enjoyed in the past?

I noticed even better, bigger benefits to my impromptu Bingo game that afternoon. People who had to be coaxed to interact with others came right in for that Bingo game. The room was full, and people interacted with each other. It didn't matter if someone was skilled at arts and crafts or excellent at trivia. Everybody was of equal status at Bingo because it is based on luck, not skill.

Many games designed or adapted for older adults are based on luck (i.e., dice games, some card games), but Bingo is a game most people have a history with. It's safe and familiar. It's a reminder of happy times shared with family and friends and other successful social occasions.

Bingo doesn't stop there. It's the vehicle for lots of interaction, and it provides people with chances to help each other. Countless times since that first Bingo game, I have seen one neighbor helping another, whether to locate the correct number on the board, push a chip into place, help clear the card at the end of the game, or pick up a neighbor's fallen chip. Individuals who aren't seen as helpers come to each others' rescue during Bingo. This is beneficial for the helpers and receivers!

I also see Bingo as a useful and enjoyable way to improve and maintain eye/hand coordination. Many adults need opportunities for this. It also exercises small muscles in the hands. Frail hands that may hesitate to pick up a paintbrush are often willing to pick up a poker chip to cover a square.

Bingo provides an excellent opportunity to sort chips and place chips on the game board, especially for those whose skills are declining in other areas. People who are not playing, for whom the game has no current meaning, seem to enjoy being in the same room as the players. I see people stack chips, placing them neatly in rows on the game boards, and sort them into colors. They also benefit from the same eye/hand efforts.

So, the Bingo box at our center is back in active duty. Friday Bingo is on the calendar as a regularly scheduled, well-loved activity. It's a great way to wrap up the week and socialize. Participants are ready to raise their hands to shout, "BINGO!"

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