MEMORY CARE INNOVATION AWARDS

+ PRESENTING THE CLASS OF +

2025



MEGAN DEATON

Memory Care Program Manager,
Community First Solutions

Megan Deaton, Memory Care Program Manager at Community First Solutions, has been named a 2025 Memory Care Innovation Award winner by Senior Housing News.

The Memory Care Innovation Awards program is designed to recognize passionate and innovative industry members who are shaping the future of cognitive care across behavioral health, home health and home care, hospice and palliative care, senior housing and senior living, and skilled nursing. To become a Memory Care Innovation Award winner, an individual must be nominated by their peers. The candidate should be a high-performing employee who knows how to put vision into action, serving as an advocate for those living with memory-related disorders and the committed professionals who ensure their well-being.

Deaton sat down with Senior Housing News to share her journey caring for patients and residents with cognitive care needs, her thoughts on the future of cognitive care in senior housing & senior living, and much more.

SHN: How long have you been a part of the memory care, senior housing & senior living industry?

Deaton: I started my career as an STNA in 2002, working my way through nursing school to become an LPN and worked in Senior living for the last 23 years.

SHN: What drew you to caring for patients/residents with cognitive care needs?

Deaton: It started with my grandpa. Watching someone I loved so deeply face the challenges of memory loss changed me. It opened my heart to the strength and vulnerability that come with this stage of life. I saw firsthand how moments of connection – holding a hand, sharing a smile, or hearing a familiar song – could bring comfort and spark recognition even when words were lost.

That experience ignited something in me. It made me want to be part of creating those moments for others, to ensure that every person living with cognitive changes is treated with dignity, compassion, and purpose. What drew me in then continues to drive me now – knowing that, even as memories fade, the heart still remembers how to feel loved and to help continue their story.

SHN: If you could change one thing about cognitive care in the memory care, senior housing & senior living industry, what would it be?

Deaton: If I could change one thing, it would be how we see those living with cognitive changes. Too often, the focus is on what has been lost instead of what still remains. I wish our industry would shift from a mindset of managing symptoms to one of nurturing experiences, creating environments that honor individuality, awaken the senses, and bring genuine joy into everyday moments.

Cognitive care should never be about simply keeping someone safe. It should be about helping them feel alive. Every resident deserves opportunities to connect, to belong, and to be understood in ways that go beyond words. When we see the person before the diagnosis, we create not just care, but meaning.

SHN: If you had a crystal ball, what do you think will most impact your ability to provide cognitive care in the memory care, senior housing & senior living industry in the next five years?

Deaton: If I had a crystal ball, I believe the future of cognitive care will be shaped by how well we balance innovation with human connection. Technology will continue to advance, helping us better understand behaviors, personalize care, and support our teams, but the real difference will come from how we use it to strengthen relationships, not replace them.

As a nurse and someone who's walked this journey with my own grandpa, I've learned that the most powerful tools in care are still compassion, creativity, and presence. Over the next five years, I see our industry moving toward more sensory-rich, emotionally intelligent environments that honor each person's story. The communities that succeed will be those that see beyond the diagnosis and understand every resident has a name, a past, and a story still to tell. When we see the person instead of the diagnosis, we open the door to connection, meaning, and genuine care.

SHN: If you could describe cognitive care in the memory care, senior housing & senior living industry in one word, what would it be and why?

Deaton: Human.

Memory care is about connection, not charts, not schedules, but people. It's about seeing the human being behind the diagnosis, recognizing their story, their emotions, and their need to belong. Every moment of care is an opportunity to honor who they are and remind them that they still matter. When we approach memory care with humanity first, everything else – compassion, dignity, and joy – will follow.

SHN: What's been the biggest lesson you have learned throughout your career?

Deaton: The biggest lesson I've learned is that success in this field isn't measured by titles or outcomes; it's measured in moments. It's in the smile of a resident who hasn't spoken all day, the relief on a family member's face when they see their loved one at peace, or the pride of a team member who feels they've made a difference.

I've learned that when we slow down long enough to truly see the person in front of us, their history, their heart, and their humanity, everything changes. Care becomes connection, tasks become purpose and every day becomes an opportunity to restore dignity, one interaction at a time.

SHN: If you could give yourself advice on the first day in the memory care, senior housing & senior living industry, what would it be and why?

Deaton: I would tell myself to slow down and feel every moment, the joy, the heartbreak, the laughter and the lessons because they're all part of something bigger than you realize. In this field, it's easy to get caught up in tasks and schedules, but the real magic happens in the in-between moments; when a resident reaches for your hand, when a family member trusts you with their loved one, when you see a spark of recognition in someone's eyes.

I'd remind myself that this work will change you in the best ways. It will teach you patience, perspective, and the power of presence. You'll learn that even on the hardest days, love and connection are what truly matter. And someday, you'll look back and realize that you didn't just find a career you found your calling.

SHN: In your opinion, what qualities should all Memory Care Innovation Award winners possess?

Deaton: To me, anyone recognized for innovation in memory care should lead with heart first. It takes compassion, creativity, and a deep understanding that every person we care for has a story worth honoring.

Innovation isn't always about big changes or fancy programs. It's about having the courage to challenge what's always been done, and the imagination to reimagine what care can look like. The best leaders in this field are the ones who never lose sight of why they started. Because at its core, memory care innovation isn't about changing systems, it's about changing lives.

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