

What is a Dementia Friendly Community?



Introduction

This information sheet provides an overview of what a Dementia Friendly Community would look like. Until December 2023 the Alzheimer's Society managed and monitored a national recognition scheme. From January 2024 it has been up to local communities to take this forward, many of whom were recognised under the old Alzheimer's Society scheme, including Harlow.

We start with a very brief explanation of what Dementia is, we then go on to explore how we can help people to live well with dementia by making our communities as dementia friendly as possible, through raising awareness, recruiting Dementia Friends and Dementia Friendly Organisations and providing events and activities where those living with dementia and their carers feel welcome, safe and able to fully participate.

What is Dementia?

Dementia is caused by diseases of the brain, most common is Alzheimer's (around 60-80%), but other main diseases include Vascular dementia, Lewy body dementia, Frontotemporal dementia and mixed dementia. There are over 100 different diseases that can cause Dementia.

Dementia symptoms include, but are not limited to the following: -

- Memory loss that disrupts daily life
- Challenges in planning or solving problems.
- Difficulty completing familiar tasks at home, work or leisure.
- Confusion with time or place
- Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships.
- New problems with words in speaking or writing
- Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps.
- Decreased or poor judgement
- Withdrawal from work or social activities.
- Changes in mood and personality.

For more information, the Alzheimer's Society produce an excellent booklet, 'What is Dementia?', it is Factsheet 400 and can be ordered from the Alzheimer's Society website.

What makes a 'Dementia Friendly Community'?

As stated in the introduction, the aim of Dementia Friendly Communities is to help people live well with dementia for as long as possible. We can do this in a number of ways, and your organisation can play its part.

Raising Awareness

A major part of creating a more dementia friendly community is to raise awareness in the general population of what dementia is and how we can help and support those living with dementia, and their

carers. This includes reducing the stigma associated with dementia and seeing how we can all make a difference.

We also raise awareness through Social Media and through events, such as our Dementia Fayre held as part of Dementia Action week each May.

We hold a quarterly Dementia Friendly Community meeting, with representatives from statutory organisations, charities and community groups and businesses.

How can you help?

As part of becoming a Dementia Friendly Organisation you will be given the opportunity to have a Dementia Awareness Session for your staff and if relevant, volunteers.

You can also help by following out [Facebook page](#) and Twitter Feed (@HarlowDAA)

You can spread the word to colleagues, family and friends.

Your organisation may like to provide a representative for our Dementia Friendly Community meetings.

Developing the network of Dementia Friendly Organisations

Like the rest of us, people living with dementia interact with many local organisations every day. They visit shops, eat in restaurants, visit their doctors' surgeries and hospital. They use their bank or Post Office, they pay their rent and use local facilities. They will use the bus, or train or taxis. They may attend faith groups, go to the cinema or theatre. In short, almost everything you do, so will those living with dementia.

How someone with dementia is treated by those organisations they interact with can make a huge difference to their wellbeing. If they are treated with respect, understanding and patience, they are likely to be happier, healthier and more likely to return. If they are treated with prejudice, impatience and misunderstanding, then they may feel sad, confused or frustrated, which may lead to them being frightened to return to that place or those people.

Dementia Friendly Organisations have at least begun a process of thinking about their staff/volunteers, their premises and their processes to consider how they can be more dementia friendly. This will almost certainly improve the experience of those living with dementia when they visit or engage with the services provided.

We want to reach as many organisations in Harlow as possible, to help them to register as dementia friendly – together we can make a huge difference.

How can you help?

By proceeding with becoming a Dementia Friendly Organisation yourself.

By recommending to other organisations that they consider registering as Dementia Friendly Organisations.

Providing events and activities which help people to live well with Dementia.

There are a number of organisations in Harlow which provide dementia friendly activities and events. Attached is the latest list of regular dementia friendly activities.

In Dementia Action Week, in May each year, the Harlow Dementia Friendly Community organises a Dementia Fayre. This includes information stalls and talks from professionals designed to increase awareness and help highlight the services and activities available for those living with dementia.

How can you help?

By:-

- Advertising these events and activities
- Encouraging staff to volunteer at any of the events or activities.
- Sponsoring one of the events or activities.

Listening to those living with dementia and their carers

It is important that as much as possible we speak directly to those living with dementia and that we take time to listen to them. If they are always bypassed and are spoken about as if they are not there, it can reinforce their sense of isolation and lead to irritation or even anger.

In order to ensure that we are meeting the need of those living with dementia, it is important that we develop ways of involving them in decisions and in shaping the events and activities that take place. This may include things like the following:-

- Forums which include those living with dementia and their carers
- Surveys
- Recording ad-hoc comments and suggestions and acting on them.

How can you help?

By encouraging your staff and volunteers to speak sensitively and patiently to those they come into contact with who may be affected by dementia.

By ensuring that there are clear mechanisms to feedback comments, complaints or suggestions about how to improve the experience of those living with dementia and their carers.

Conclusion

A short answer to 'What makes a Dementia Friendly Community' would be 'we do!'. Whether as individuals or organisations we can all make a difference, and together we can help those effected to live well with dementia, for as long as possible.