



## DEVELOPING Dementia-Friendly Communities WITH MY SISTER'S KITCHEN AND OTHERS

BY YVETTE FERRIS

To caregivers and dementia patients' loved ones, dementia-friendly community is an often-unknown phrase that could greet them with the promise of a sunrise after a long, dark night. Finding businesses who welcome our loved ones with open arms and minds is often more challenging than anticipated. For example, finding servers willing to repeat the daily specials over and over again with fewer words and more patience or a store whose glaring displays and loud sounds don't put

our loved ones into sensory overload can be a grand challenge.

Thanks to the dementia-friendly community program initiated by Joy Schmidt in Dane County, those welcoming spots are more present than ever. Originally with the Alzheimer's & Dementia Alliance of Wisconsin (ADAW) and now with the Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC), Joy says the need for dementia-friendly communities is only growing. According to the State of

Wisconsin Department of Health Services, "Dane County currently has approximately 7,000 living with dementia. That number is expected to rise to over 17,000 by 2040."

Though dementia-friendly community training is available at a number of churches, nonprofits, and other organizations, local businesses are also participating. After a brief 30- to 45-minute presentation, owners and their employees are trained in how to help those with dementia and

their caregivers. Once trained, these businesses are given a window cling with the purple angel icon, informing the public they are part of the dementia-friendly movement. Businesses receiving training range from having as few as two employees to much larger companies, such as Old National Bank branches across the county; Care Wisconsin, which covers the state; and Walgreens, who is looking for ways to offer similar training to all its employees nationwide.

Diane Mikelbank, director of the Monona Senior Center, says, "The dementia-friendly community initiative helps to give a quality of life for people living with dementia and for their friends and family." This is done by helping waiters, cashiers, and others to take the time to help with choices so it's not so overwhelming for those with dementia to be out in public. Diane adds, "While the Senior Center enhances the lives of older adults, so does a dementia-friendly community. Monona is lucky because there is a local group working on a letter-writing campaign to local businesses regarding the brief dementia-friendly community training." Diane also credits the Monona City Council for their support and being a part of their proactive team for this initiative.

The need for communities to understand and welcome those with dementia into local businesses is not only for the benefit of the person with dementia, but also holds value for the family members and caregivers. Diane explains, "Caregivers will stop taking their loved ones out if it gets too frustrating. If we can make other businesses aware by keeping interactions simpler for those with dementia, all involved will have a greater tendency to socialize in the community."

Having had a grandmother with dementia, sisters Shelly Nelson and Karen Grove, who own and operate My Sister's Kitchen café in Middleton, concur. They were approached by the ADAW to take part in the dementia-friendly community training. Shelly says most who work at the restaurant have had some acquaintance to a person with dementia. As Shelly says, "It's our goal to make all of our patrons safe and comfortable while they're out of their home. Caregivers can feel safe to bring their family members in to receive the respect and service they deserve."

Joy Schmidt feels optimistic about the work being accomplished in Madison and surrounding communities. "It's been truly amazing to see all the growth in awareness as everyone works together across the community—from libraries, senior centers, first responders, local hospitals, businesses, Alzheimer's agencies, municipalities, churches, museums, and many volunteers." Joy has seen many successes in expanding area businesses' and residents' awareness of dementia, and how to become a more welcoming community for those with the disease and their caregivers. These include Walgreen's Shop in their Shoes campaign; the Capitol Square museums' participation in SPARK!, a program for individuals with early memory loss; and a program with former Governor Marty Schreiber and many local businesses.

Joy says, "The true success stories come from the people living with this disease and their caregivers. When they have a positive experience from a dementia-friendly business or organization, it makes it all worthwhile. When they feel welcome and accepted, we've done our job. We hear from many that they appreciate the efforts that are being made to re-



duce the stigma of this disease. We hear specific examples from businesses about how this has improved their understanding and comfort level when serving a customer with cognitive impairment."

If you would like to become involved in the dementia-friendly community initiative, or if you know of a business who would like to receive training, contact Joy Schmidt at the ADRC at (608) 240-7400.

*Photographs provided by Alzheimer's & Dementia Alliance of Wisconsin.*

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