PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR GROUP LEADERS AND ORGANISERS IN MAKING OUR U3A DEMENTIA FRIENDLY

Dementia describes different brain disorders that trigger a loss of brain function. These conditions are all usually progressive, and Alzheimer's disease is the most common type of dementia.

Symptoms can include:

- Memory loss
- Difficulty with communication and reasoning skills
- Changes in emotional behaviour (becoming sad or angry)
- Disorientation (confusion about time and place, even in familiar surroundings)
- Confused perception of physical environment (eg, a doormat may be perceived as puddle)

Treatment focuses on slowing the progression of the disease and maintaining the individual's quality of life.

Social isolation is known to exacerbate the symptoms of people living with dementia.

As a u3a, we can therefore make an important contribution to the individual's well-being.

Making Our u3a Dementia-Friendly

The understanding and support of the broad membership are both needed to create a dementia-friendly environment.

Key Messages

Hope: People living with dementia can have a good quality of life, provided that they remain involved in everyday life, including attending our u3a**.**

Dignity: Be aware that dementia does not necessarily equate with loss of intellect, and everyone is affected differently

Understanding: Being unable to communicate something important is frustrating – especially so when this is due to memory loss or reasoning processes.

Be a Friend: If you know someone with dementia, treat them as you always have done, show that you are pleased to see them.

Actions

Speak clearly and in short sentences

Listen to what the person is saying a small amount of knowledge can enable a great amount of change

Involve the family members and carers, where possible.

Remember that a carer can attend with the member who has dementia and need not become a member or pay, and will still be covered by the u3a Public Liability Insurance (this does not apply to paid carers)

Most u3a's have a significant number of members who live on their own and it is possible that the symptoms of dementia will first be noticed by their friends in our u3a. If you are worried about someone's memory, suggest they read the Alzheimer's Society leaflet "Worried About Your Memory?" 1540 The memory handbook and see if you can persuade the person to see their GP and offer to go with

them. If possible, contact a relative (with their consent). Bear in mind that the person may be anxious and quite frightened about this as they may be aware that they are having some difficulties.

Making Open Meetings Accessible

Encourage the member to bring a family member or carer with them
Have clear signage – for coffee, toilets, etc
Don't be afraid of saying the wrong thing – it is better to be friendly than not to speak at all, and use clear and uncomplicated language.

Making Interest/Activity Groups Accessible

Use people's names more than usual, so that the member knows who's who
Explain the format of the group and what is going to happen in the session
Be patient
Encourage all group members to be welcoming
Sometimes, changes in someone's behaviour may cause an issue. If this happens, try to lead the member to a quiet space and sort it out in a positive manner with little fuss.

Simple Ways You Can Help People With Dementia

Offer reassurance and understanding – put someone experiencing difficulties at ease
Communicate clearly - listen carefully and use simple, short sentences
Be aware of the surroundings – noisy or busy environments can make people with dementia uneasy or

add to their confusion. Consider how features of the environment may affect someone
Ensure any signage is clear and people can find what they want easily.

Conclusion

u3as are autonomous, self-help, co-operative organisations, therefore, it is important that members are able to take full responsibility for their own participation in u3a interest groups, events, and trips.

Should the situation arise where a member no longer feels confident that they can participate fully without needing help, it will be necessary for that person to be accompanied by a designated companion/carer who will be covered by liability insurance provided by The Third Age Trust whilst in attendance.

A designated carer or companion does not have to be a member of the u3a. However, whilst reasonable adjustments will be made to ensure that individuals can participate and can attend with carers to support their needs, there will be certain needs that the u3a will not be able to accommodate due to the level of care that an individual may require.

Even if other members are willing to help, they can not take full responsibility for another member's care unless previously agreed and designated.

The u3a, aims to be inclusive, welcoming, and accessible to everyone. We know that dementia affects every individual differently, and their needs change over time.

To ensure everyone stays safe and supported, we look at each situation individually. If a member needs extra help to attend our sessions, they are welcome to bring a carer. Because our group sizes and activities vary, the Executive Committee reviews support needs case-by-case, including how many carers can safely attend a single session.