

Memory Moment

Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness – Who We Are

By Shannon Nosbisch, CDP, DCS

In 2002, my mother-in-law and Amy Sobrino's grandmother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. At that time, Amy was 10 years old and my husband and I had a seven-year-old son and our youngest son was born 2 months after her diagnosis. Our family lived a mile from her home and we were part of her care team. She stayed in her home for eight years and then moved to a long term care home where she lived for four years before she died from complication of Alzheimer's disease.

When Amy was choosing her major for college, she decided on Social Work with a specialization in Gerontology. While she was getting her degree, she interned with the Alzheimer's Association of St. Louis and with Memory Care Home Solutions, where she is employed now. She realized that there were techniques and strategies that can help families and caregivers of people living with dementia. These techniques and strategies can make caring less stressful and give the person living with dementia a better quality of life!

In early 2014, she brought some educational programs to Effingham County through the Alzheimer's Association. Later in the year, she asked me to join her in forming a non-profit organization to help other caregivers and families struggling with Alzheimer's disease. I decided to do it! Our organization, Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness (EAAA) was formed in November of 2014.

As I (Shannon) had never had any formal training, I started reading books, watching DVDs and attending conferences on dementia. I have had Certified Dementia Practitioner training and Dementia Care Specialist training, also.

In 2015, we came up with the idea of providing books, DVDs, and reminiscence tool kits to Effingham Public Library for anyone to check out. Working with the library, we worked out a system that patrons do NOT have to have a library card

to check out the resources. We named it the Forget-Me-Not Resource Center. Since that time, we have expanded our Forget-Me-Not Resource Centers to six other counties/libraries. They are Evans Public Library (Vandalia), Flora Public Library, Newton Public Library, Greenup Township Public Library, Mattoon Public Library and Shelbyville Public Library. Again, in all these libraries, you do NOT need a library card to check out the resources. Ask at the desk for assistance.

We have held Community Education programs in every county. Since COVID-19, we have not had any in person. Last year, we held some by Zoom and recorded them. The links to these programs are on our homepage at www.effinghamalz.org.

Our website has a lot of information for caregivers and families of people living with dementia. There is a tab of caregiver tipsheets. These tipsheets have information about wandering, driving, eating, redirecting, communication and others.

Amy and I are always available for helping families and caregivers with specific questions or problems. Anyone can call us or email us. If we don't have an answer, we can direct you to agencies to help you with specific issues.

Also on our website are our Memory Moment and Forget-Me-Not Spotlight articles. We have been writing these articles since 2016. Memory Moment articles are general articles about aging, dementia, caregiving, etc. The Forget-Me-Not Spotlight articles are reviews about resources we have in the Forget-Me-Not Resource Centers. You can browse the reviews and find out what resources would be best for you to check out before you even get to the library.

When we started out as Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness, we were focusing on only Alzheimer's disease. But in the first year, we received calls from families that had loved ones with Frontal temporal dementia and Lewy Body Dementia. We expanded our resource centers to include these dementias and others.

EAAA is now working with Midland Area Agency on Aging to make Effingham a dementia friendly community. We offer training to businesses, agencies, organizations and others to understand what dementia is, how to recognize it and

the best communication techniques. The training is 30 minutes long and is free. Just contact us to set up convenient times.

If you have any questions or concerns in caring for a loved one with dementia, please contact us. Our emails are eaaa.shannon@gmail.com or eaaa.amy@gmail.com. Our phone numbers are Shannon at 217-663-0010 or Amy at 618-363-8372.

Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness (EAAA) is a volunteer-run, not-for-profit organization founded to provide education and support to all families, caregivers, and people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia in Effingham County and the surrounding area. For more information about Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness, check out the website at www.effinghamalz.org. If you are a caregiver & have specific questions or situations you would like information on, please feel free to call Shannon Nosbisch at 217-663-0010 or Amy Sobrino at 618-363-8372.