

## Becoming dementia-friendly

By: Amy Sobrino, MSW, LSW

In a couple of months, Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness will be partnering with the Effingham Public Library and several other local public libraries to present a dementia-friendly library seminar. Originating in the United Kingdom, dementia friendly communities aim to help people living with dementia and their loved ones feel supported and included in their community. In the past couple of years, several organizations have brought these principles to the United States and have begun working with various states and groups to integrate them into our communities. You might be thinking – why does this matter? A progressive dementia, such as Alzheimer's disease, is very isolating. Many people who live with the disease may begin to withdraw from social settings, public outings, or local functions because it is more challenging for them to participate in the same way before they started seeing the effects of dementia. As a result, their care partners/caregivers are isolated to the home setting as well. Additionally, there is still a lot of stigma associated with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. I've worked with many families who are very private about who they share new about a diagnosis with, even if visible signs and symptoms are present.

On the most basic level, the 'dementia-friendly' initiative is about reducing stigma and increasing awareness. Although there has been a greater rate of education and understanding about dementia in the past several years, helping community members understand what symptoms they may see and how to best support someone living with dementia or their care partners continues to be vital. There are a variety of initiatives targeting many different sectors of the community – libraries, businesses, banks, restaurants, first responders, etc. – to help offer suggestions to become dementia-friendly. There are three main categories that this is broken into. The first are physical changes to the environment or appearance of a space/building. For example, using clearly marked signs with high contrast colors is helpful for people living with dementia as they try to compensate for the vision changes they may be experiencing. The second is tailoring programs and services directly to people who are living with dementia and their care partners/caregivers. There are a couple of great examples of this already happening in the Effingham area. The Forget-Me-Not Resource Center, created by Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness and housed in various local public libraries, is a great example of tailoring materials directly for people affected by dementia. Another partnership started by Willowbrook Communities & Tuscan Hills Winery, the Forget-Me-Not Café is a social activity held monthly at Tuscan Hills. With a simplified menu and enjoyable entertainment that is appropriate and meaningful for people living with dementia, this event make it easier for people dealing with dementia to feel comfortable in public. The third main category is training staff on how to best support people affected by dementia. This looks a little bit different depending on each sector. A good example of staff training would be educating staff on good communication strategies to use when helping a customer who has

dementia. Being able to communicate effectively will help the person living with dementia still feel capable to function in their daily routine.

Helping our libraries become dementia-friendly is a natural fit as they are a hub of community activity and learning. We hope that with the upcoming dementia-friendly library training, our efforts to help serve the community affected by dementia will continue to grow. If you are a local business owner or professional who would like to learn more on how to incorporate dementia-friendly practices, please contact Amy Sobrino at 618-363-8372 or [eaaa.amy@gmail.com](mailto:eaaa.amy@gmail.com). To learn more about dementia-friendly communities, check out [www.actonalz.org](http://www.actonalz.org) or [www.dfamerica.org](http://www.dfamerica.org).

*For more information about Memory Moment articles & Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness, check out their website at [www.effinghamalz.org](http://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.*