

Supplementary Information Sheet 1

Increase Awareness and Understanding of Dementia

People with dementia tell us repeatedly that it is the attitude of those they encounter on a day to day basis that has the biggest impact on their lives.

Staff and volunteers with good “people skills” or within organisations with a strong focus on customer care may already have many of the attributes or skills they need to be able to support people with dementia.

A basic understanding of the impact of dementia can make a huge difference, both to the experience of the person living with the dementia and to the confidence of staff and volunteers, who may otherwise be uncertain as to whether and how to offer help.

Each person with dementia experiences their illness in a unique way. The parts of the brain involved and the extent it is affected, the individual’s personality and the support that they receive after getting the disease all play a part.

In public situations people with dementia may have a range of difficulties including:

- Having problems remembering what they are doing.
- Having difficulties in communicating clearly.
- Having problems handling money.
- Having problems navigating in complex or confusing environments.

Some people with dementia can tell you they have a diagnosis and need support. Others may not have a diagnosis, or may not be aware they have memory problem; and some people with dementia maintain that everything is fine even when they are clearly confused. In all cases it is very important to act in a manner that preserves the person’s dignity and treats the person with respect.

How staff and volunteers respond to people who may be experiencing any of these kinds of problems make the biggest difference.

Checklist:

Are staff and volunteers aware that dementia can affect people’s abilities in many ways, and these will vary from person to person?

- People can have difficulties finding the right word for everyday items.
- People can find it hard or impossible to retain information they may have been given a few minutes before.
- People might struggle to read and understand charts or timetables.
- People might have impaired cognitive abilities - so might have lost ability to add up the cost of their shopping and give the correct money.
- People might forget faces of people they have seen many times before.
- People might forget the layout of a building and where things are.
- People might mistake a reflection of themselves as a stranger in the room, or a change in colour of a surface as a step or drop.
- People might lose their inhibitions so not know how to behave appropriately.

- Some people with dementia might also retain some high level skills, so it is essential not to underestimate what people can do.**

For example a person may be able to:

- Do the Times cross word.
- Remember all the parts of a car engine, and how it all works.
- Play a round of golf with good skill, or do lovely embroidery.
- Continue to drive their car for some years.

- Are staff and volunteers aware of how to support customers or service users who have dementia?**

Staff and volunteers will feel more confident in offering support if they have had some basic training and information about strategies to help people who might:

- Look or say that they are a bit lost or confused.
- Appear to be searching for something they can't find.
- Look like they don't know what to do next.
- Appear to have problems handling or understanding their money, or how to use their card.
- Have speech that is hard to understand.
- Appear to have problems understanding what you are saying.
- Forget to pay for things they have picked up.

- Have your staff and volunteers had experiences of people with dementia in their work, where they felt a better understanding of the condition would have enabled them to deal with the situation more appropriately?**

- Have your staff, volunteers or managers come across working practices, attitudes or policies that they feel aren't helpful for people who are experiencing problems with dementia.**

This might include:

- Staff insisting that people use pin numbers/ remember dates etc.
- Not knowing how to deal with someone who seems to have forgotten to pay.
- Not being clear if people should be able to access all activities on the same bases as everyone else.
- Interacting with a carer and ignoring the person with dementia.
- Feeling under pressure to get people through the system quickly.
- Losing patience with people who are harder to deal with due to forgetfulness or confusion.
- Other things to your business or organisation.

- Are your staff and volunteers confident about talking to and dealing with people with dementia. Do they feel the need for extra help and support in this area?**

- Are there other issues about staff or volunteer's awareness?**

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