



How to enthuse a local community

Addressing social problems by only care and welfare professionals and the person concerned must end. A dementia-friendly society or even better, a dementia-inclusive society, is a task for everyone. It is a place or culture that is committed to work together and promote a better understanding of dementia, raise public awareness and facilitate social inclusion.

For people living with dementia, it is important to prevent social exclusion and therefore keep triggering their senses at different levels. Art and cultural activities can play an important role in achieving this. A cultural activity or an art experience gives the person with dementia a feeling of inclusion for that moment and a better wellbeing on many different levels.

Living with dementia is challenging as it is, but by engaging communities and helping each other, an environment can be created where people with dementia and their relatives will be more supported and accepted just as they are. A connected and engaged community where people work together, is more resilient and better equipped to deal with certain situations and problems.

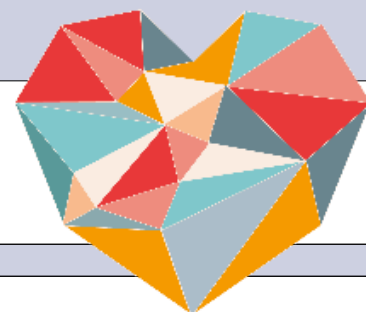
The challenge in this is however, involving the local residents in the dementia-friendly part and discovering what they can and want to contribute. It starts with togetherness and awareness: together we can ensure that our vulnerable elderly continue to count and participate.

But how do you enthuse the local community to be part of this?



7 Practical tips

How to enthuse a local community



Know the community

Know what is already being organised for people with dementia. How many residents? Ages and backgrounds? What questions do they have? Are they aware of how people with dementia can react and behave? Do they have experience with people living with dementia and would they be interested in more information? Look at the stores and if the retailers are aware of how to interact with people with dementia. So go out and look for the answers.



Awareness

Find out the level of awareness and knowledge of the community members regarding dementia. Involve everyone: residents, shop keepers, cultural and civil society organisations, professionals, local decision makers, caregivers and people with dementia. To increase awareness, role play can be used. But also commercials on tv/social media. Share stories of people with dementia, relatives or professionals through various channels to create awareness.



Right location

You have to be on the right location to get in touch with the local community. For some, the threshold is too high to go to the townhall while the community centre around the corner is more accessible. Ask collaborating partners what the meeting points in the neighbourhood are. The coffee corner in the supermarket or the waiting room of your own practice can be a right location and for a certain target group much easier to visit.



Connecting

Connect people from different target groups to create more awareness of including people with dementia. Get people together to share stories, ideas and knowledge and ask questions. A shopkeeper can talk to a person with dementia to find out how they are feeling in a certain situation, while a neighbour can talk to the caregiver about their personal experiences. Inspire people to help in their own way and possibilities. It might also inspire a person with dementia and their relative to reach out for help.



Empowering

By including people with dementia in this whole process, professionals and other community members become more aware of their needs and wishes. Including people with dementia also means empowering them, recognizing they are still part of the community.



Neighbourhood Communication

Participation and involvement of local residents is a goal of most local governments. Communication may be the key to success. People can only give their opinion and act on it if they are well informed. Local governments use various ways for communication (local newspapers, websites). This is effective for a certain target group but how to reach the right residents? Other ways of communication are: street interviews, events, neighbourhood app, inspiration wall (think of the "Wall of Love" in Paris) and home visits.



Commitment

Build and maintain a relationship of trust. The right attitude is important: be connecting (outreaching), be culturally sensitive and be open. Take time to get to know each other. Everyone involved can participate in their own field of expertise and interest. To create lasting commitment, it is important to keep communicating, listening and share experiences. Offer training and information material, let everyone know the difference they are making and show appreciation.

