

Lessening the Impact of Dementia – courses for family carers

Dementia can bring devastating changes to the brain, body and behaviour, but our courses focus on its effects on the person inside. Rather than fighting against it as a disease, we work positively with it as a disability. This reduces its impact on the person, so behaviour becomes less of an issue.

We began offering interactive training via online meetings in 2020. Even carers prevented from joining in face-to-face events by their caring role, location or even lockdown could attend, and their feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Wokingham Borough Council now support us to deliver courses online, with one face-to-face course in a different part of the borough each term.

We run 8 weekly interactive sessions for about 6 trainees. The training is free of charge for unpaid carers, but we ask them to purchase and read our booklet. Each session includes a short presentation, with time for Q&A and discussion. During the course, trainees gain a better understanding of the effects of dementia on the person they support, and they learn skills that help to lessen its impact. Each week we focus on a different aspect of our approach, with an opportunity to try out techniques between sessions and discuss the outcome the following week. Trainees gradually deepen their understanding of dementia, develop their skills and build mutually supportive relationships within the group. After completing the course, we invite them to join our online community of family carers using this approach, for ongoing discussion and support.

Topics covered in each 75-minute interactive session:

1. **Overview of our approach**
 - Understanding Dementia and how to lessen its impact
2. **Well-being**
 - its importance, its relationship to dementia and how to promote it
3. **Questions**
 - why they don't help in dementia, and how to find better ways to support choice
4. **Being a buddy**
 - getting alongside the person and building positive relationships
5. **Contradiction and confrontation**
 - why we should avoid them, and how to do that without getting tangled up in lies
6. **Listening and talking skills**
 - including how to respond to repetitive questions from the person with dementia
7. **The hazards of 'parenting' our elders**
 - maintaining dignity despite cognitive decline
8. **Where do we go from here?**
 - planning ahead to avoid a crisis

We have interactive online training courses for health and care professionals too - see our website for details. When care is shared among a team of people trained in this approach, it has a more seamless and unobtrusive feel to the person at its centre.