



DON'T LET MEMORY CHALLENGES PREVENT YOU from Enjoying Life

BY CLAIRE BITNER

A diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or dementia does not have to mean the end of one's social life. In fact, socializing is even more important for brain health in a person with dementia. Increasingly, local organizations serving people with Alzheimer's and dementia are finding new ways to provide social outings and social groups.

Socialization has long been considered an important aspect

of dementia care. A person with dementia may forget their loved ones or friends, but they can still have enjoyment when their loved ones visit. Memory challenges don't change the ability to benefit from the experience of interacting with others.

Memory Cafés are social groups that meet on a monthly basis and offer people with mild cognitive impairment, early Alzheimer's, and

other dementias a chance to interact with their peers. The Memory Café model first appeared in Europe and has quickly gained momentum across the United States. For some, Memory Cafés provide a lifeline to their community. A caregiver who brought her husband to a Memory Café hosted by the Alzheimer's & Dementia Alliance of Wisconsin (ADAW) stated, "My husband and I thought the Memory Café was wonderful! We don't socialize much

anymore, and it was great seeing him happy and laughing with others. Opportunities like this make life so much better."

There are now over 100 Memory Cafés across Wisconsin. Each café is unique, and the activity changes each month based on the group's interests. Recent activities have included drum circles, painting, and singing favorite songs from the past.

Additional programs in south central Wisconsin include SPARK!, a program for people with dementia and their care partners to enjoy arts and socialize in a comfortable setting; the Alzheimer's



Association's Spry Society, a social engagement program for people in the early stages of memory loss; and Meeting of Minds, the memory enhancement program offered by the ADAW.

Noreen Kralapp, ADAW dementia outreach specialist for Dane County, leads the Meeting of Minds group in Madison. Noreen said she has often witnessed the benefits socialization can have on a person living with dementia. Group activities draw people out of their shells and help them express themselves, she says. Noreen is especially impressed by the role group art activities can play. Group participants can converse and engage with others while they are busy practicing an art activity.

"Art can serve as a bridge to reach the inner self and aid in the expression of thoughts, feelings, and memories," Noreen says. "As this disease progresses and even if the ability to use words lessens, they can still express themselves."

The next session of the memory enhancement program, Meeting of Minds, begins March 5 at Madison's Central Library with a focus on creative and cognitively stimulating exercises, like painting or group storytelling, tai chi, and other relaxation activities.

*Photographs provided by
Alzheimer's & Dementia
Alliance of Wisconsin.*

Claire Bitner is communications coordinator for the Alzheimer's & Dementia Alliance of Wisconsin (ADAW). ADAW offers in-person consultations, community education, caregiver support, and a locally staffed helpline for people living with Alzheimer's or other dementia and their caregivers. To provide social opportunities, in addition to Meeting of Minds, ADAW hosts Memory Cafés in more than 11 locations in south central Wisconsin with an additional 6 affiliated cafés. Visit alzwisc.org or call (888) 308-6251 to learn more.