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PRESS RELEASE:

The Spokane Area has been recognized as a Dementia Friendly Community!

A group of collaborative partners have been meeting since late 2018 with the intention of creating a “Spokane Area Dementia Friendly Community” within Spokane County, Washington.

“For the past 10 years, I have been an unpaid and employed family care partner to my mother, who had dementia. In addition, I am a social gerontologist, specializing in dementia. Early on in my care efforts, the disenfranchisement and stigma in the population of People Living with Dementia (PLWD) became apparent... Several years ago, when my mother and our family moved to Spokane, we did not easily find community dementia programs, so we made our own small community.” – Debby Dodds, M.S.

A “Dementia Friendly Community” is a town, city, or county that is respectful, and informed of individuals with the disease, their families and caregivers, and offers support that fosters quality of life. Becoming a Dementia Friendly Community means engaging in a process to become more dementia friendly, so individuals like Debby Dodds and her mother find the support they need.

The Spokane Area Dementia Friendly Community benefits from the expertise of a strong action team committed to community engagement and education. Early planning partners include Aging & Long Term Care of Eastern Washington, the Washington State Chapter of the Alzheimer’s Association, and Providence Health Care (including Providence Adult Day Health, Providence Holy Family Hospital, and Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center).

“My husband Alan was diagnosed at the age of 60 with Younger Onset Alzheimer’s. This was difficult to accept and wrap our heads around, what did the future hold for us? What would our retirement years look like? Alan is an “outdoorsy” individual, the dilemma was how could we provide him these outings while keeping him safe? We discovered that the City of Spokane’s Park and Recreation was the perfect fit... helpful, understanding and so supporting of Alan’s situation. Alan has participated in hiking, kayaking, snowshoeing outings and it has been so rewarding... We truly appreciate that for a few hours Alan can be released from Alzheimer’s.” – Janet Tarbutton

This team seeks opportunities for inclusion and improved quality of life for people living with dementia and their care partners. The hope is the more individuals can have the same experience that Alan and his wife had. This team plans to advocate for the growing number of adults with dementia, educate the public, and expand on community-based activities.

As it’s predicted that the number of Washingtonians living with Alzheimer’s disease will continue to increase, the Spokane Area Dementia Friendly Community is working to make our county a better place for the number of people living with dementia.

“Families and individuals facing Alzheimer’s and other forms of dementia need our support. It is through community effort that we will be able to create improved quality of life for these individuals, and continue to educate the public on these diseases. Together we can lead the way in supporting people with dementia and their families.” – Joel Loiacono, Regional Director of the Alzheimer’s Association Washington State Chapter

Background

- Currently, more than 120,000 people in Washington have Alzheimer's or other dementias.
- An additional 20,000 people are expected to be diagnosed in the next 5 years.
- Dementia is the 3rd leading cause of death for Washington state citizens.
- Washington State has the 6th highest Alzheimer's death rate in the US.
- Family members provide the vast majority of care for those living with dementia. It is estimated that there are currently between 286,000 and 324,000 unpaid family caregivers of persons living with dementia in Washington State.
- The duration of dementia, and high costs of care commonly result in families depleting their resources and eventually turning to public programs for financial assistance.
- Increased public awareness, engagement and education to prepare our community for significant growth of dementia population.
- A "nothing about us without us" approach will include participation from people with Alzheimer's and family care partners.

References

Washington State Alzheimer's infographic:

<https://www.alz.org/getmedia/134f9fdd-24c2-4a14-8be6-57fe4f4ee506/washington-alzheimers-facts-figures>

Washington State Plan to Address Alzheimer's and Other Dementias:

<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/legislative/documents/2016%20WA%20Alzheimer%27s%20State%20Plan%20-%20Full%20Report%20Final.pdf>

Personal stories

- Debbie is a Social Gerontologist with Partner Generation Connect. She also cared for her mother who was diagnosed with dementia.
- Alan was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in his 50s. Together with his wife, they are navigating the journey together.

Call Savannah Reams-Taylor to arrange for interviews (509) 458-2509.