

Dementia Friendly La Crosse County

History of the Dementia Friendly Movement

In 2010, Norm McNamara, from the United Kingdom began what became the dementia friendly movement we are seeing today. He was 50 years old when diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and he began blogging his experience and talking to others. He wanted to spread awareness and make a difference. He had difficulty going to stores and restaurants because of a lack of understanding by the staff. Along with a team of volunteers, he spread the word across his community and in one year over 200 businesses became dementia aware. London became dementia friendly in 2013. Norm and his wife developed the purple angel symbol and when the concept was recognized and embraced by others outside the UK, they added the globe as it had become an international movement.

It is uncertain of the exact date this concept arrived in the US, but Minnesota has taken action forming the Act On Dementia Alliance and a group in the Fox River Valley began forming around this and other awareness efforts in 2012. Dr. & Mr. McFadden presented on this concept at the Wisconsin Alzheimer's Association Conference in May of 2012 and from there, many individuals and groups began starting their own projects. The State of Wisconsin made it part of their state dementia plan in 2014.

Dementia Friendly in La Crosse County

Many individuals had started working on this idea in La Crosse County. They provided dementia education to as many employers as they could within the city and spoke to businesses and organizations.

In Fall of 2018, La Crosse County hired a Dementia Care Specialist to help facilitate a Dementia Friendly Community, providing knowledge, resources, structure, materials and additional supports for these efforts to continue to build. The goal is for this project to have minimal cost and that the training will be free for the businesses and agencies. La Crosse County has formed a Dementia Friendly Community Coalition in early 2019, to raise the level of awareness across the county and the state.

“Dementia Friendly Business”: Recognition not Certification

Currently there is not enough funding to consider this a “certification”. This is a grass roots project with support from La Crosse County. It is guided by the Dementia Care Specialist, the La Crosse County Dementia Friendly Coalition, volunteers and citizens working to create awareness and understanding of how dementia is affecting people in our community. It is a collaboration. We consider this a “recognition” rather than a certification.

The primary goals are:

- To raise awareness of the issue and to reduce the stigma.
- To increase recognition of the signs.
- To improve communication.
- To increase acceptance and compassion.
- To promote inclusivity and accessibility.

What it takes to be recognized as a dementia friendly business.

- 80% or more of the staff has been trained
- Management is involved
- A Dementia Champion on-site is identified going forward and will have continued contact with Dementia Care Specialist
- The agency incorporates this into education for their employees; current, ongoing and new
- The business has looked at the environment and will consider changes in the future.
- The business provides annual dementia education in collaboration with the Dementia Care Specialist for education, HR newsletter articles, lunch and learns, additional trainings, etc.

Benefits for businesses, government agencies, and organizations:

- Recognition from the community
- Increased loyalty from customers
- Free employee customer service education

How to participate:

Once a business, organization, or agency requests to become dementia friendly they will appoint a contact person to collaborate with the Dementia Care Specialist (DCS). The DCS will then provide the training (face to face). The information provided should be incorporated into the business, agency, and organization for new and ongoing training for employees. Business, agencies and organizations can request follow up training from DCS as needed. Recognition includes: a certificate, a window cling and ADRC materials to have onsite. A picture with staff holding a dementia friendly banner will be shared on La Crosse County and ADRC website, and social media accounts.

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