

Dementia Friendly Wincanton

“There are 850,000 people living with dementia in the UK and this is expected to rise to one million by 2021. One third of people living with dementia do not feel part of their community” Alzheimer’s Society 2016

Wincanton has been motivated to act by statistics such as this, drawing on local support and leadership, initially from GP Dr Iain Phillips, Mayor Howard Ellard, Health Coach Julie Woan and Tom Barber, Health & Wellbeing lead for Spark in November 2016. Tom’s work is part of the NHS Symphony programme in South Somerset, and he has supported the establishment of community partnerships in three locations, including Wincanton. The Community Partnership was where we as a community decided to focus on making the town dementia friendly.

A steering group specifically for this work was started and includes local people who can guide and direct how Wincanton can progress the initiative, with support from the Dementia Action Alliance and Alzheimer’s Society Somerset. Our aim is to encourage residents to respect and support people living locally with dementia, so that they feel socially confident and involved locally. The group decided to concentrate primarily on informing local shops and businesses along the High Street, plus local key agencies e.g. Emergency services, Library, Churches, Health Centre, Schools and Leisure facilities.

We have embraced the Dementia Friends information sessions, and delivered over 20 sessions for the public and targeted groups including the Sports Centre and Fire Service, resulting in there now being 220 Dementia Friends in Wincanton. Two local schools have received introductory sessions, with a third school in line for an imminent session. Our aim is to engage most shops and businesses so that those with dementia do not worry about shopping locally, as there will be more people with the knowledge and awareness to support and reassure them if required. Those businesses that have been involved receive a “Dementia Friends” sticker for their shop window. We are also actively promoting the use of the Alzheimer’s ID card for those with memory problems/dementia in the town so that residents know what to look for if someone does require assistance.

Our group includes two local women with early onset dementia and both have been directly involved with environmental reviews of the Sports & Health Centre, where certain key areas are assessed for ease of use, such as signage and information, flooring and doors. This identified several easily remedied issues which will benefit others using these facilities.

Progress has been steady with some wins and losses. Our public sessions have not been well attended despite publicity, but the way forward is to target specific groups, postmen, publicans, undertakers, supermarket staff, dentists, WI – public-facing people. A recent session at our local Veterinary surgery netted 19 staff, the best result for a staff training session for them and brilliant for us! Our Fire Safety Officer based locally has performed many home safety checks for elderly and vulnerable residents as a priority as well as training all the fire officers and cadets to become Dementia Friends.

Our campaign was given a boost in October 2017, when our group joined the Carnival, with a decorated bed containing the Mayor dressed as a large bear, alongside the Alzheimer's national campaign roadshow bus. We raised our profile that evening to several thousand people.



Dementia Friendly Wincanton float, Wincanton Carnival 2017
Photo: Julie Woan, Alzheimers Society

We would like as many people with dementia to remain in their own homes for as long as possible, and to still feel part of our community. We have made excellent progress over the last year but we still have a long way to go.

Trish Foers

The Balsam Centre & Wincanton Dementia Friendly Community Steering Group