

Cognitive Changes

ADMITTING YOU NEED HELP IS NEVER EASY!

January 28, 2021

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Caring for a loved one or community friend who is experiencing cognitive changes due to Alzheimer's or another form of dementia is never easy. First you have to realize that they are changing and accept it. Next you have to act and that means you begin to make changes, you begin to adjust. But this is a degenerative disease, and it gets progressively more difficult. You think "I can handle this until you can't."

Page |
1

I received a phone call on Christmas day from a family caregiver who shared her normally loving tiny mom was throwing furniture at her and screaming. There have been other similar calls.

Caring for a person living with Alzheimer's or a related dementia is made more difficult due to our sense of "I can do it all". Yes, you can but you require adequate supports. They say it takes a village to raise a child; well, it also takes a village to care for a person living through the stages of dementia.

In the early stages of the disease friendly reminder calls, assisting with Doctors visits and grocery shopping work. Then you find out mom has not been paying her bills when you go out to lunch and her credit card is declined. Some individuals are the victims of scams, for example one older man was paying his "girlfriend" in the islands thousands of dollars a month.

The Outer Banks is a loving community, and we reach out and help our friends who are experiencing dementia we include them, take them to meetings or to play golf. This works till the disease progresses a little bit more and the person becomes difficult. The family caregiver is getting more and more involved in care and the community friends are no longer coming around. Knowing when to add paid and consistent care makes all the difference, in supporting you in your caregiving role.

Reach out, get a diagnosis from a professional knowledgeable in dementia to be sure it's a form of dementia, and not something that's reversible. Learn what type of dementia it is. Discover existing supports and lifestyle changes that are beneficial and take advantage of them. GEM provides programs that will enhance the well-being of both the caregiver, and the person they are caring for.

Did you know (that) "According to the findings from researchers at Boston University School of Medicine, who analyzed medical records of thousands of participants in the Framingham Heart Study, a long-running study that followed more than 5,000 adults living in Framingham, Mass, over many years. Their findings are important, because interventions for Alzheimer's disease are most effective in the earlier stages of the illness. For example, numerous studies suggest that lifestyle measures like a heart-healthy diet and regular exercise may help to slow disease progression in people with early Alzheimer's. Likewise, people with mild or moderate Alzheimer's may benefit from programs like art or music therapy, or day-program services that can provide social outlets and help to ease anxiety..."

*Read full article on The Fisher Centers page: news@alzinfo.org.

GEM, a local non-profit is here to help. We have been supporting individuals experiencing cognitive changes and their families since 1997. We provide programs, and services for not only the care partner, the person living with dementia, but also for their friends and our community.

One of our programs GEMz addresses the difficulty of finding friends, and maintaining friendships, due to Covid. We at GEM are reaching out to share a way to connect with friends, enjoy fellowship, and interesting virtual programs via Zoom. All are welcome and there is no cost. To join this we will require your email address. You can email Gail at: gsonnesso@gmail.com. We will email you an invitation to our program on Wednesday, which will include a zoom link, and we will also send a follow-up reminder again on Friday at noon to make it easier to find. For those of you who might be unfamiliar with ZOOM Angelo is available starting at 1:30 to guide you through the program. If you require further assistance, please call Gail at 252-480-3354 and we will be happy to help you.

To join our Craft programs, we will get our craft kits to you with everything you need to complete the activity. **Bingo** Cards can be emailed, or hand delivered. **Let's Tell A Story.** We use a picture that tells a story, and then go around the group and ask what they think of the picture. **Sing-along** with Angelo and celebrate birthdays during the month by singing Happy Birthday. Angelo has a wide variety of songs to share and if you have a favorite song, ask him to play it.

Additional support for families: The Area Agency on Aging - Lynne R. Raisor (252) 404-7090; OBX Dementia Friendly Coalition -Dianne Denny (252)489-9508; Outer Banks Homecare Rose Jones (252) 491-1234