

Why the Outer Banks needs both

OBX Dementia Friendly Coalition & GEM Adult Day Services, Inc.

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A friend wrote me about the OBX Dementia Friendly Coalition and GEM Adult Day Services: “I feel there is confusion in the community now with the two organizations. Who does what? Which one am I qualified to attend?”

It’s a good question and one that I am happy to answer.

Several local families participate in activities of *both* the OBX Dementia Friendly Coalition and GEM Adult Day Services, Inc. because our missions are so complementary. We *both* exist to provide services for families who are experiencing Alzheimer’s or a related dementia. See the following comparison of the mission statements of these 501(c)(3) tax-exempt, charitable organizations:

Mission Statements	
<i>Outer Banks Dementia Friendly Coalition</i> (founded in 2020)	<i>GEM Adult Day Services, Inc.</i> (founded in 1997)
Supported by the Dare County Department of Health and Human Services, the Coalition’s mission is to build a dementia Friendly Community through collaborative partnerships to raise awareness, provide education and support and to encourage community engagement. We strive to enhance the quality of life for everyone, not only those diagnosed with dementia but also their caregivers by reducing isolation and encouraging inclusion.	GEM Adult Day Services, Inc. is a non-profit, locally-based program that is working throughout Dare and Currituck Counties to alter the impact of dementia. The organization’s goal is to change awareness, attitudes, and behaviors with a primary emphasis on promoting best practices for training, education, and care.

Encouraging our loved ones to participate in *both* organizations’ programs increases their opportunities for social interaction as well as provides much-needed support for their care partners. See the following overview of programs:

Programs	
<i>Outer Banks Dementia Friendly Coalition</i>	<i>GEM Adult Day Services, Inc.</i>
“Caregivers Day Out” 3-hour group respite program	“Harmony Café” 2- and 3-hour memory cafés also attended by the care partner
Respite funds	Respite funds
Caregiver support group	E-newsletter sharing info and events
“Here with You” one-on-one support	Faith Outreach “Memorycare Navigators” Toolkits, tips, and resources
Workshops	Workshops

Educating and supporting the Outer Banks community is also a shared venture between the two organizations. The OBX Dementia Friendly Coalition promotes dementia-friendly training for local businesses and restaurants.

Training completion is noted by the display of a purple seahorse, whose shape mimics that of the hippocampus, the section of the brain playing a major role in memory.

GEM Adult Day Services, Inc. has partnered with College of the Albemarle since 2006 to train nursing students in dementia care best practices. GEM's tagline—"Gentle Expert Memorycare"—describes the organization's primary aspiration: To provide the *Best Practices in Care* for our friends and loved ones experiencing cognitive change.

The steps we have taken to reach this goal are multiple and varied. Our main program is a Memory Café that meets weekly to offer a meaningful, engaging, and validating program for the participant living with dementia. An added benefit because of care partner participation is the demonstration of what the participant can still do with the proper support. Finally, GEM provides opportunities for socialization for participants, care partners, and supportive volunteers through partnerships with many other community groups.

Our philosophy is based on the research of John Zeisel, Ph.D., so-founder and CEO of Hearthstone Alzheimer Care's "I'm Still Here" Approach, a comprehensive, non-pharmacologic, resident-driven method of working with persons living with cognitive impairments that provides a high level of meaningful engagement and can significantly reduce the common symptoms associated with dementia. This methodology has been researched for more than 20 years and field tested extensively at Hearthstone's six assisted living residences. Use of this approach has been shown to provide significant benefits such as decreasing falls by as much as 50% and antipsychotic drug use by as much as 75%, while creating a substantial increase in the quality of life for persons living with cognitive challenges.

Clearly, *both* programs—OBX Dementia Friendly Coalition *and* GEM Adult Day Services, Inc.—are helping to meet the needs of Outer Banks residents living with Alzheimers or a related dementia, their families, and care partners assisting them.

For further information about the OBX Dementia Friendly Coalition, contact Dianne Denny at 252.489.9508; for further information about GEM Adult Day Services, Inc., contact Gail Sonnesso at 252.489.8751.