



DEMENTIA TAS
GLENVIEW

Supporting people with dementia on outings

A guide for
retail & service staff

www.dementiatas.com.au

Introduction

You are one of the many thousands of people in Tasmania who provide a service to customers during your work. Some of your customers will be people living with dementia. This booklet will provide you with some guidance on how you can help to support them.

An Alzheimer's Society survey (UK) revealed that 69 per cent of people living with dementia said that the main reason they stop going out is a lack of confidence. Your encouragement and support will help people living with dementia to remain part of the community, be more active in the local area and live better, more fulfilling lives.

By understanding more about dementia and how it can affect individuals, you can also help other people appreciate the impact of this condition. You can contribute to the important work being done to create dementia-friendly communities.

Your role

By developing an understanding of dementia, you can make someone who is feeling isolated to feel valued and welcome.

You are in a position where you can influence the experience of a person with dementia in your local area. Thoughtful and helpful service from you can make a big difference to someone who is feeling vulnerable.

People experience dementia in different ways and they can be affected differently by the people and environment around them.

In Tasmania in 2015 there were 7,818 people living with dementia. This number is increasing each year and the projection for 2020 is 9,900, and by 2040, that number increases to 13,544 (*Australian Institute of Health & Welfare 2012 Dementia in Australia*).

They, along with their carers, friends and family members, depend on a wide range of products and services. People living with dementia and their supporters require organisations that show support and understanding.

Please don't underestimate how important your knowledge and understanding might be for people living with dementia.

What is dementia?

The word dementia describes a set of symptoms that include memory loss and difficulties with thinking, problem solving or language.

A person living with dementia may also experience changes in their mood or behaviour. There are many types of dementia. The most common are Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia.

Dementia is caused by diseases of the brain - it's not an inevitable part of ageing, as many people believe. The symptoms will gradually get worse as it progresses and there is no cure. No two people experience dementia in the same way – it affects everyone differently.

Dementia mainly affects people over the age of 65 but younger people may also develop dementia. In Tasmania, the number of people who have dementia diagnosed when they are in their forties, fifties and early sixties is increasing each year.



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How does dementia affect people?

Every person with dementia is different and an individual with their own personality. Some of the ways in which dementia can affect people include:

- **Memory loss** - this particularly affects day-to-day memory, for example forgetting what happened earlier in the day, not being able to recall the reason for being in a particular shop, being repetitive or forgetting addresses. Some people remember things from a long time ago much more easily.
- **Communication problems** - including problems finding the right words for things, for example, they may describe the function of an item instead of naming it. People might also struggle to follow a conversation.
- **Difficulties with thinking things through and planning** - problems with carrying out everyday tasks such as handling money.
- **Confusion about time or place** - getting lost in familiar places or being unaware of the time or date.
- **Sight and vision problems** - increased difficulty with reading and judging distances or mistaking shiny, patterned objects or reflections.
- **Unusual emotional behaviour or responses** - becoming sad, angry, frightened or upset. Someone may seem to lack self-confidence or display changes in mood.
- **Restlessness or disorientation** - in unfamiliar or noisy environments people living with dementia may become confused or ill at ease.

How you can help

Dementia is one of a number of reasons why someone might have any of these difficulties. Whatever the cause, **you can play an important role in helping someone contribute to everyday life and feel part of their community.**

If you notice someone having problems such as those described in this booklet, it is important that first and foremost you see the person as an individual - not just the symptoms of dementia.

You already know the importance of good customer service. The following tips may help you assist someone who is experiencing some of the difficulties associated with dementia.

Offer understanding and reassurance

Someone living with dementia who is finding it difficult to process information or is feeling disorientated may not be able to answer simple questions or take in what you are saying. They may not remember what they were doing or intending to do. In the later stages, they may also make mistakes about things, for example, they may think that their bag has been stolen when they have left it somewhere else.

When you are assisting a person living with dementia, remember the following points.

- **Firstly, allow the person to take their time.**
- **Avoid asking too many questions at one time.**
- **Try to understand how the person might be feeling.**
- **Put them at ease - be friendly and smile.**
- **Consider their feelings and respond to the emotions they are expressing.**
- **If they are experiencing difficulty or appear distressed, ask direct questions such as whether there is someone they would like you to call, rather than 'What would you like me to do?'**

Communicate clearly

The key to helping someone is being able to communicate with them. A person living with dementia may not understand what you are doing or remember what you have said. Treat them respectfully by addressing them in conversation as well as any partner or carer they may be with. Follow the guidelines below that may help you communicate with someone who is experiencing difficulties associated with dementia.

Body language and physical contact

- Make eye contact
- Make sure that your body language and facial expressions match what you are saying.
- Never stand too close or stand over someone to communicate.
- Do not cover your mouth. The person should be able to see your face clearly.

Talking

- Speak clearly and calmly
- Use short, simple sentences
- Speak at a slightly slower pace
- Avoid speaking sharply or raising your voice
- Avoid talking about people living with dementia as if they are not there or talking to them as you would to a young child

Listening

- Listen carefully to what the person is saying, and give them plenty of encouragement.
- If you haven't understood fully, tell the person what you have understood and rephrase the information back to them to see if you are right.

If possible, use visual clues – write your message down if the person is able to read and use objects or pictures to help the person understand. For example, show the person photographs of meals they can choose from.

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Be aware of the environment

There may not be very much you can do to change the features of your working environment. However, if you are aware of how these features may affect people living with dementia, you might be able to help if they are having difficulties.

If the place where you work is noisy, busy or there are sounds that might be distracting, this can make people living with dementia uneasy. Some people can also have specific visual problems in addition to the normal ageing processes that can affect how clearly they can see.

They may not recognise colours, faces or objects or have problems with spatial awareness (judging the distance between things and where you are in relation to them). This can lead to getting lost or disorientated or bumping into things.

Bear in mind the following points:

- Objects that are shiny, patterned or reflective can cause people living with dementia to mistake what they are seeing.
- Features such as lighting, mirrors, shadows, steps, escalators and patterned walls and floors might cause problems.
- If they have increased difficulty with reading or processing visual information, they may not recognise instructions or signs, be able to read maps or timetables, or know where they should put things. What is obvious to you may not be so to them.
- There may be a wide variety of noises in your workplace such as alarms, electronic equipment, music and other voices - beware of how this might affect someone living with dementia.



Offer practical support

In some situations, there are specific ways you can provide help to people living with dementia. You may find the following suggestions useful:

- If someone can't remember how to do something, offer to show them how to do it. As much as possible, do the task **with** them not **for** them.
- Somebody living with dementia may feel anxious about their ability to carry out tasks or activities. Try not to put them under pressure - break down tasks into smaller tasks, supporting them along the way.
- If someone appears to be looking for something they can't find, ask if you can help.
- People living with dementia may have problems with money or their payment card. Try to be patient: tell them there's no hurry; ask if you can help counting out the right money.
- If someone cannot remember significant information, for example their address or PIN, make sure you are aware of your organisation's alternative procedures that will help them access the service or information they require (e.g. being able to sign for purchases). If your organisation doesn't have these processes in place perhaps you could suggest developing them (a 'no hurry check-out').
- If someone forgets what you have just said, repeat your sentence patiently as if you had not said it before.
- Be aware of environments that are noisy or dark, and if you can, provide a quiet place where it is easier to offer one-to-one assistance.

If you suspect someone is having difficulties or recognise that a regular customer is having specific problems associated with dementia, be guided by them as to how you can answer their needs.

Dementia affects everyone differently so you may be able to suggest adjustments or put relevant practices in place for individuals with particular requirements.

A small action may make a significant difference to someone and help them to continue living safely and comfortably in the community.

Dealing with a difficult situation

Customer service can sometimes be demanding and stressful. Practice your techniques for coping when your role is challenging and you are helping someone living with dementia who is experiencing difficulties.

Remember the following tips:

- 1 Stay calm.
- 2 Keep your breathing even.
- 3 Maintain eye contact with the person.
- 4 Reassure the person living with dementia or anyone with them that they are not under any pressure.
- 5 Explain to anyone else concerned that the situation is under control and that it will be resolved as soon as possible.
- 6 If the situation remains difficult, ask a colleague or supervisor for assistance.

Going to the local

“Dad really enjoyed going out to eat at the local pub – somewhere we’d been going for years. As his Alzheimer’s disease progressed, his behaviour got more unusual. He didn’t understand the menu options, started to complain about the food and would sometimes get very angry for reasons we could not understand.

Mum and I felt so embarrassed that we thought we’d have to stop going to the pub – which Dad would have hated! But two girls who worked there had such a gentle and responsive way of dealing with Dad that his outbursts and confusion never became an issue.

If he complained about the food, they were sympathetic and asked if he’d like a replacement. If he asked for a strange dish (raw onions and tomatoes, for instance) then they would bring it for him (checking subtly with us first). If he said, ‘Steak, egg and chips! Who on Earth would come up with such a ridiculous combination?!’, they would tell him they thought it was silly too.

Their kindness and consideration meant that we all felt welcome, and Dad was able to enjoy going out for pub grub - something that really mattered to him - for as long as possible.”

**Jamie Anderson, son of Gerry Anderson,
creator of Thunderbirds**

Dementia Tas provides consultancy and training to aged care, disability and business sectors. Dementia Tas also provides education and information to family members who are supporting a person living with dementia.

To find out more information about Dementia Tas or to explore other interesting resources please visit the Dementia Tas website:

www.dementiatas.com.au

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