

The Alzheimer's Café Model

An Introduction for Washington State



Friendships blossom at the Alzheimer's Café at the Frye, Frye Art Museum, Seattle WA. Photo: Olli Tumelius

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This introduction provides a basic overview of the Alzheimer's Café social engagement model for people with dementia and their loved ones. Read on to discover more about how an Alzheimer's Café works and the benefits it can provide in your community!

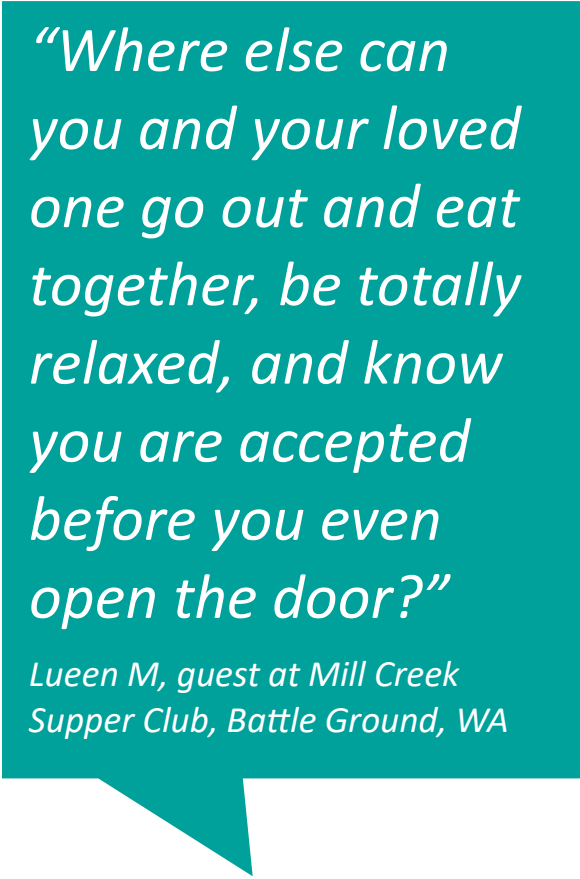
Background

Over 100,000 people in Washington State live with Alzheimer's disease or other dementias, and another 300,000 people care for a loved one with dementia.

While people with dementia and their loved ones remain a vital part of the community, they often experience social isolation. Even getting out for a cup of coffee with friends can present challenges – from wondering about how a server may respond to a memory lapse, to choosing between items on a complicated menu.

In response, the Alzheimer's Café model aims to provide accessible, community-based opportunities for people with dementia and their loved ones to build social connections.

Developed in the Netherlands in 1997, the Alzheimer's Café model came to Washington State in 2010 when Seattle's Greenwood Senior Center launched the second Alzheimer's Café in the nation. Now there are hundreds of monthly Alzheimer's Cafés around the country, with more getting started all the time.



“Where else can you and your loved one go out and eat together, be totally relaxed, and know you are accepted before you even open the door?”

Lueen M, guest at Mill Creek Supper Club, Battle Ground, WA

Alzheimer's Cafés: The Basics

What is an Alzheimer's Café, and what is its purpose?

An Alzheimer's Café, or Memory Café, is a regular social gathering for people living with dementia and their loved ones, in a comfortable community setting such as a coffee shop or café. While some include education or structured activities, Alzheimer's Cafés primarily provide the simple joy of being together, in a welcoming, stigma-free environment.

What is it NOT?

An Alzheimer's Café is not an adult day program or drop-off respite program, it is not an opportunity for medical or professional advice, and it is not a marketing opportunity for particular agencies or services.

Who attends?

An Alzheimer's Café is open to all, but is especially intended for people living with dementia and their loved ones. Other attendees may include interested visitors, paid caregivers, staff and volunteers, or activity facilitators like musicians or teaching artists. To foster a comfortable, inviting atmosphere, people are not typically asked about their diagnosis. People with any level of dementia symptoms are welcome. If a person needs support in order to participate, they attend with a loved one or caregiver.

Where and when does it take place?

An Alzheimer's Café can take place in any comfortable community setting. In Washington State, many cafés take place in local coffee shops or restaurants. These venues are familiar, often free, and provide a warm, social atmosphere. Other successful settings include community centers, faith congregations, museums, senior centers, libraries or parks. Medical or long-term care settings are not recommended. An Alzheimer's Café usually takes place for 1.5 – 2 hours, once a month, during a time when the venue is less busy.

“My husband and I have only attended once, but we really enjoyed it and will definitely go again. Ted especially! He is in the early stages of dementia and we were both happy to visit with the other people at our table. With all the changes in our lives lately, this feels like a bit of ‘normalcy’ returning.”

Jan B, guest at Mill Creek Supper Club, Battle Ground, WA

What happens at an Alzheimer's Café?

While the European model of the Alzheimer's Café may include educational presentations, the American model aims to give people a break from focusing on dementia. The focus is relaxed, informal social interaction. So at its most basic level, an Alzheimer's Café “agenda” can just involve arriving, taking a seat among friends, placing an order, enjoying food and socializing. Many Alzheimer's Cafés in Washington State follow this informal model. To help foster interaction, facilitated conversations or activities can also be incorporated. Examples include sing-alongs with familiar songs, seasonal creative arts, or table games.

What are the benefits?

For the person with dementia and their loved ones, benefits include social support, enjoyment and fun, informal resource-sharing and peer mentorship, and a chance to be out and about in a familiar community setting. The café becomes a special outing to look forward to, and regular attenders often develop close relationships that extend beyond the monthly gathering. For the wider community, benefits include increased dementia awareness and reduced stigma, and the opportunity to live in a place which fosters social inclusion.



Café guests David and Daphne Jones lead a sing-along at the Columbia City Alzheimer's Café, Tutta Bella, Seattle, WA. Photo: Full Life Care.

Where can you go for additional resources?

To learn more, see the companion Alzheimer's Café Steps to Success "how-to" guide for Washington State on the Dementia Action Collaborative website: www.dshs.wa.gov/altsa/dementia-action-collaborative

- For a list of Washington State Alzheimer's Cafés, see www.alzcafes.org. Contact any of these café organizers if you'd like to visit.
- For a national registry, see www.alzheimerscafe.com.
- For a comprehensive overview of Alzheimer's Cafés, including templates for planning, marketing, budgeting, outreach, evaluation and more, see the Massachusetts Memory Café Toolkit: www.jfcsboston.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Memory%20Caf%C3%A9%20Toolkit/