

Have you ever wondered what it is actually like to live with dementia or to really care for someone with dementia? I hadn't.

I just thought with growing old came challenges; forgetfulness, poorer mobility, confusion etc

I should have known better with my mother's Parkinson's & Lewy Body dementia being diagnosed over 14 years ago

My father was my mother's main carer. When he passed away I began to realise how difficult things can be sometimes. I suspect he shielded a lot from me. He was always 'fine'

A couple of years ago I decided I needed to do much more, not just for my mother, but also to help raise awareness of dementia and the way I run my business

My name is Adam Michallat-Cox and I run the WFF franchise for the Bristol area, something I have done for 25 years. WFF supplies meals directly into the homes of very elderly people or older people living with lifestyle limiting conditions, such as dementia, Parkinson's, stroke, physical and mental illness, etc

I am also a trustee of the Bristol Dementia Action Alliance (BDAA), I sit on the steering groups of the South Gloucestershire DAA and the Portishead DAA, plus I am a member of the Avon & Somerset Dementia Forum, which pulls together many of the organisations involved in the fight against dementia, together with bodies such as the police and fire service.

We work closely with BRACE, a Bristol based charity trying to find a cure for Alzheimer's Disease, plus the Alzheimer's Society itself

We are heavily involved with a project at Bristol Airport aimed at making it more accessible for travellers living with hidden disabilities, plus projects involving Ashton Gate stadium and First Bus. Bristol also has a dementia friendly theatre, a zoo and many other dementia friendly public places, organisations and retail outlets, but our work continues

Firstly, what is dementia? See Alzheimer's Society description:

The word 'dementia' describes a set of symptoms that may include memory loss and difficulties with thinking, problem-solving or language. These changes are often small to start with, but for someone with dementia they have become severe enough to affect daily life. A person with dementia may also experience changes in their mood or behaviour.

Dementia is caused when the brain is damaged by diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease or a series of strokes. Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia, but not the only one.

The specific symptoms that someone with dementia experiences will depend on the parts of the brain that are damaged and the disease that is causing the dementia.

How did we do this at WFF?

I plan to leave you with three 3 Key Benefits of creating a dementia friendly business		
Making your business a better place	Creating Self-Perpetuating Goodwill	Building something Great by Doing the Right Thing

Invest in your Business	Do the Right Thing	Inspire Others
Have Clear Values & Beliefs What is really important? we are all dementia friends	Put Customers First create systems that meet needs, not other way round	Create a positive Dynamic. Values, Awareness, support, knowledge, freedom etc
Build the Right Culture & Communicate It. Let it grow	Caring Culture: Look after customers, team & each other	Follow the Customer Journey. Make sure it Works
Find & Keep the Right People. nice, kind, caring people "Saved my mothers' life"	Build Real Relationships. Get to Know People. Ask & mean it	Image & Reputation. It matters what people think
Have the right (Flat) Structure so people can be involved	Value Dignity & Respect. Costs little achieves a lot	Recommendations & Referrals. Best marketing. Up to 50%
Raise Awareness of things that matter. dementia awareness	Show Patience, Tolerance & Understanding. Empathy.	Participate in Local Activities & Events. Fly the flag. Mem Cafes
Give Training & Support; invest in people. dementia champion	Time is precious. Don't Ration. Drivers/Max Drops	Be Community Centric. Get Involved & be seen
Give Ownership to People Allow discretionary behaviour Driver Areas M-F	Find Correct Solutions for Customers. Seek & Find	Private sector has a massive role to play. Be Willing.
Acknowledge & Recognise the right things. Reinforce culture	Remove Barriers; physical & emotional. Outgoing Calls	Go the Extra Mile and Make Somebody Happy
Make Real Changes to Premises, Processes & Systems Missing lists/safeguarding	Think about the Bigger Picture Not just about transaction, it is about the relationship	Shout About It. Tell Others. Be Proud. Social media/events etc



Hopefully I've communicated the three key benefits

Finally, Just think; if you are a person living with dementia or their carer and you have a choice of a business displaying a purple angel or other Dementia Friendly sticker, where the staff and premises show not only an understanding but also a desire to make things as easy and enjoyable as possible, you are going to go back there time and time again, plus probably recommend that business to somebody else

Furthermore, if that business is dementia friendly, it will also be a better place to visit or interact for everybody else as well, young or old, so commercially IT IS THE RIGHT THING TO DO

I know this is not necessarily relevant, but just think; if businesses and offices, cafes and coffee shops, restaurants and pubs, opened up their premises and facilities to people living with dementia, whom may need to use the toilet or have somewhere to rest or feel safe, what a nicer city we would have

My mother has deteriorated over time because of her condition and has been a resident of a dementia unit within a nursing home for almost three years now. I visit her 3-4 times a week. She usually recognises me, but is never sure who I am. Some days I can be her husband or father. Unfortunately, she has now lost all mobility, must be helped entirely with eating and drinking, plus is doubly incontinent.

Strangely one of the last things she lost was her ability to play the piano, although she still recognises some music and songs, so we often listen together. It is so important to try and hold on to those little things in the hope that they still give some joy.

As Norman McNamara, founder of Purple Angels, once said; *hopefully one day dementia itself will be just a memory.*

Thank-you