

THE FOREST HILL STORY

DEMENTIA FRIENDLY COMMUNITY



Who are we?

In 2016, a group of community service organisation representatives agreed to work together to improve the wellbeing and quality of life of people living within dementia in Forest Hill. In 2018, the group expanded to include community members living with dementia and their carers. Today, there are nine service providers and eight community members in the group. The Inner East Primary Care Partnership, City of Whitehorse and Carrington Health play key roles leading the project.

Forest Hill is a suburb in the City of Whitehorse, which was ranked as the local government area with the fourth greatest prevalence of dementia in Victoria (NATSEM, 2016). Forest Hill has approximately 1,380 people currently living with dementia (Alzheimer's Australia, 2016) and a high proportion of older residents (15.5% aged 70 years and over) (City of Whitehorse, 2016).

What do we want to achieve?

In 2018, the group collectively agreed that the aim of their DFC project is to **make Forest Hill a place where people living with dementia, and their family and friends, feel supported to participate in their community.** This was the result of a discussion about the initial aims of the service provider representatives, the aims of DFC, and the group's underlying interest in improving wellbeing and quality of life of people living with dementia.

Following broad community consultation in 2017, the group consolidated 30 project ideas into six action areas. They then developed criteria to assess these and achieved consensus on two priority actions:

- Assist people with dementia and their carers to know where to get help.
- Help businesses to have an understanding about people with dementia.

Forest Hill Dementia Friendly Community is a partnership with community members and Inner East Primary Care Partnership, Whitehorse Council, Carrington Health, Care3, Home Instead Senior Care, Uniting & Villa Maria Catholic Homes

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Next, the group will develop more detailed project plans and a framework for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the work.

How will we do it?

Using a co-design approach

The philosophy of this project is to co-design actions that will contribute to building a more dementia friendly community in Forest Hill. The first step in this process was to ensure the working group understood what co-design means. Five members of the group participate in a partner forum organized by the Inner East Primary Care Partnership and facilitated by the Australian Centre for Social Innovation. The forum introduced members to co-design principles and practices such as equalizing power, understanding roles within the group, taking time to build relationships and providing the appropriate supports for community members to participate, such as transport.

Building partnerships

The project relies on the successful partnership of all the service providers and community members involved, ensuring a genuine co-design approach. In particular, the involvement of the City of Whitehorse will be critical in promoting the project to a broad reach of the community, connecting with businesses, and influencing infrastructure changes.

The group also plans to form new partnerships to implement the agreed actions. This is likely to include Forest Hill Chase Management and Brentford Square Traders Association, two key local shopping precincts accessed by people living with dementia in the area.

The group also plans to work closely with Dementia Australia to implement actions related to increasing understanding about dementia.

Developing resources

Depending on the final agreed action areas, the group is likely to develop the following resources:

- **promotional materials** (such as flyers and posters) will be designed to suit the specific target groups, including people living with dementia, businesses and the broader community

- **dementia friendliness audit tools**

To date, the group has developed a [dedicated webpage](#) about the project on the Inner East Primary Care Partnership website and published an article for the October 2018 edition of [Whitehorse News](#), distributed to all households in the Council area.

The group is keen to ensure the resources and knowledge developed throughout the project are made available to the wider community, and that the work is continued and sustainable in the longer term. The more that dementia friendly community ideas, resources and knowledge are shared, the greater the impact will be on the quality of life of people living with dementia.

How are people living with dementia leading it?

The involvement of people living with dementia is critical to the success of the project, and to the co-design philosophy. During the consultation phase, the group visited seniors, carers and dementia groups and retirement villages in the area to ask what was important to them, what they want to access in the community, and whether they want to be part of the project. This led to eight community members joining the group, including one person who is living with dementia.



The Forest Hill Dementia Friendly Community Working Group with the aim agreed

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What have we learned?

Success factors

The key successes of the project so far have been the:

- **partnership approach** between service providers, and more recently with community members, combining service providers' expertise about working with people with dementia with community members lived experience.
- **level of commitment** from group members, who attend meetings and contribute meaningfully to discussions.
- **use of a skilled, external facilitator** with a good understanding of co-design and ability to build rapport and positive engage the group.

Challenges

Key challenges of the project so far have been:

- **meaningfully engaging people living with dementia.** While carers are keen to participate, it has been difficult to recruit people living with dementia. As we develop our action plan, we will need to consider other ways of involving people living with dementia in the project. This could include taking ideas to them for discussion and walking with them to better understand their experience of their local area.
- **setting the right pace of work** so there's enough time to build relationships, ensure members understand co-design, and allowing enough time to explore ideas and have a genuine co-design approach, without losing momentum.
- **having adequate resources** to support people to attend meetings and participate in the project. While we're committed to providing compensation for members' time, transport and respite care to allow community members to attend, this can be costly.

Further Information:

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