Alzheimer’s Society achieves one million Dementia Friends ambition

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The biggest ever social action movement to change perceptions of dementia is today (Saturday 18 February) celebrating creating one million Dementia Friends. Just over two years since it was launched, Alzheimer's Society's Dementia Friends programme is now transforming the way the nation thinks, talks and acts about the condition.

Dementia Friends is one of the many ways that Alzheimer's Society is changing the lives of people with dementia for the better. As well as the development of Dementia Friendly Communities, the charity has committed to spend £100 million on research into care, prevention and a cure over the next 10 years.

With nearly two thirds of people with dementia experiencing loneliness and almost half reporting to have lost friends after their diagnosis, Dementia Friends was launched in February 2013 to tackle the stigma and lack of understanding which means that many people with the condition can face social exclusion. The initiative, which is jointly run with Public Health England and funded by the Cabinet Office and Department of Health, combines face to face Information Sessions and online videos to help people learn more about dementia and the small things they can do to make a difference.

Dementia Friends has harnessed the energy of individuals, communities and organisations to challenge stigma around dementia across the whole of society. There are currently more than 9,000 Dementia Friends Champions, volunteers who have dedicated an estimated 100,000 hours of time to creating grass roots change in their communities by running Dementia Friends Information Sessions.

To date, businesses including Marks & Spencer, Asda, Santander, Lloyds Pharmacy, easyJet, Argos, Homebase and The Royal Bank of Scotland have encouraged their staff to become Dementia Friends. They join schools, the police, the fire service and transport providers in a concerted effort to build a dementia friendly society and support people with the condition to take part in their local community.

Celebrities including Ruth Jones, Alesha Dixon, Ruth Langsford, Eamonn Holmes and Pixie Lott have also become Dementia Friends and helped front a TV advert urging the public to do the same. The Cabinet, the leader of the opposition, Ed Miliband, and more than 100 MPs have taken part in Information Sessions too.

As part of a long-term commitment to help more communities and businesses become dementia friendly, Alzheimer's Society has set an ambitious target of creating four million Dementia Friends by 2020.

Jeremy Hughes, Chief Executive of Alzheimer's Society, said:

'We are beginning to change for the better the lives of people with dementia and their carers. More research and improved health and care services are fundamental to the work of Alzheimer's Society. But the real revolution is the one million ordinary people who have chosen to become Dementia Friends. In communities across the country, they are working to eradicate the isolation, fear and despair felt by so many affected by dementia. Dementia is our biggest health challenge and the British people are rising up to tackle it."

Gary Whiting, 61, was diagnosed with vascular dementia in 2012. He lives in Surrey with his wife, Jackie. He said:

'My diagnosis was a real shock, but it also allowed me to better understand what was happening to me when doctors took the time to explain the effects of the disease. I'd lost my concept of time and shopping was becoming very difficult because I'd go out and buy too many things I didn't need. I'm determined to remain as independent as possible. Over the years I've noticed that dementia awareness has increased and I've had some really positive experiences in local shops with kind and patient staff. Dementia Friends is a great initiative - I think sometimes people don't understand the day to day realities of dementia, and taking some time out to understand how it can affect people is very important.'

Duncan Selbie, Chief Executive of Public Health England, said:

'The sheer scale of the challenge posed by dementia means we all need to work together to address it. Public Health England is doing all it can to raise awareness of this disease and in helping the public and

businesses support people living with the disease by becoming Dementia Friends.'

Anyone can become a Dementia Friend by watching a short online video or attending a face-to-face session. To find out more visitwww.dementiafriends.org.uk

Notes to editors

1. Dementia Friends Champions are volunteers who talk to people about being a Dementia Friend in their communities. It's easy to get involved. Dementia Friends Champions will attend a training course, receive ongoing support and be part of a growing network of people creating dementia friendly communities together.

- Dementia Friends has been driven by a marketing programme that is jointly run with Public Health England (PHE). The ambition to create a further three million Dementia Friends is an Alzheimer's Society commitment.

- For confidential advice, information and support, please call Alzheimer's Society's helpline on 0300 222 1122.

- For more information on becoming a Dementia Friend, visit http://www.dementiafriends.org.uk/

- Alzheimer's Society is the UK's leading support and research charity for people with dementia, their families and carers. We provide information and support to people with any form of dementia and their carers through our publications, National Dementia Helpline, website, and more than 2,000 local services. We campaign for better quality of life for people with dementia and greater understanding of dementia. We also fund an innovative programme of medical and social research into the cause, cure and prevention of dementia and the care people receive.

- Public Health England's mission is to protect and improve the nation's health and to address inequalities through working with national and local government, the NHS, industry and the voluntary and community sector. PHE is an operationally autonomous executive agency of the Department of Health. Follow us on Twitter @PHE_uk

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