Helping to combat the loneliness of Dementia through friendship

Monday 21 November, 2016

‘Dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, has overtaken heart disease as the leading cause of death in England and Wales, latest figures reveal. Last year, more than 61,000 people died of dementia - 11.6% of all recorded deaths.’ – BBC News

The Bible Reading Fellowship's (BRF) The Gift of Years programme aims to tackle the loneliness of old age by supporting older people. As part of this work there are Anna Chaplains who deliver spiritual care services to older people and provide a way for churches to respond to the need to draw alongside older people. These ecumenical, community-based chaplains are promoting older people’s spiritual welfare. This was pioneered in Alton, Hampshire, and is now being used in a variety of contexts in other parts of the UK.

Anna Chaplains frequent clubs and groups where older people gather. Such chaplains also create opportunities for people in twos and threes to meet and talk, over books, poetry, crafts or other shared interests. They also make time to meet with people one to one.

Debbie Thrower, founder of The Gift of Years says:

Loneliness is a silent killer. You might be able to inoculate yourself against ‘flu but the effects of spending prolonged periods on one’s own can be corrosive to the soul. Anna Chaplains are there to support the older people in our communities and provide them with a friendship and support.

Over 850,000 people are estimated to be suffering from late onset Dementia in the UK. By 2025, the number is expected to rise to one million. By 2051, it is projected to exceed 1.7 million.

Debbie also goes on to say:

With a rapidly ageing population, more and more of us live in single households, often some distance from relatives and old friends. We need places in which to meet, and forge new friendships.

-ends-

Further information:

The Gift of Years is a core part of BRF’s overall vision to transform lives and communities through the Christian faith. Our vision for the programme is to inspire, equip and enable every church across the UK to meet older people’s spiritual needs. At the heart of The Gift of Years is the Anna Chaplain model which we are making widely accessible.

The aim of The Gift of Years is to improve the spiritual lives of older people in the UK by:

- increasing the provision of spiritual care services for older people
- raising awareness of older people's spiritual needs
- improving the skills, knowledge and confidence within communities in addressing these needs

There are a wide range of Dementia resources on The Gift of Years website aimed to support carers, families and church leaders in their work. See: The Gift of Years resources

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