

St. John's Community Care leads sessions on how to identify and serve those with dementia

by Kerry Smith
July 25 2018 11:46 AM



COLLINSVILLE - St. John's Community Care offers companies and organizations a no-cost, one-hour session on how to spot, serve and support those who may be struggling with dementia.

The session, called Dementia-Friendly Madison County, delivers education and resources tailored to equip professionals in a myriad of environments including health care, retail, legal, financial, law enforcement, local government and faith communities. Gail Shaw, Care Coordinator at St. John's Community Care, says the brief but impactful session is designed for a small group – between three to 12 individuals. Causes of memory loss and the 10 warning signs of dementia are also covered.

“Our whole purpose is to help participants understand what dementia is and what it can look like,” Shaw said. “Group members will walk away with an understanding of what is considered routine memory loss versus memory loss that is out of the ordinary.”

Dementia-Friendly Madison County is modeled after Dementia-Friendly UK that recently expanded to the U.S. “Thirty-five states have joined this initiative to provide businesses and the public with an up-close understanding of dementia, Alzheimer's Disease in particular,” said Shaw, who leads the sessions here. “Since we began hosting these one-hour sessions in May, a lot of great discussion and learning has taken place. Our program includes activities that help individuals understand what it's like to live with serious memory loss and how best to communicate with and assist those struggling with dementia.”



Dawn Mushill, executive director of the Troy/Maryville/St. Jacob/Marine Chamber of Commerce, says Dementia-Friendly Madison County is a huge resource. “It really comes down to good customer service,” Mushill said. “If you're in business, you'll want

to know how to manage the influx of people who will be affected by dementia /Alzheimer's, and how to serve and support their caregivers, too. This one-hour time investment is a monumental first step toward doing that."

Madison County Sheriff's Dept. Lt. Kristopher Tharp recently invited St. John's Community Care to present the one-hour session to his team. "There's nothing to fear if we're all working together in community outreach and support to those facing dementia," said Tharp, who has formed Madison County TRIAD, a nonprofit entity to enhance quality of life and safety for the county's senior population. "When I set out to start our organization, I reached out to Nancy Berry (St. John's executive director) as a stakeholder. Dementia-Friendly Madison County is a shining example of what we're all seeking to accomplish together...to show empathy and support seniors all around us who bear the symptoms of dementia. It's vital that when we encounter people we're able to connect them to the appropriate resources."

Cindy Knebel, chief operations officer and HR director at Best Hometown Bank in Collinsville, says the Dementia-Friendly session is well worth the time. "This is particularly valuable for anyone who serves customers who are senior citizens experiencing dementia. I'd recommend it," Knebel said. "Learning about the umbrella of diseases that fall into the category of dementia is vital in recognizing this insidious disease within our community and doing all we can to reach out and help those around us."

Chris Fulton is information specialist at AgeSmart Community Resources, one of two organizations administering the Illinois Dept. on Aging grant to make the one-hour session a reality. "Our goal is to be able to take this program to our five surrounding counties," she said. "We're working hard to ensure that our communities are more open, inviting and willing to support those with dementia as well as their caregivers."

To schedule a Dementia-Friendly Madison County one-hour session, contact Shaw at St. John's Community Care, (618) 344-5008.