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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Join the Movement - Become a Dementia Friend!

Before the COVID-19 pandemic tightened its grip in March this year, almost 200 people in our region became Dementia Friends. Dementia Friends is a growing movement that started in the United Kingdom and was developed with the goal of creating awareness in communities about what dementia is, the many ways it is manifested, and how people can respond and help when they encounter someone who seems confused. Dementia Friends in Virginia is sponsored by Leading Age, a nonprofit that supports education, advocacy, and applied research related to aging and ageism.

The one-hour information session (one receives a certificate) takes minimal toll on time, but significantly expands awareness of dementia and aptitude to those who can assist people living with it, without feeling uneasy or unable. Essentially, it builds confidence to help. "The more people we can encourage to become Dementia Friends, the more our community benefits.", says Ellen Phipps, Executive Director. "It's not only about awareness, but about offering confidence to the general public so they aren't hesitant when confronted with a situation where they may be able to help someone who is manifesting signs of dementia. If you know what to do, you are more likely to do it. At the same time, as a community builds its corps of Dementia Friends, the propensity for emergency situations or tragedy may be diminished, and that's huge."

According to the Alzheimer's Association an estimated 5.8 million Americans age 65 and older are living with Alzheimer's dementia in 2020. Alzheimer's is the most common type of dementia, but there are many others including vascular dementia, or dementia associated with other diseases like Parkinson's or Lewy Body disease. Sometimes even vitamin deficiencies can cause dementia which can actually be reversed when treated, unlike other forms of dementia. And dementia is exhibited in varying ways, some more obvious than others.

The possibility of encountering a person living with dementia is high. They go to the grocery store, the post office, the movie theater, places of worship. They walk in the park, downtown, and in their neighborhood. They dine out and shop for gifts. They stop in for a coffee. Sometimes their level of dementia is low and unnoticeable, or they could just be having a bad day where it's more obvious. It can be common that they are with someone, but sometimes

they are alone or get separated. They could be lost and don't know what to do. Often a person living with dementia withdraws physically and mentally.

That's where Dementia Friends fits in. The significance of this information session is that anyone can become a Dementia Friend: a merchant, customer service rep, restaurant waiter, law enforcement officer, service provider of any industry, faith-based minister, coworker, peer, friend, resident, or anyone (really, ANYONE) in the community. "Everyone can learn to understand what tendencies someone living with dementia may exhibit and how to help them. You don't even have to know anything about dementia to participate.", says Phipps. "But you will come out of it with a sense of empowerment and if we grow the number of Dementia Friends in our region, that empowerment becomes a huge force – it's a movement!"

Aging Together is continuing Dementia Friends training with its first virtual session on January 26, 2021 at 10:30am. Registration is free on the website: <https://www.agingtogether.org/upcoming-programs.html>. There is also a short but powerful video on the site outlining the importance of Dementia Friends. "We encourage everyone to become a Dementia Friend and invite others in your personal sphere to do the same", says Phipps.

The mission of Aging Together is, through partnerships, to connect people to communities and resources to improve quality of life as we age. Aging Together serves the counties of Culpeper, Fauquier, Orange, Madison and Rappahannock.

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