

Support from our localities during a pandemic

On any one day across Scotland's 21 localities you might find our Dementia Resource Centres hosting a carers support group, musical memories, a one-to-one meeting with a Dementia Advisor or a Day Care session. As well as this, our local teams work hard in the community to raise awareness of dementia. The pandemic understandably stopped the majority of our face-to-face support but, as always, our local teams have gotten creative and continued to provide high-quality, person-centred support via other means. In the next few pages, you can read just a few of the various ways we've been there for people with dementia, their carers and families throughout the country.

Cup o' kindness

By Anne O'Donnell, Community Activities Organiser, Alzheimer Scotland

During Dementia Awareness Week we wanted to deliver something extra special for the people we support, with the main aim to lift their spirits during lockdown. As no-one could come to us for a tea & a blether, we wanted to take the tea to them and decided to create cup o' kindness packs.

The name cup o' kindness is from the lyrics of the Robert Burns song Auld Lang Syne "we'll take a cup o' kindness yet" which refers to the tradition of raising a glass and meaning "good will, friendship and kind regard." I felt it encapsulated what we were trying to do, reminding everyone that they had not been forgotten by Alzheimer Scotland.

The contents of the pack included home baking, a purple picky pack, a heart box of chocolates and a

little bag of happiness. We even included tea bags and coffee sachets for their cuppa. One of our carers, Mary McShane, handmade some lovely cards and we had some wonderful donations from the local community.

Everyone showed such generosity and put the kindness into our cup o' kindness packs! We delivered 93 cup o' kindness tea & treat packs and received some lovely comments from those who received one.

"Have been reduced to tears for the first time since the beginning of this trying time. Such a lovely surprise and gesture. Will now put the kettle on and thank you for your kindness."

We're so glad that we could put a smile on people's faces during what was quite a difficult time for many.



Home support in the Western Isles

By Christine MacLeod, Daycare Organiser, Alzheimer Scotland

When the day came that we were able to do a limited amount of home support, the team in the Western Isles had a huge amount of enthusiasm. I had really positive experience supporting a lady, Murdina, who normally attends the Day Centre three times a week.

On my first visit, wearing full PPE, Murdina and I had a virtual activity scheduled called French Lingo. On arriving at Murdina's house her face lit up when she saw me and her welcome was worth all the difficult times prior. She recognised me and said she was so glad I came as she was missing seeing people. The French Lingo was explained to her and she immediately quoted a couple of French sentences!



The activity was a success and Murdina interacted well. She is a retired teacher and I could see her teacher mode at times; the session brought much laughter to us both. The next session was Musical Memories which went equally as well with lots of singing along. Murdina's carer and son have expressed how the visits have helped her and brighten her day.

After the virtual activity, we have a cup of coffee and a chat about anything: from reminiscing to the bird activity in her garden. The longer I'm in the house and the more Murdina talks, the more I can see her mind engaging and her communication improves. This home support has been a positive experience for Murdina and myself as we have built up a good rapport and are very relaxed in each other's company.

Sounding Good – Feeling Good

By John Gray, Community Activities Organiser, Alzheimer Scotland

Everyone knows about the healing power of music. It can reduce anxiety & depression and help with speech & memory. The human voice is the most effective sound-healing instrument of all.

To this end many of the activities organised by the Kilmarnock Dementia Resource Centre involve music and, in 2019, we decided to add another string to our bow. This came in the form of Kate Barbour, who runs 'Sing Like a Lark' vocal coaching sessions. Kate is a native of the Czech Republic and has lived in Scotland since 2013. She is a trained singer and vocal coach and is currently studying for a diploma with the *British Academy of Sound Therapy*.

Kate developed a workshop for a small group who we thought would enjoy and benefit from the class. Each class involves breathing and vocal exercises, singing in harmony alongside humming and 'sound baths' (the use of therapeutic sound along with sounds from nature which slow down the brain waves, stimulate deep breathing and help relax the body and nervous system). Kate has also introduced Body Percussion (BAPNE method), to the group. This exercise helps



aid memory and co-ordination for older people. The effect on the group has been dramatic; building confidence and friendships along with providing tremendous fun and laughter. Each session ends with a group lunch – next to singing, eating together is the best way to form relationships.

This of course all stopped with lockdown. However, we moved the group online and now meet up every week via the internet. It hasn't been a seamless transition but with Kate's skills and perseverance and the group's enthusiasm we have managed to get a working model that bring us most of the benefits of the class.



A digital tea and blether

By Carol Hamilton, Community Activities Organiser, Alzheimer Scotland

During the lockdown we moved our weekly Tea & Blether informal social group onto a digital platform called GoToMeeting.

Meeting online can be daunting for people who are not used to communicating digitally, and perhaps even more so if a person has dementia. To allay people's anxiety, I first invite each participant to a one-to-one session in the GoToMeeting room. In this way, I can help them to work around any technology issues they might encounter, answer any questions or concerns, and start to develop a relationship so they feel more comfortable to join the group.

Integrating members can be challenging at times as some people can be more forthcoming than others. I am mindful of those who are quieter or at a more advanced stage of their dementia journey and encourage them to chat and interact more. I



also take care to ensure the type and complexity of the activity is suitable for everyone. The current group enjoy quizzes, singing and reminiscence and provide each other with fantastic peer support, as well as lots of laughs. This helps to prevent social isolation and improve their emotional wellbeing.

"I look forward to a Friday so I can put the world to rights."

We also know that the benefits of therapeutic activities for people with dementia outlast the duration of the activity, with carers reporting that their loved one has experienced improved mood and communication after taking part in the group.