**How you can help make your community more dementia friendly? Helping a stranger who seems lost and confused**

A dementia diagnosis can cause a person to lose their navigation skills and their ability to recognise familiar places. Due to this it is common for a person with dementia to become lost or disorientated about where they are. This is likely to be a scary and confusing time for them and a worrying time for their family, friends or supporters. With the right support of the local community a person with dementia can be helped to get home safely and quickly. There are steps that can be taken by members of the public, local businesses, neighbours and the wider community that will have an impact.

The more people in Sheffield who are aware and understanding of how to help, the more safe and supportive the City will be for people living with dementia. We have shared some thoughts, considerations and resources to help increase awareness. SDAA have covered:

* *Why* a person with dementia might be lost in your community
* *What* to do if you think someone is lost and vulnerable
* *How* to help someone in your community who may be at risk of becoming disorientated

**Why might a person with dementia be lost or disorientated in the community?**

A person with dementia could become lost in their community for a variety of reasons. They might leave the house with a particular goal in mind, such as going to the post office or local shop, and suddenly not recognise where they are. They might be looking for something or someone familiar and find themselves in an unknown area. They might be bored, anxious and on leaving the house suddenly find themselves unsure about where they are going.

How each person will respond in each situation will be different. A person may ask someone walking by for help, they might keep walking in the hope they find somewhere or someone that looks familiar or could end up in an unusual place. It could be a distressing time for them, their family carers and friends. At these times the awareness and support of members of the public will make a difference in getting someone home safely.

**How you can help:**

While it might not be clear if a person is disorientated, you might notice something that appears unusual. The person might appear confused or anxious. They might have left the house unprepared so could be wearing inappropriate clothing such as wearing pyjamas, a t-shirt on a cold day or carrying something unusual.

While every situation will be different, it is worth thinking what you would do if you were in the position to support someone who appeared lost and confused. You could consider:

1. **Communication**Keep your tone of voice **friendly and calm.** Body language also has an impact so stay relaxed. When talking **make eye contact and speak clearly**. You might notice they are confused about what you are saying or where they are. **Use simple language** and if the person doesn’t understand you, rephrase what you are saying but avoid asking too many questions at once. **Listen to what the person is saying** and give them your full attention. They may need time to process what you have asked.
2. **Let them know you are going to help** them and help get them home.
3. **Dial 999** to let police know you are with someone who is lost and confused and a vulnerable person. The person might have a “help card”\* in their pocket, which will have details of who to contact in an emergency.
4. **Stay with them in** a public place, such as a cafe or park.
5. **Reassure the person** and let them know that someone is coming to take them home. Smiling and being at ease will have an impact.

**How to help people in your community at risk of getting lost**

You might work with someone affected by dementia, have a neighbour or support a customer who you are concerned could get disorientated or lost. Here are some steps you can take to help them stay safe in their community:

* Encourage them, family or friends to complete a **Herbert Protocol.** This is a national scheme that encourages carers to compile useful information that can be used if a vulnerable person later goes missing and is used in Sheffield. It can be hugely distressing for families and friends if a person goes missing so it is advised for the Herbert Protocol to be completed after a diagnosis, rather than at the time of an emergency. The form can be found here: <https://www.southyorkshire.police.uk/contact-us/tell-us-about/herbert-protocol/>.
* The person might give consent for neighbours and people in the community to be told about their diagnosis. In this case local shop keepers, local groups or neighbours might be asked to contact a family of friend if they see the person walking in the area. If the person doesn’t give consent, their diagnosis should only be disclosed if in their best interest.
* The power of **social media.** Families and friends may share posts on local groups and missing person’s groups if their loved one has gone missing. Yorkshire Police also use Social Media. Sharing posts to online groups in your local area might help a missing person get recognised. However, remind family carers and friends to carefully consider how much information they share. The missing person might not want people to know they have dementia.
* **Increase awareness.** You, your colleagues or neighbours could complete training to increase awareness of dementia. You could complete a Dementia Friends training session or look at any relevant Dementia Advice Sheffield training. More understanding and awareness of dementia, will better equip everyone to understand, communicate and support a person with dementia.
* Encourage the person with dementia to **carry identification** and details of who to contact in an emergency. The Alzheimer’s society have a ‘Help card’\* that will assist with this.
* GPS devices can give reassurance to both the person with dementia and their family member if they are concerned about getting lost.
* Sheffield Dementia Action Alliance works with local businesses, shops, and community groups to help them be more dementia-friendly and supportive of people living with dementia. In order to fully support people with dementia across the City to feel included in the community, we need the support of many. If you are involved in a local group, visit a local business or organisation that might want more information on and want more information on how you can be more dementia-friendly then please contact us on SDAA@ageuksheffield.org.uk.
* The Dementia Advice service can offer information, advice and guidance to any professional or volunteer who comes into contact with someone living with dementia. For example, if you are a local shop assistant, a hairdresser or a volunteer who is concerned about someone getting disorientated in the community and wants advice, you can contact Dementia Advice Sheffield for free on 0114 250 2857 or on the contact details below.
* Ask if someone is OK if you feel safe to do so
“*I recently had an interaction with a gentleman, who it transpires has dementia and was lost. It reminded me the difference stopping and asking someone if they are OK can make.
I arrived into Dore train station and walked past a gentleman a few minutes later. It took a moment to register that he didn’t seem completely at ease. He had a worried expression and on turning back I noticed he was in slippers. I said a friendly hello and when I had his attention asked if he needed any help. The gentleman came across quite confused and wasn’t sure exactly where he was or where he was going. He mentioned his son who I was able to call after the gentleman pulled out his wallet, with a note attached saying he had dementia and an emergency contact number for his son. We sat at a bus stop and while we waited for his Son to collect him and spoke about Sheffield and 60s music. On this occasion the small act of asking someone if they needed help made all the difference. I wonder if there have been other times that I have been in such a rush that I would have missed the same expression. It really was a reminder that it can make a huge difference to just check in with someone if you think something doesn’t feel quite right.”* Rebecca, SDAA

Other resources:

* Information on Herbert Protocol <https://www.southyorkshire.police.uk/contact-us/tell-us-about/herbert-protocol/>
* South Yorkshire Police twitter: <https://twitter.com/syptweet?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor>
* Information on the Alzheimer’s Society ‘Help Card’

<https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-support/publications-and-factsheets/helpcards>

- Contact DAS on (0114) 250 2857 or e-mail dementiaadvice@ageuksheffield.org.uk with any enquiries