

# Key features of a dementia-friendly community

Ideas from a Memory-Friendly Neighbourhoods break-out session



On Monday 2nd June 2014, 45 of the leading thinkers, strategists and practitioners in dementia-friendly communities came together at the Scottish Universities Insight Institute in Glasgow to exchange knowledge and ideas about their work. Invited by the Memory-Friendly Neighbourhoods team, participants came from across Scotland, the UK, Europe and North America. They were from a range of backgrounds, including academia, policy and practice. Three participants had dementia.

There were two interactive activities on the day, interspersed with short presentations from invited speakers. This brief report summarises the outcomes from the first of the interactive activities in which participants were asked to discuss what they understood to be the key features of a dementia-friendly community. The informal, table-based exercise took place over 50 minutes, with participants working in multi-disciplinary groups of six - eight people. We felt this to be important, as the concept of a dementia-friendly community remains under-theorised, and notions of 'place', 'space', 'neighbourhood' and 'assets' are liable to mean different things to different people.

In general, our participants felt that, harnessing the strength of the relationship between people and place, a **dementia-friendly community** is both **socially** and **physically** supportive of people with dementia. Specifically, it is...

... one in which everyone has at least a basic awareness of dementia and the fact that it affects different people in different ways. It is one in which people are willing to listen to those whose lives are affected by dementia, and talk *to* them, not *over* or *about* them. It is a community in which people with dementia are visible, and feel comfortable and supported in being so, where they feel empowered to participate in community life, if that suits their character. Where does responsibility lie when someone with dementia needs a helping hand? A dementia-friendly community is one in which structures and systems don't get in the way of a friendly, informal, human approach.

... an accessible, inclusive and enabling environment. It is a place in which navigation and wayfinding are not a matter of signage alone and in which it is easy to get from a-to-b regardless of cognitive ability. It is a place on a human scale; that feels secure and promotes social interaction; that is not alienating and is inclusive of people with different needs and backgrounds. It is a place in which thought has been given to what we can design *for* and what we can encourage to *evolve* and which reflects a heightened awareness of how our multi-sensory environments impact on people with a range of cognitive needs.

Memory-Friendly Neighbourhoods (MFN) is an interdisciplinary collaboration between research centres at the Universities of Stirling and Edinburgh. Funded by the Scottish Universities Insight Institute (SUII), the programme is supported by the Centre for Dementia Research at the University of Linköping, Alzheimer Scotland, Anderson Bell Christie Architects and Architecture and Design Scotland. For further information and resources, visit [www.memoryfriendly.org.uk](http://www.memoryfriendly.org.uk)