

Highlighting Spotlight!

The Dementia Spotlight Foundation

by D. Lee Higgins M.S., PhD

In 2012, Whitney Oeltman's father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. The physician delivered the news and wished them "good luck" in a blithe manner as he opened the door for them to exit. Whitney's training and experience as a social worker sprang into action as she searched for resources to help her mom and dad figure out their next steps. Given the number of people with dementia in the country, she assumed that she would be able to link her parents into a coordinated system of education, skill building, decent medical care, and find high levels of social and community support. Shocked and disheartened by what she found, Whitney and her mother, Linda Demarlo, were determined to turn their struggles and negative experiences into positive action. In the fall of 2016 they founded Dementia Spotlight Foundation with the mission of providing a "guiding light" for discovering the connections, direction, support, and resources that they had hoped to find.

Though a nascent 501(c)3 organization, Dementia Spotlight Foundation has sponsored trainings for care partners, individuals living with dementia, and professionals given by Teepa Snow (PAC) and The Eden Alternative. The PAC curriculum, first of its kind, identifies the value of connection with care partners and people living with dementia when their primary verbal communication and interaction abilities are compromised. The Eden Alternative culture change model identifies and illustrates the techniques available to combat loneliness, helplessness, and boredom that accounts for the bulk of suffering among elders. To date, over 600 people have attended trainings that were made more affordable and accessible by Dementia Spotlight Foundation's scholarship programs.

Most recently, in addition to sponsoring the Dementia Action Alliance's first International Conference, held in Atlanta in June, 2017, the foundation provided scholarships to ten care partners - individuals living with dementia and their respective care providers. This conference was a testament to the belief that the voice of people living the experience should be instrumental in creating and guiding dementia services and programs. The experience was priceless.

Building relationships with other dementia-focused organizations and seeking to create a coordinated and comprehensive approach to help people navigate their lives as they continue the journey with purpose and meaning, is the Foundation's vision. As this collaborative effort continues at the national, state, private, and public sector, every day a big step forward is being made in the right direction.

Dementia Spotlight Foundation envisions a world that does not fear dementia. Instead, we see communities capable of embracing dementia and supporting individuals and families living with a changing brain.

On July 14, 2017, Whitney's father, Anthony "Tony" DeMarlo passed away from congestive heart failure. His courage continues to be present as Linda, Whitney, and the Dementia Spotlight Foundation Team continue their work. For more information, please visit our [website](#).