

## Training Designed to Create Dementia-Friendly Communities

In 2010 the State of MN passed legislation requiring the state to prepare for the huge impact Alzheimer's disease will have on our population and our resources over the next few decades. One of the five areas the state identified as needing attention is helping communities become dementia capable.

The state chose five pilot communities for this program: four geographic communities (including St. Paul), and one religious/cultural community, which is the Twin Cities Jewish community. Their goal is to increase awareness, reduce stigma around Alzheimer's disease, and reach as many people as possible. The Twin Cities Jewish Community Alzheimer Task Force, a joint effort between JFS and JFCS of Minneapolis, was asked to help with this goal.

The Dementia Friends training program is a 60 to 90-minute educational session designed for any community organization, business, religious institution or other community setting. The program focuses on understanding dementia and acting to create an environment that is safe, respectful, and welcoming for people living with dementia.

Dementia Friends learning objectives include:

- Learn what dementia is and some facts about Alzheimer's.
- Recognize the signs of dementia.
- Learn tips for communicating and interacting with a person who has dementia.
- Become familiar with dementia-related resources and services in your community.

Dementia Friends training helps organizations heighten their constituents' awareness of dementia and equips them to respond warmly and effectively when serving people living with dementia and their care partners.

"I got involved as a Dementia Friends 'champion' after my mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's," explained Margie Solomon, Volunteer Engagement Specialist at JFS. "I was motivated by the frustration I felt so often when a store clerk or bank teller showed little awareness or empathy when communicating with my mom."

Margie has delivered dozens of Dementia Friends training sessions to local business groups. "I always come away knowing that I have delivered meaningful and impactful information to my audience, but I also gained more knowledge about how those who are uniquely challenged by living with dementia every day. I think it's critical that everyone in our community has this awareness and that it translates into intentional behaviors to build a dementia-friendly community."

Margie has received a variety of thank you notes from some of the groups she has trained. "Thank you for making this training happen for our staff and several congregants," wrote a rabbi from a local temple. "Truly this is helping us honor and understand, a sacred task." A meeting planner from a local Lutheran church wrote, "Thank you for your wonderfully engaging visit with us today at St. Michael's Lutheran Church and our Religion in Life Adult Education program. Several members have experienced dementia in family and friends. Some of them attended today's discussion. I believe their personal interest in the topic and the stories they shared were indications of how much you helped inspire and educate them."

Any group interested in receiving Dementia Friends training can call Margie at (651) 690-8907 or email her at [msolomon@jfssp.org](mailto:msolomon@jfssp.org) to schedule a free session.