

HOW CAN THE CHURCH RESPOND TO THOSE WITH MEMORY LOSS IN YOUR COMMUNITY?



There are many answers as to how the church can make a response, but one way is to set up a Memory Café. This is exactly what we have done at Revidge Fold United Reformed Church (URC) in Blackburn. "The

Open Door Memory Café" was established in response to the needs of those living with memory loss in the community and the church. It is an ecumenical project, offering an informal, friendly and welcoming space where people with various forms of memory loss or dementia can come together for a cup of tea, chat and optional activities and home made-cakes in proper China cups. Activities include; Speakers, Art and Craft, Quizzes, Games, Themed activities e.g Saints days and Easter etc, sharing memory activities and Sing-a-longs.

The Café was launched in June 2016 and officially opened by the Mayor and Mayoress of Blackburn with Darwen Council who unveiled a plaque and assisted in burying a time capsule of memories from all those who attended including various agencies. However the seeds were sown long before this when members of the church identified there was a need either from personal experience of a family member with memory loss or knowledge of someone in the congregation or congregation.

It was very clear from the beginning that one church could not respond alone and that it had to be ecumenical if it was going to succeed and so there are four denominations involved, the Methodist Church, Anglican Church, Baptist Church and the URC. The café runs once a fortnight and there is a core group of around 25 volunteers who help out on a rota basis. Each volunteer brings a different skill to the table, which compliment each other, and makes for good teamwork. Some folk can't get help out at the sessions but make cakes for us also on a rota, which is a very important contribution.

In preparation the majority of the volunteers attended a Dementia Friends Training Course and met with representatives from a variety of agencies who provide us with support as appropriate. The café has gone from strength to strength and is becoming well known across Blackburn and further afield.

So what do those involved think of it?

We find the memory cafe at Revidge Fold URC (Four Lanes Ends) very valuable. It provides a social connection for my father and additionally a stimulating opportunity for him to continue performing music. The team at the cafe are caring and well organised and finally last but not least the cakes are delicious!!

Eric Howarth – Guests father

'The memory cafe is good. We are all getting to know each other and we really enjoy the activities. The volunteers are all friendly and caring'. I can't think of anything else to say except it's great!

Maureen Shaw – Guests wife

It is a real privilege to be involved with the Open Door Memory Café! I love welcoming our guests and in particular to see how their relationships with each other, and with us, are developing. We are learning such a lot as a team of volunteers as we spend time with our guests, sharing activities with them and hearing their stories.

Elizabeth Bradley – Coordinator.

We enjoy the Friendship and chatting, The Variety of activities, singing, companionship, tea and cakes, having fun and meeting new people.

General feedback.

Dementia and Alzheimer's are a pressing issue not only for society but also for the church. Its so easy for us to jump to conclusions and forget that there are many reasons for 'Memory Loss' and that's why we decided to call it a 'Memory Café and not a Dementia Café.

We need to acknowledge that memory loss affects us all at some stage whether it's forgetting where we've left our keys, what we went into the shop for or the name of someone we've known for years. It's important to remember that it isn't always a sign that people have Dementia or Alzheimer's.

The reason our Memory Café is so successful is because it's contextual, meeting a local need, its ecumenical, it's none threatening, not 'Church' and we have a great team of enthusiastic and committed group of volunteers with a common interest, singing from the same hymn sheet, Amen to that.