

Forest Hill dementia-friendly community



Project overview

The Forest Hill Dementia Friendly Community Group co-designed resources to help local businesses in Forest Hill Chase Shopping Centre become more dementia friendly.

Dementia-friendly communities are welcoming and inclusive of people living with dementia, as well as their families and friends, so they can continue to participate in their community and live their life with maximum independence.

Project description

A group of local community members and people from local organisations collaborated and co-designed resources to support local cafes and businesses to become more dementia friendly. The group was led by the Inner East Primary Care Partnership (IEPCP) and Whitehorse City Council.

The group developed promotional materials, a checklist of physical changes that could be made to premises, a short dementia-friendly awareness session for retailers, simple and clear information for retail staff, and a logo so people could easily recognise participating businesses.

Project model

- An initial group of partner organisations consulted with people with dementia, carers and other community members about the important features in a dementia-friendly community, generating over 30 ideas for action.
- Local carers and people living with dementia were an important part of the work and ensured their direct experience underpinned the changes.
- A co-design approach was embedded in the way the group worked, with all group members learning and developing their skills in co-design together.
- Time was invested on building trust, rapport, and ways of working together, including using an external facilitator in the initial phases.
- Power imbalances between community and organisational members were addressed to ensure contributions were equally valued.
- The group was open to evolving and changing its approach as it developed.
- Group members had high ownership, shared tasks and attended events on behalf of the group.

Budget

The project was a collaboration between funded and private organisations and community members.

The Victorian Government provided a significant contribution to resource staff to lead the project. Whitehorse City Council contributed leadership, a \$2,500 grant, and other in-kind resources such as printing, meeting spaces, and development of a video. Dementia Australia also provided a \$15,000 grant to enable reimbursement to community members and development of resources.



Project challenges

Engaging people living with dementia in co-design work can be tricky. Recently diagnosed people may still be coming to terms with their diagnosis. Some people living with dementia may not have had a formal diagnosis or acknowledge their dementia. Many people feel the stigma of living with dementia. Some people living with dementia have considerable cognitive decline, which can impact on their capacity to contribute meaningfully. Nevertheless, the concerns and needs of people living with dementia were included through consultation with dementia groups and carers groups, and the inclusion of carers and one person living with dementia on the group. Spending enough time on building rapport, trust and a positive working environment was paramount to sustained engagement. A balance needed to be struck between these aspects and the desire to start implementing project actions.

Project outcomes

The group developed a unified identity that emphasised collective contributions and decision making and valued members' skills and knowledge. Group members supported and encouraged each other, developing new friendships, connections, skills and knowledge.

The strength of the co-design process means community members have strong engagement with the project and with completing the next steps. While implementation was postponed due to COVID-19, the work can be resumed when interested businesses are ready to re-engage.

Resources designed by the group are available on the [IEPCP website](https://iepcp.org.au/key-project/dfc/) <https://iepcp.org.au/key-project/dfc/> for others to use in their own setting.

This work has strengthened local partnerships between carers' organisations, council, community health, IEPCP and local businesses.

Project sustainability

Community and organisational members now have co-design skills and community project development knowledge that can be used to benefit the local community. This investment in social capital, together with the strong commitment derived through participation, will enable community to implement the project. The resources developed can also be adapted to support other dementia friendly community work in other locations in the future. An evaluation of the co-design process also provides a useful guide for community service practitioners to replicate.

For more information, see:

- Whitehorse City Council's '[Creating dementia-friendly communities](https://www.whitehorse.vic.gov.au/creating-dementia-friendly-communities)' page <https://www.whitehorse.vic.gov.au/creating-dementia-friendly-communities>
- [Dementia Australia](https://www.dementiafriendly.org.au/) <https://www.dementiafriendly.org.au/>

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