Milestones

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In this issue:

Dementia impact on lesbians and gay men  Page 4
A new era in volunteering  Page 5
I am continually encouraged at the level of support this organisation receives even when times are tough.
A walk to remember

More than 400 people walked nearly 4000 laps of honour at the inaugural Memory Walk as a symbol of support for people living with dementia in WA.

The Walk, which was held on 20 September to mark World Alzheimer’s Day, also raised $72,000 in donations to assist Alzheimer’s Australia WA to provide critical services to more than 22,000 Western Australians who have dementia.

Walking 1,900 kilometres on the day, participants received a “memory” flag each time they passed the finish line.

By the end of the day 4,000 flags were planted to honour people living with dementia and in memory of family and friends.

Two people, Elizabeth Barnes and Eddie Jagger, who were part of a large group from Albany, each walked 42 kilometres - equivalent to the distance of a marathon!

Age was no barrier on the day as well. Five-year-old Zion Williams walked seven laps (3.5km) while 81-year-old Carmen Strugnell walked 14 laps (7km)!

However, the most inspiring walkers were those people who have dementia.

Symbolic reminder
Alzheimer’s Australia WA Chief Executive Officer Frank Schaper said the walk was a show of public support for people living with dementia in this State.

“Every lap walked and every flag planted served as a reminder of loved ones and friends who had to live with dementia,” he said.

Supporters acknowledged
Mr Schaper acknowledged the outstanding support of Memory Walk partner, Curtin University of Technology, who provided the use of their facilities at no cost.

He thanked all who participated or sponsored the walkers and hoped more would get involved in next year’s Memory Walk.

“We aim to have 1,000 walkers next year and plant many more thousands of flags as we strive to make an even bigger statement in raising the awareness of dementia in the community,” he said.

For more photos and details about how to get involved in next year’s Memory Walk, visit: www.memorywalkwa.com.au

Thanks to our Memory Walk partner:

People of all ages helped to raise funds and awareness of dementia.
In his foreword to Alzheimer’s Australia’s paper “Dementia, lesbians and gay men”, Justice Michael Kirby said that lesbians and gay men face particular challenges in dealing with the impact of dementia.

Commissioned by Alzheimer’s Australia, the paper, launched in November, explores issues including those for service providers and care workers.

It also looks at the social stigma and the lack of acceptance of lesbians and gay men by fellow residents in aged care facilities.

Chief Executive Officer of Alzheimer’s Australia WA, Frank Schaper said that in an ideal world all people would be treated equally.

“However, we must face reality and be particularly aware of the challenges faced by all minority groups when faced with dementia”, said Mr Schaper.

“This paper aims to inform and enable aged care service providers to provide the best care services possible to a section of people in our community whose needs are often overlooked.”

“As an organisation we are continuing to develop our expertise in supporting people who, because of their sexual orientation, may be facing the dementia journey on their own.”

Further information
To obtain a copy of the paper, visit our website www.alzheimers.asn.au or phone (08) 9388 2800.

Case study
Two women who had lived together for some years were admitted to residential care and placed in adjoining rooms and treated as a couple by staff.

Jean had dementia, while Sally, who had been providing care at home, was now physically frail.

However, Jean’s adult son demanded that staff separate the two as he insisted his mother ‘was not a lesbian’.

He also requested that they not be placed at the same dining table or sit together in the lounge area.

Staff complied with his requests and both women were very distressed.
A new era in volunteering at Alzheimer’s Australia WA

Alzheimer’s Australia WA has launched an innovative volunteering program to enable many more people to become meaningfully involved and engaged in its work.

CEO, Frank Schaper, said that Alzheimer’s Australia WA was founded and run by volunteers for many years.

“I have enormous respect for the power of volunteers in our community”, said Mr Schaper.

“Without the generosity of so many individuals, this organisation would never have started.”

Mr Schaper said that the organisation has launched its new-look volunteer program to enable more people to become involved at different levels.

“We take great pride in our positive culture and the sense of camaraderie and shared passion that exists between our staff and volunteers”.

Intensive training
Part of the new volunteer initiative is a two-day induction program where volunteers are provided with an understanding of dementia and how to interact effectively with people with dementia.

This will ensure volunteers will be confident to talk about the organisation and be able to interact with our clients and the public.

Ongoing support
Volunteers will be assigned a workplace mentor or a “buddy” from the moment they commence with the organisation. These mentors will either be an experienced staff member or volunteer.

Volunteers who wish to work in direct care and support roles with people with dementia will also attend a three-day nationally recognised course in dementia care.

Volunteer positions
Here are some of the volunteer positions currently available at Alzheimer’s Australia WA:

- Community guest speaker
- Day centre activity support
- Gardening assistant (Albany)
- Day centre handyman (Perth)
- Kitchen assistant (Albany)
- Memory van assistant
- Transport assistant (Albany & Mandurah)
- Regional events assistant
- Windows and Internet tutor

Pamper parlour: Jenny Horsley, who was a former beautician, now volunteers once a week treating clients at our Shenton Park day respite centre with a free “pamper” session.
The formal evaluation of Alzheimer’s Australia WA’s Brain Fitness pilot project has proved a great success according to the participants.

More than 40 people from three retirement villages and two senior’s gyms took part in the eight-week pilot which involved 40 one-hour sessions in July and August. Most of the participants were in their 60s and 70s.

The project’s aims were to show that a brain fitness routine can be readily incorporated into lifestyles and routines for people living in retirement villages and people already involved in senior’s physical fitness programs. It sought to demonstrate that a regular program of cognitive exercise will reduce the impact of cognitive decline on the quality of daily life.

**Memory outcomes**
At the end of the pilot, more than 50 percent of participants reported an improvement in their train of thought and could remember names and shopping lists better than before.

**Social outcomes**
Everyday life improved for participants with 50 percent of them reported feeling more productive and sociable while 40 percent of people said they were sleeping better!

The project also demonstrated the effectiveness of older adults using the program in a group setting.

**“Plastic” brains**
Brain fitness is based on the idea that our brains are “plastic” and have the ability to change in response to new learning and stimuli. It challenges the notion that we are somehow pre-programmed to inevitable decline in later life.

Research now shows that much of the decline in later life is the result of lifestyle choices and training the brain works in the same way that physical fitness training benefits the body.

**Strategic priority**
A key strategic priority of Alzheimer’s Australia WA is “to promote greater awareness of dementia and inspire more interest in both maintaining healthy brain function and preventing dementia”.

Proactive brain fitness training for older adults is now recognised internationally as a way to enhance healthy ageing and delay cognitive decline. However, there has not been a focus on such training in Australia, despite the nation’s rapidly ageing population and the predicted impact that age-related cognitive decline will have on our social, health and economic structures.

To meet its strategic priority, the organisation has partnered with US company Posit Science and now has more than 500 users of Brain Fitness programs in WA.

**Thank you**
Alzheimer’s Australia WA thanks the following organisations for their partnership and support throughout the pilot project:

- Council on the Ageing WA;
- Southern Cross Care;
- RAAF Association WA Aged Care;
- Loftus Recreation Centre;
- Exercise for Life East Fremantle;
- Curtin University Centre for Research on Ageing; and
- McCusker Foundation for Alzheimer’s disease research

For more information visit www.brainfitnessaustralia.org.au or call (08) 9388 2800.
It’s never too late to change your mind
By Dr Michael J Valenzuela

There are practical things that we can all do to mitigate against the course of dementia. Using the latest research, Its never too late to change your mind explains just what dementia is and what causes it, and most importantly, what you can do to avoid it.

Enriched care planning for people with dementia
By Hazel May, Paul Edwards and Dawn Brooker

This up-to-date guide emphasises the importance of an individualised and inclusive approach in dementia care and offers practical steps for improving the quality of physical, social and psychological support for the person through their day to day experiences of living with dementia.

Available now from our Library

New study explores link between cognitive exercise and Alzheimer’s

A leading research centre has began a new study looking into the benefits of cognitive exercise and dementia.

Researchers at the WA Centre for Health and Ageing (WACHA) are currently seeking people diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease and a family member or a friend who care for them to participate in this groundbreaking research study.

The Promoting Healthy Ageing with Cognitive Exercise – Alzheimer’s Disease (PACE-AD) study will investigate whether a mental activity program, specifically designed for people with mild dementia, can reduce or slow further memory decline and improve quality of life.

It will also investigate the benefits of such a program on the family member or friend.

The study is currently looking for people who are willing to participate in the program, once a week, for six weeks.

Assessments of each person’s thinking abilities and well-being will be conducted as part of the study.

To find out more or to participate in this research study, please contact Cheryl Ackoy on 9224 2855 or email cheryl.ackoy@uwa.edu.au

WACHA Research Officer Sarah Brookes is part of the team researching the benefits of cognitive exercises on people with dementia and their carers.
As Australia’s oldest and largest dementia organisation, Alzheimer’s Australia WA is at the forefront of dementia care services, with world-class research, risk reduction and education and training programs designed to meet the challenge of what has been described by Access Economics as “a national dementia epidemic”.

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Disclaimer
Articles in this publication provide a general summary of the subject matter covered. Any person with dementia should seek professional advice about their specific case. Alzheimer’s Australia WA is not liable for any error or omission in this publication. Permission should be sought from the Editor before reproducing articles and/or images. Should permission be given, the source must be acknowledged.

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1800 100 500

Workshops and courses 2010

Family and friends

Understanding Dementia
A free introductory workshop for people who know or care for a person with dementia.

Living with Dementia
A follow-on workshop from Understanding Dementia. This workshop explores strategies to deal with challenges that may arise when caring for someone with dementia.

Mind your Mind®
This free workshop covers the seven lifestyle changes you can make now to reduce your risk of developing dementia later on in life.

Reminiscence and Life Stories
This free workshop provides participants with the knowledge and skills to engage in reminiscing and create a life story book with a person with dementia, with the support of their family and friends.

Successful Mobility for People with Dementia
This practical workshop provides family members and friends with strategies to promote and maintain mobility and independence for a person with dementia.

Health and aged care staff

Positive Dementia Care
This free workshop provides the underpinning knowledge and skills needed to interact effectively with people who have dementia.

Assistive Technology in Dementia Care
This free workshop looks at available equipment and technologies and explores their uses in dementia care environments.

Intellectual Disability and Dementia
This free workshop provides the underpinning knowledge and skills needed to interact effectively with people who have an intellectual disability, such as Down syndrome, and dementia.

Building and Interior Design for Dementia
This workshop provides an overview of the principles of best-practice building and interior design for environments that will be used by people with dementia.

Effective Dementia Care in Hospitals
This free interactive workshop provides information and strategies for all staff working in acute care to provide effective person-centred care to patients with dementia.

Specialty Topics in Hospital Dementia Care
This workshop is designed for clinical staff working in hospitals who may be responsible for the care of patients with dementia.

Effective Dementia Training Becoming a Dementia Champion in the hospital
This workshop provides applicable skills, information and resources to acute care health professionals working with patients with dementia. It will enable those with a passion for dementia care to become workplace role models and education resources for work colleagues.

Experiencing Dementia
This free two-hour simulation and workshop offers people working in aged care the opportunity to experience firsthand some of the feelings and emotions that may be associated with having dementia.

For dates, times and venues, please call (08) 9388 2800 during office hours or visit www.alzheimers.asn.au

Front cover: 4000 flags containing messages of love were planted at the Memory Walk to remember those living with dementia.