



Let's change our views on dementia and ageing

Think of a word you associate with "dementia". Is the word positive or negative? The chances are that it's the latter and this will be through no fault of your own.

While there have been some advances in media coverage of dementia and some of the language used has changed, it is still not uncommon to hear people with dementia referred to as a "sufferer" or "victim" in the papers and on television. Some of the most shocking news headlines have related dementia to a "living death" and, with this kind of language widely used it is no surprise that a study found in 2014 that over-50s fear dementia more than they do cancer. The frequency of negative reporting on dementia and ageing in general has influenced public thinking on these topics. There is little coverage of people with dementia, or older people in general, enjoying social activities, discovering new talents or speaking out about their lives.

At Dementia Friendly Communities we recognise that even those who mean well sometimes get it wrong. The series *Dementiaville*, broadcast on Channel 4 earlier this year, intended to highlight positive elements and progress in dementia care, but its shaky camerawork and minor-key music in no way reinforced this message. A more recent example of the negative depiction of older people is the latest Christmas television advert offering from John Lewis. Produced in partnership with Age UK, a respected and well-established charity which does some great work for older people, the advert highlights the issue of loneliness and isolation but in doing so reinforces stereotypical imagery in order to tug the heartstrings. The advert is reported to have cost £6 million – across the region many a local lunch club, community transport group, befriending service or activities provider does such good work existing on a shoestring... just think what could be achieved from that amount of money assisting and shining a spotlight on that side of life for older people and the communities in which they live.

We believe that positive depictions of life in older age and life with dementia need to be encouraged to alter the public's perceptions and get across the message that ageing need not be something we have to fear.

If you would like more information about Dementia Friendly Communities and the inclusive activities we run for all ages at Helmsdale Community Centre, call us on 01431 821655 or email hello@dementia-friendly.com