



What makes a community?

In March 2015, we at Dementia Friendly Communities in Helmsdale received a funding boost courtesy of Life Changes Trust, as part of their commitment to funding activities that support people with dementia and their carers in Scotland. At the end of February, we attended a meeting run by Life Changes Trust alongside representatives from all of the other dementia friendly community initiatives they support.

The meeting provided an opportunity for us to share our work and learn how others around Scotland are becoming more dementia friendly. Some of the figures presented at the meeting were impressive: over 2,900 people with dementia have been actively involved in dementia friendly activities; nearly 1,500 members of the public have attended dementia friendly events; and 64 new partnerships have been developed. These programmes are proving to be very effective with some heart-warming stories and anecdotes highlighting the positive responses from people with dementia and their carers.

In our rural areas, we often have a strong sense of community. That is, 'community' in the conventional sense of the word. What is not often realised, but became clear at the Life Changes Trust meeting, is that communities come in many different forms. We heard about the work of groups set up for people with dementia who are also deaf or are Gaelic speakers. Other dementia friendly communities include a football club, a choir and an allotment project.

So it seems community is really about shared interests, dreams and passions and those are as different and varied as the people involved. From performing or painting to golf, walking, online gaming, shopping... the list goes on. Interest also grows from experience and it is often the case that the experience of having an illness or long-term condition - or caring for someone who does - brings you closer to those in a similar position. This also goes for those who have children of the same age, with many lasting friendships borne out of this experience. In our work we have often witnessed the unspoken connections that occur between family carers or people with dementia.

Given that a community doesn't necessarily have to be about where we live but also *what we do* and *who we are*, it is important that people, after a diagnosis, are able to carry on being what makes them the person they are, or even discovering new interests, passions and communities. People should not be defined by their illness. We welcome any community, whatever or wherever it may be, that wishes to become more dementia friendly and embrace the challenges that brings.

For more information on the work of Dementia Friendly Communities visit www.adementiafriendlycommunity.com or email hello@dementia-friendly.com