



BUFFALO AREA DEMENTIA FRIENDS

Judy Weis, Wright County resident, knows dementia well. In 2013, her husband was diagnosed with it, causing overwhelming confusion about what to do next. After research and conversation, they agreed that they would be open about his diagnosis. Weis joined a support group and her husband joined a respite group for fellowship, activities, and socialization.

“As I started to experience my own struggles as a caregiver,” reflects Weis, “I was also hearing the struggles of others in my support group who were dealing with this terrible disease.” Weis was traveling to Becker to attend the support group but felt something needed to be done closer to Buffalo.

With the help of a close family friend, Weis pulled together local organizations and community members to be part of a group called the Buffalo Area Dementia Friends Action Team.

The group completed a community survey and assessment in 2017 and is now implementing their action plan.

One of their greatest successes has been a weekly caregiver support group, launched in January 2018. “Sometimes just knowing that you aren't alone in your journey helps,” shared one caregiver. “That's what a support group does. Having others that understand what you're experiencing is so helpful.”

The team also has created memory kits in partnership with Great River Regional Libraries. These kits include movies, stories, activities, and other tools to help those with dementia connect with their loved ones. Kits can be checked out through any library in the Great River system. They have also held other educational events and dementia training for Buffalo High School students and the Wright County Sheriff's Office.

“I felt it was important to have the availability of supportive resources and programs for people with dementia and their caregivers,” says Weis. “We want our community to be informed, safe, and respectful of people living with dementia and their families, have supportive features across all community sectors, and foster quality of life for everyone.”

Buffalo Area Dementia Friends Action Team is comprised of representatives from the Central Minnesota Council on Aging, Elim Care, Buffalo Chamber of Commerce, Stellis Health, St. John's Lutheran Church, Guardian Angels Elim Care, Allina Health, Zion Lutheran Church, Prairie River Home Care, Buffalo Community Center, Great River Regional Library, The Legacy of St. Michael, Wright County, and community members.