



MASE Monthly Newsletter



Proud Recipients of Queen's Award for Voluntary Service

January 2020



We wish all Carers and your cared for, all the very best for 2020. Stay well and remember Carers you are all incredible - take time to give yourselves a pat on the back for all you do.

Dementia experts are advising families to re-visit the past this New Year, to benefit loved ones living with dementia – and to think twice about incorporating noisy fireworks into midnight celebrations.

Remember that regional traditions and refreshments around New Year's Eve and New Year's Day can spark memories and create conversations that reveal much about our loved ones' past.

New Year Resolutions

1. Get your council tax reduced

If the person you live with has dementia, they will be exempt from paying Council Tax, so your home will be charged as a 'single person occupancy,' which means, in effect, that you will get a 25 per cent reduction in your total council tax bill. If this is the first time you've heard about this don't panic – you can get it backdated. Contact your local authority for more information. **Plus:** If you've had any special facilities added to your home to help your loved one (such as a downstairs bathroom) your council tax band rating could be lowered. So if your home is in band 'b' it could now be classed as band 'c' – giving you another saving.

2. Apply for a Blue Badge disabled parking permit

The popular Blue Badge parking scheme has now been extended to include 'hidden' disabilities such as dementia. This is great for people with dementia who are still driving, but it's great news for caregivers too who can also apply for a permit. Once you have it, make sure to display the permit in your car when you're taking your loved one out and you'll find it far easier to park. Go here to find out how to apply: <https://www.gov.uk/apply-blue-badge> or go into your Local Council Offices who can sort it out for you.

3. Ask for help

Caring for someone with dementia can be really difficult physically and emotionally. So it's really important that you make the most of people around you who can help. If you're struggling to cope, contact your local council and ask for a carer's assessment. It doesn't matter if you've had one before, dementia is a progressive condition and your needs may be different now – you could be entitled to more support.

4. Look after your health

It's very easy to become so wrapped up in caring for your loved one that you neglect your own health. However noble your intentions, this is a flawed strategy because you need to be strong and well to be an effective carer. If your health deteriorates, you won't be able to look after the person you love in the way you want, or feel they deserve. Make 2020 the year that you make your own health a priority. Perhaps you haven't been eating well, getting enough sleep or have been putting off that doctor's appointment because you're too busy. Maybe you're using food or alcohol as a comfort, or just feel stressed all the time? If so, now's the time to do something about it.

5. Make more time for yourself

Booking in regular 'me time' is vital for ensuring that you remain a healthy and therefore an effective carer (as well as a happy one!). Make sure you schedule it in – even if it's just an evening on your own at the cinema. You may also be able to book your loved one in for some respite care. And whatever you do, don't feel guilty. You deserve time to recharge your batteries and, if anything, it will make you an even better carer.

6. Find like-minded friends

Loneliness is one of the most painful and common emotions you're likely to experience. Many carers find they see less and less of their old friends, either because they don't have the time to socialise as much as they used to, or because friends simply don't understand. However, it is possible to build new friendships with more like-minded people.

Daphne Sharp ☎ 01785 211140 or 07939 505455 **Trustee /MASE Co-ordinator** ✉ themasegroup@gmail.com

Alzheimer's Society Dementia Helpline 0300 222 1122 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday and Saturday and Sunday 10am - 4pm.

People living with dementia do have something to say Try and develop communication skills to maintain meaningful connections with them



A clinical psychologist with over 30 years experience in specialist dementia care, **Professor Graham Stokes** is one of the most influential people working in dementia in the UK. His words of wisdom always make total sense and will help you on your journey with dementia.

Graham has twice paid a visit to the MASE; on each occasion he spoke to our Carers and gave them so much of his precious time. He has certainly helped many of our people over the years. He has published four books, including *Challenging Behaviour In Dementia* – a vital resource for understanding dementia and the people living with it, and most recently *And Still The Music Plays: Stories Of People With Dementia*.

When you're caring for someone who is living with dementia, some skills are obviously essential – kindness, patience and sensitivity, to name a few. Arguably, an even greater skill that's needed is the ability to maintain meaningful connections as the disease progresses. Being able to listen and engage can make the difference between meaningless words and meaningful interactions.

Graham speaks about being puzzled by an older woman who, in the midst of her dementia, would sit wringing her hands and repeating over and over the phrase "man like me". All became clear when her brother visited – she calmed down, and her eyes brightened as she recognised him. He was the "man like me" she was talking about.

The challenge for us all in such a situation is to see beyond the words to decipher the concealed message behind them. It's no secret that it can be very difficult to communicate with a person who has advanced dementia; the content of their words is often sparse, repetitive, disjointed and frequently incomprehensible. This communication challenge is the same for care assistants and nurses as it is for relatives looking after people with dementia. As their ability to communicate deteriorates as their dementia progresses, more effort is needed to stay connected to them to help maintain their quality of life. "Look for the emotion behind the words, rather than focus on the words themselves"

Think as you listen: concentrate on what you hear, think about what the words might represent and follow that line of enquiry. Look for the emotion behind the words, rather than focus on the words themselves. Seemingly confused statements like "I need to go to work" are often the way a person is trying to voice an unmet need, such as a need to feel useful or valuable.

Show you are listening: this will often prompt a person. It can be easy to look away, be distracted or respond inappropriately to perceived "ramblings". This will close down communication, as the person with dementia – like any of us – will sense the lack of interest. Instead, make sure you face the person and maintain eye contact; a smile will convey warmth and interest, and a gentle tone of voice will reassure and encourage them to continue.

Keep it simple: rather than introduce new content to the conversation, repeat back to the person what you have heard them say and your understanding about how they are feeling. Repeated phrases or key words act as stepping stones to help the person with dementia to say more. If you use questions to develop the conversation, keep them straightforward, and ensure they can be answered with "yes" or "no".

Be patient: take time to reflect on what you've heard and accept that pauses in conversation do not need to be filled with words; allow time for the person to digest what you have said and gather their thoughts so that they can respond.

People living with dementia have something to say, and they do say it, but their words often hide what they actually mean. Apply yourself to listening, rather than just hearing, and you'll start to appreciate the meanings and feelings behind words. These meaningful moments of communication can often help to bridge the emotional distance that this debilitating condition creates.

If you have a computer please take a look at our website which covers all MASE activities: www.themasegroup.com

Registered Charity No: 1137193 - The Monthly Alzheimer's Support Evening Limited (MASE)
Company Limited by Guarantee No: 7228424

DISCLAIMER— Every effort has been made to ensure that the information in this newsletter is correct at the time of going to publication. MASE Group accept no liability for the accuracy of the text. Company limited by Guarantee in England & Wales. Registered No: 07228424 Registered Office: 3 Hartwell Grove, Stafford ST16 1RW. MASE is a registered Charity - Number: 1137193 The Monthly Alzheimer's Support Evening Limited (MASE)