

# Age and Dementia Friendly

## Real life stories



# Real Life Story: Raymond D White, Optometrist

Ray White is an optometrist who offers a personalised service for older people, which includes home visits and supporting people who live in care homes.

Building rapport and offering individualised support is central to Ray's approach: 'everyone should be treated as we would want to be'. He has been on a learning curve. Although academic training produces highly educated medics they are not always very customer focused, and Ray has had to be creative and 'think outside the box'. This is key to developing methods to do eye tests with people who are living with dementia. It has strengthened his professional integrity and sense of job satisfaction.

As well as offering an eye test, Ray refers people to other professionals and offers practical 'dementia friendly' tips like avoiding patterned carpets, using blue toilet seats so it's easier for people to see, and choosing a photograph of the person when they were younger as they may not recognise themselves in more recent pictures.

Ray has been working alongside Glynn Carr, an audiologist, as they have found that if someone gets a suitable hearing aid their communication and connections with others will improve, which will enhance their quality of life. There is growing evidence of a link between dementia and hearing loss.<sup>1</sup>

Suitable lighting is also very important. Sometimes Ray will work with people in their own home or in a care home to reposition lights and increase the illumination. If the person's eyesight can be improved it can help them see the television, recognise their friends and relatives, enjoy looking at photograph albums, improve their balance and so reduce risks of falls. Some of these may seem like small things but they can be life-changing.

People who are living with dementia may also have conditions like cataracts and macular degeneration, which affect their sight, but diagnosis can be difficult if they have limited communication, as it may be hard for them to describe their sight loss. Some conditions can be helped by surgery, but this can also be challenging for people who are living with dementia.

The origins of Ray's work with older people date back to the 1980s, when home visits were not the norm, and he started looking into the visual effects of dementia. It became evident to him that plenty of people were housebound, often living with dementia and other conditions and that there was unmet need regarding vision testing. Fast forward to more recently when he was the first optometrist to register as Dementia Friendly.

Ray and Graeme (who works with Ray on marketing) now work closely with Carers Leeds, doing talks to support carers with information and encouragement to reduce their social isolation.

For someone thinking about developing their services for people who are living with dementia Ray recommends being aware of your professional boundaries, to be patient and tolerant if you encounter difficult behaviours and that the sense of achievement when you can make someone's life better is very satisfying.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/live-well/our-community/our-blog/why-and-how-are-dementia-and-hearing-loss-linked/>



# Real Life Story: ToastLoveCoffee

The ToastLoveCoffee (TLC) cafe in Harehills offers a welcoming space and home-made food to the local community and beyond. Natalie Tharraleos, the outreach worker and volunteer coordinator, describes its mission statement as ‘to be a place for conversations between people who may not usually meet, with the global pay as you feel menu being created from intercepted ingredients that would have gone to waste.’

Many local older people visit the cafe regularly, and some have joined the team of volunteers. Located on Harehills Road, with several bus stops close by and lots of footfall outside the cafe, it is a place that older people can easily access, and Natalie has found that people really value popping in and connecting with others. TLC joined the Come in and Rest scheme earlier this year, offering a seat for older people who need to sit down for five minutes without the obligation to make a purchase.

Older people are part of an intergenerational team of volunteers from the local community, who give their time and talents to the cafe alongside the paid staff and managing directors. Volunteers do a range of roles, including cooking, DIY, admin support, serving customers and co-facilitating groups. Natalie has recently introduced a new volunteering role of ‘customer host’:

“We noticed that some older customers who come into the cafe seemed isolated, they maybe sat alone, and we didn’t have enough time to speak with each of them. We know many people have positively responded when we initiated a conversation. We want to be able to help customers be aware of the groups we run, and that a friendly chat might encourage some to come and try them. The ‘customer host’ volunteers receive training in conversation skills, and are present in the cafe to chat with customers who may really value a conversation.”

TLC are offering a Dementia Friends session for their staff and volunteers and are hoping to have an Age Friendly Ambassador within the team. They run a range of groups including creative poetry writing, yoga, knitting, ICT drop in, healthy cooking and a walking group, all funded from different sources. They seek to bring people together with opportunities to be creative, improve their health and wellbeing and build on community assets. Their volunteers, groups and events are all intergenerational, with people of all ages mixing and sharing their skills.

Natalie states that “other local businesses have been very positive about us; they recommend us to their older customers. We try to link with other local services and organisations and invite them in to share information, and we’re pulling together a file of local places that our volunteers can signpost people to for information and support.”

Natalie would recommend becoming an age and dementia friendly business to anyone. “Having seen the numerous benefits of reaching out to older people - actively welcoming and involving them, their knowledge of the community, and their wealth of life and work experience, only enriches our organisation.”

Please be as GENEROUS as you can to ensure our cafe thrives & the whole community

We hope you have a good time here please share the TLC ❤️ on social media!  
@TLCLeeds TLCLeedsCoffee



# Real Life Story: Leeds Playhouse

Nicky Taylor is responsible for Leeds Playhouse's pioneering creative work with people living with dementia which has developed over the past ten years. It was whilst leading the theatre's Heydays programme for over 55s that Nicky realised the busy nature of the project was overwhelming for some participants. She could see that some people were showing early signs of dementia and were struggling and starting to grow more isolated from the group. Nicky was trying to manage the changing needs of people and others' attitudes towards them.

Leeds Playhouse wanted people to get as much out of their activities as they always had. Heydays giving them so much fulfilment and joy, Nicky wanted to make sure that this was not lost when it was needed the most!

So Leeds Playhouse set up small scale projects with calmer, tailored activities and with more support in place. They worked with partners from Leeds City Council's Peer Support Service to find out what people wanted and how the sessions could be as dementia friendly as possible. These sessions are focused on the expression of feelings, thoughts and opinions rather than remembering facts. Whatever people bring of themselves on that day is welcomed. They are fantastically creative sessions full of song, music, drama, visual arts and storytelling - imagining a story together and bringing that to life with action. There is lots of laughter and a clear bond develops between people. There is an unspoken support for each other and a willingness to try something new and have a giggle together.

Nicky has seen a real change in attitude towards dementia and now some of the members of the Heydays group volunteer at the sessions for people living with dementia.

Leeds Playhouse also runs enhanced theatre performances for people living with dementia. Themed sessions before the performance help to develop an understanding of the production and there is a chance for people to meet the actors. People with dementia can attend with a partner, carer or friend and do something 'normal' together which can be really powerful. Bookings at dementia friendly performances are limited to approximately three quarters of the capacity of the theatre to allow some room for movement and while most people in the audience are directly affected by dementia, anyone who supports the idea of a dementia friendly community is welcome to attend.

Leeds Playhouse encourages an intergenerational audience and often schools bring young people to the performance - after all the theatre would normally have a mixed age group at a full house! The children often help by selling ice-creams or showing people the way. This intergenerational element helps to raise awareness of dementia and reduce the stigma. One person develops dementia every three minutes in the UK so people who are living with that diagnosis are not alone and Leeds Playhouse is keen to make sure that they never feel like they are.

When asked what advice she would give to others who want their business to be dementia friendly Nicky says that taking part in a Dementia Friends awareness session is a great starting point, but crucially to talk to people with lived experience rather than making assumptions about what people might need. This could simply start with inviting someone for a cup of tea and a chat! Many people living with dementia have a lot to offer and want to be involved in their communities. By taking a positive approach people who are living with dementia can be supported to take part as equals, shaping a truly dementia friendly society.



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