

Establishing Dementia Friendly Communities

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Lanka Alzheimer's Foundation (LAF) initiated the Dementia Friendly Programme (DFP) to create awareness among commercial entities and service providers on dementia. The launch of the tri-lingual 'We are Dementia Friendly' sticker, awarded to partner organisations (businesses and service providers in all sectors) and the Personalised Identification Bracelets and the opening of the Memory Garden Café also took place at this event.

This venture was initiated with the goal of creating dementia friendly communities across the country, to create awareness and understand dementia; people with dementia (PWDs) and their caregivers will be encouraged to seek help and support; and to prevent persons with dementia from being socially isolated whereby making them feel included in their communities.

Statistics on this illness demonstrate that there will be 135 million PWDs by 2050 of which 71 percent will be in low and middle income earning countries. Every four seconds, someone in the world develops dementia. It is in this context that LAF continuously makes an effort to educate the public on dementia, focusing on its prevention through awareness.

Becoming dementia friendly means creating an environment where PWDs are empowered recognising their contribution to society. An integral part of this initiative is to educate businesses and service providers on how to respond to customers with dementia, creating easy to navigate physical environments, ensuring that activities include PWDs, ensuring early diagnosis and challenging stigma attached to the disease. The LAF will train and educate the management and staff of entities including public offices such as police stations, hospitals, theatres and cinemas, restaurants, salons and other service providers on how to respond and better service PWDs. On completion of the programme, every organisation will be awarded the 'We are Dementia Friendly' sticker. In addition, such institutes will also be listed on LAF's web page as entities that have committed towards creating a dementia friendly society.

Six out of ten PWDs wander away from their homes; and often such persons would not remember his or her name, address and can be easily disoriented even in familiar places. Hence, the Personalised Identification Bracelet was introduced by LAF to ensure the safety of these people. The bracelet will contain the person's name and whom to be contacted in case of emergency. These are hypo allergic, long lasting, water and sweat resistant and are designed to prevent the wearer from removing the bracelet.

Another initiative to create an environment where PWDs can interact and socialise without feeling embarrassed or misunderstood, the Memory Garden Café was also opened at the LAF to provide an opportunity for PWDs and their caregivers to enjoy themselves in an engaging and supportive space. This café will be open on Fridays from 10am to 4pm.

LAF believes that it is through communal efforts that their dream of creating a safe, friendly and non-judgemental environment for PWDs could be made a reality.

