

Living Well with Dementia: Reflections during the pandemic

In the next few weeks, we will explore in greater detail what it means to “live well” with dementia from the perspective of the affected individual and that of the family caregiver. Today, the reflections are about the resiliency that has come about during these difficult and even dark days for many.

As we all quickly had to begin living our lives in a new form of isolation, little thought was given that isolation could be as deadly – if not more so – than this new coronavirus that we have all learned so much about. The Dementia Friendly Tempe (DFT) staff (Candice Hewitt and Allie Burke, City employees), volunteers from the DFT Action Team and support group leaders, Cindy O’Connell and Susie Peck worked together to carry on in new ways. Hopefully by now, you’ve grown accustomed to our weekly Monday email bringing valuable resources and links to services and support along with messages to encourage you in your efforts to care for your loved one. Our bi-weekly support group provides much needed connection for new and continuing members as we learn together and support one another in a job that can be exhausting yet rewarding.

Our DFT presents has not missed a single month or lecture and we are blessed with talented speakers that continue to provide excellent lessons on a variety of topics. These are scheduled to run all through 2021. We even managed to celebrate our 5th annual DFT summit. While it was virtual, it still provided added celebration, knowledge and connectedness we all long for.

As caregivers, your support and creativity to care for your loved one has increased during this past year – probably without even knowing it. Many of you have found virtual ways to stay connected to family, friends, and new options for creativity and learning through numerous links. Many of you are now Zoom experts!

You have found ways to “Live Well” despite the circumstances. While it might not be what you’ve wanted, hopefully you reflect that it was “good enough.” However, in the good enough of day to day, there have been moments, lessons, connections and opportunities that have been both lost and gained. Because Alzheimer’s disease/related dementias are progressive, many of you have seen added loss of memory, thinking and abilities in your loved one. And, you have also gained new knowledge and skills to meet the demands. Most have lost precious direct contact with family and friends, but you gained new ways to connect through the phone, virtual means and even cards and letters. Some lost the ability to celebrate graduation, anniversaries, weddings, birthdays, and holidays while discovering new ways to celebrate virtually. Travel plans to see new parts of the world or gather with family and friends were lost however, many found online ways to visit zoos, national parks, Europe and more!

As we move forward in 2021, there is renewed hope for better days ahead. With wider vaccine distribution, there are now opportunities to gather with small groups of family members and do some limited travel. Our DFT “family” of staff, volunteers, and participants look forward to the day when we can resume our face-to-face gatherings. Be assured, we will also continue virtual options as this made it possible for those who could not attend in person gatherings to join in. Another example of what we lost AND what we gained during this challenging time.

May you reflect on what you lost during this time AND balance it with what you gained. No doubt there will be mixed emotions of sadness of what has been lost and joy in what has been gained. We hope this reflection will allow you to see your resiliency in the midst of adversity.