

Building dementia friendly churches

August 5 2020

A project to help church communities become more 'dementia friendly' has had a significant impact across the country.

The Dementia Friendly Church programme began as a collaboration between Peter Kevern, Professor of Values in Health and Social Care at Staffordshire University, and the Anglican Diocese of Lichfield in 2012.

It was developed to inform, inspire and embed change in church communities so that their resources can contribute to the wellbeing of people with dementia. This includes making small practical changes to the layout, worship and hospitality available in church buildings.

The project is directed primarily at church attendees via volunteer 'champions' in each church, with the intention of making churches both 'friendly spaces' for people living with dementia and their carers, and providing them with the tools and encouragement to lead beneficial change in their local communities.

Professor Kevern commented: "Faith-based organisations represent a fantastic resource for helping to care for people in their [local communities](#), one which is usually overlooked and underused by policymakers and statutory providers of [social care](#). The Church of England, for example, covers every square metre of England and reckons to be available to everybody.

"The Diocese of Lichfield alone covers an area serving 2 million people, from isolated rural villages to industrial conurbations. In each of those

communities, it can potentially make a difference to the experience of people with dementia."

The Dementia Friendly Church programme has involved partners from [local authorities](#), the health community and the volunteer sector and a total of 3,900 'Dementia Friends' have been trained across the 94 churches in the Anglican Diocese of Lichfield.

Research by Professor Kevern and Revd Dr. David Primrose of the Diocese of Lichfield has shown a significant improvement in the ease with which church attendees interact with people with dementia, which translates into making churches more welcoming and responsive places.

Revd Dr. David Primrose said: "One of the big barriers around dementia has been an underlying fear—people don't know how to respond, people are anxious. The fact that this programme has enabled people to talk about [dementia](#) in [church](#) and in the community is itself liberating."

The model has since been adopted and adapted by a number of dioceses across England and Wales, as well as attracting attention from the USA and Canada. The experiences of some of these dioceses are the subject of a recent film, which can be [viewed here](#).

More information: Peter Kevern et al, Changes in Measures of Dementia Awareness in UK Church Congregations Following a 'Dementia-Friendly' Intervention: A Pre–Post Cohort Study, *Religions* (2020). [DOI: 10.3390/rel11070337](https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11070337)

Provided by Staffordshire University

Citation: Building dementia friendly churches (2020, August 5) retrieved 13 March 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2020-08-dementia-friendly-churches.html>

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