

What is a Dementia Cafe?

Dementia cafés, sometimes called memory cafés, are opening up all across the country. What are they and who can attend them? Well, they really can be better described as pop-up cafés because they are a place for people to meet up for a couple of hours on a monthly basis. They are held in different places. Some are held in GAA clubs, some in community centres or family resource centres whilst others might be held in hotels or actual cafés. In Longford the café moves around the county.

The cafés are set up and run by voluntary committees in every county in Ireland. The aim is to provide a safe and welcoming space for those living with dementia and their friends, carers and loved ones to come together on a regular basis. The café is inclusive and welcomes everyone. There is no charge and local businesses often get involved and offer support.

There is no set format and each café is different. However, usually there is a fun element with live music or storytelling, and always cake or other treats! Information sharing is part of the format and this usually means that a speaker comes and talks about something of interest to the attendees.

Feedback from those attending the cafés has been very positive. I spoke to Kevin Quaid, who along with his wife Helena, ran a dementia café in Kanturk, Cork for 2 years. Kevin however has had to pass over the keys of the café to someone else to run as he has been so busy. Kevin is a wonderful advocate for those living with dementia and he travels the world giving talks and interviews. He is also an author and is set to star in the pilot episode of a new Netflix documentary that focuses on the stories of people living with different types of dementia. He suggested that for those who are new they can go along to a café of their choice and just sit and listen for the first few times and see if they like it. There is no pressure to speak unless you feel that you want to. He said that it provides a safe place where you can meet with others in similar situations. It helps to create a sense of community and offers support and information.

Charlie Drake is from Dromtarriffe, Cork and is a member of the North Cork Dementia Alliance Group. I spoke to him about his experience of attending a dementia café. He said that he got great benefits from attending the café in Newmarket, Cork for the past few years. He has learnt so many new things such as how to use new technology, more ways to be active and about memory aids. He also said they had speakers who gave them useful tips on how to improve their communication skills.

Margaret McEntee is involved with two dementia cafés, one in Newmarket and one in Fermoy. She aims to create a warm ambience where people attending can feel like they are having a chat with old friends whilst sharing a pot of tea and some lovely cakes. Many friendships have made along the way and people said they felt supported and have been able to share ideas and tips with each other on their dementia journey. Willie Collins plays the keyboard at the Fermoy Café and has encouraged many to sing along with him including one man who has found a new passion for singing.

If you want to go and visit a café then check out the list of cafés on our website www.dementiacafe.ie. If you cannot attend in person then there are some virtual cafés on our website and you can just join in online from the comfort of your home. If you want to find out more about the cafés then email michelle@engagingdementia.ie.



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