

Natasha Holmes
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Features - 3rd Place

I am still me...

Imagine looking into the mirror and not recognising the face staring back at you? Imagine not remembering who your son, daughter or spouse is? Imagine not possessing the memories of you wedding, your children or your life? Imagine being told that you have a form of Dementia. That your memories and those you hold to dear to you will begin to slip away. Sounds scary, right?

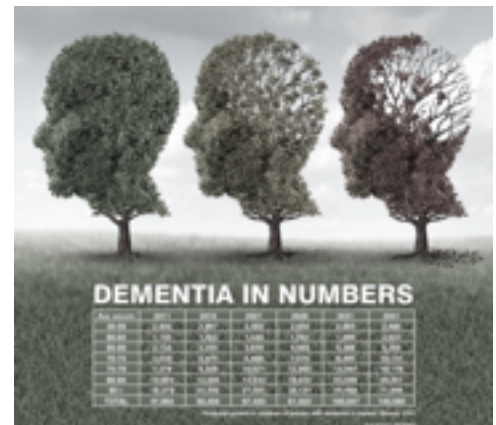
This is the case for over 44,000 people living in Ireland who have been diagnosed with a form of Dementia. Dementia is the overall term that describes a wide range of symptoms associated with a decline in memory. In some cases, severe enough to reduce a person's ability to perform everyday activities like making a cup of tea, watching television or even cooking a simple meal.

In South Tipperary alone there are approximately 1010 living with some form of Dementia. Studies predict that in 2017 over 11,000 people will be diagnosed with a form of Dementia. This is 11 people per day. The scaring and shocking truth is that unfortunately there is no cure for this disease. Although there are medicines to slow the progression down there is no cure.

For the majority of people, Dementia hasn't touched their door. It is easy for us all to read about something like this and to feel sympathy for those who are going through this. When you are finished reading this article you can close the newspaper, turn off the computer. But the facts will still be there. The numbers who are diagnosed with the disease are increasing each and every year. It is estimated that one in every three born in Ireland will develop Dementia.

Although there is nothing to stop the disease there are centres such as Le Cairde where it makes living with it easier. Le Cairde is a day-care centre in Clonmel, Co. Tipperary. It opens its door to clients from all over Tipperary and the surrounding areas Monday to Friday. It is a centre specifically designed and tailored to those who have Dementia. The centre includes a dining room, kitchen, hair and beauty salon, activities room and a garden. Clients can be bused to and from the centre or can be dropped and picked up by a family member. Each day is different in Le Cairde as activities are tailored to the clients likes and abilities. Although Bingo, painting and a sing song always goes down well with the clients! Tea and biscuits are served throughout the day and clients are given a four-course dinner in the dining room each day. The cost for attending the centre is €15 per day.

Le Cairde is a vital resource in helping those with the Dementia to feel normal. It gives the clients an environment where it is safe and stimulating to their abilities. It is somewhere where they can socialise, interact and have fun. It gives carers/families peace of mind to know that their loved one is safe and well while also

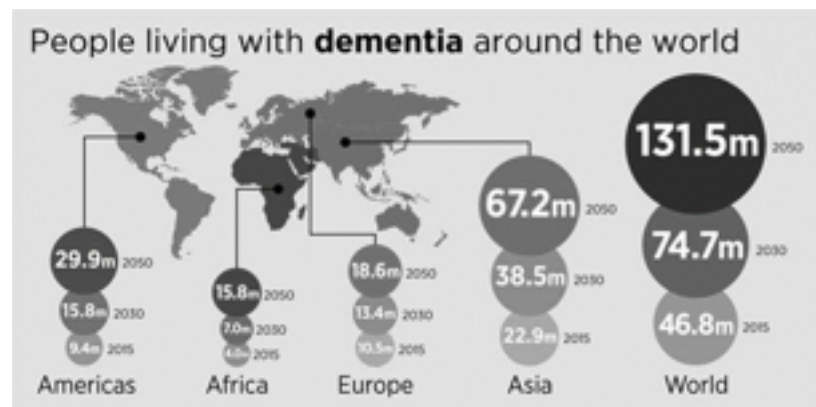


giving them a break from the carer role. The majority of clients see coming into Le Cairde as coming in to see their friends and to have a good time. It gives the clients a feeling of being a part of something.

Without centres like Le Cairde unfortunately people with Dementia would not see the light of day. This disease can make people feel isolated and alone.

Sometimes those who are diagnosed with Dementia are only defined by their illness. They are only seen as the person who cannot remember. Le Cairde breaks though those perceptions. From what I saw on my work experience the staff of Le Cairde treat the clients as people, people who like to sing, to dance, to laugh. They allow them to be themselves, whoever that may be. Therefore, I think Le Cairde is such a vital resource as it sees past the illness.

One thing that has stuck with me since finishing my work experience is that anybody can get Dementia. It doesn't matter if you are Donald Trump or the man in the moon. It doesn't matter if you are a Doctor, a teacher or a footballer. It doesn't matter whether you have loads of money or none. One in three of us will get it. It has made me realise to live everyday as you can because nobody knows the future.



They may forget what you said but they will never forget how you made them feel.

"Don't think of people with dementia as not having abilities. They have an ability to feel and interact and we need to try and enter into their world."

Judges Citation:

The third place essay in the Features section was a piece on Dementia entitled 'I am still me'. The cleverly assembled piece used factual graphs to illustrate her point and, in our opinion, was spot on by not turning this into an interview-driven essay.

The author's own experience working within the Le Chairde organisation was enough for her to get a grasp of how difficult it can be to both live with dementia, or live with someone with dementia.

She finished the article with a beautiful quote: "They may forget what you said but they will never forget how you made them feel."

Third place goes to Natasha Holmes from Presentation Secondary School in Clonmel.

