

APRIL DOBSON IS HEAD OF DEMENTIA AND INNOVATION AT OLDER PEOPLE'S HOUSING AND CARE CHARITY, ABBEYFIELD.

GREAT MINDS – ABBEYFIELD'S PERSPECTIVE ON DEMENTIA

DEMENTIA AWARENESS WEEK, MAY 14TH – 20TH 2017

Abbeyfield is an organisation that offers care and support to older people. We were founded over 60 years ago with the aim of alleviating loneliness in older people and improving their quality of life. That ethos continues today with over 8000 older people enjoying supported, family-like houses and specialist care homes across the UK and beyond.

Many of the people we support are living with a complex range of conditions, including dementia, and we recognise that dementia can have a profound impact on everyone, not just those living with the condition. At a recent conference in Manchester, Alastair Burns, National Director for Dementia at NHS England explained that 80% of people living with dementia also have another long term condition, stating, "Dementia rarely travels alone". As a student nurse back in the early 1980's, dementia wasn't something that was talked about very much and certainly wasn't included in our training. Looking back I can now see that there were clearly people dealing with many conditions all at once, including dementia. I wish we'd known more about the condition then, as their experience of hospital care could have been so much better.

Prior to working at Abbeyfield, in my career as a housing professional, I saw the numbers of people living with dementia in older peoples' accommodation rise dramatically. I witnessed some excellent care and support, often enabling people to remain living where they want to be, in the place they call home. That's really what inspired me to learn more and to want to make a difference. Wherever or whatever we call 'home', that's where we all want to be, surrounded by the people and things that matter most to us. Why should that be any different for someone living with dementia?

I am extremely proud of the work Abbeyfield does to support people living with dementia and all those affected by it, and constantly impressed by the work of our teams.

In a first for Abbeyfield, we are hosting 'Great Minds' - a series of moving, insightful and inspiring films, broadcasts and presentations which will be streamed on our website throughout Dementia Awareness Week. Some of the nation's leading dementia care professionals and people living with the condition are taking part and will be speaking candidly about the effects the brain disease can have upon people,

their family and friends, and champion the need for better public understanding and engagement.

It will be a fantastic opportunity to hear directly from people who are at the cutting edge of influencing and shaping the way people with dementia can be better understood.

Abbeyfield will stream film footage, interviews and talks from six dementia experts throughout Dementia Awareness Week via www.abbeyfield.com and through its social media networks.

Contributors include Keith Oliver, a former primary school head teacher who has become an ambassador, envoy, volunteer and speaker on dementia since being diagnosed with Alzheimer's on New Year's Eve 2010 and journalist and author Nicci Gerrard who co-founded John's Campaign which lobbies for the right of people with dementia to be supported by their carers' in hospital.

Apart from highlighting the issues surrounding dementia, I hope the series will encourage people to talk more openly about dementia and challenge everyone from the public to care providers to really think about what it means to live with the condition.

Great Minds will stream on www.abbeyfield.com May 14 – 20 2017.

Visit the website for updates about the series and on Twitter @TheAbbeyfield and Facebook @AbbeyfieldSociety