



ENGAGE & EMPOWER

Peer Support Groups for People Living with Dementia

Impact Report 2025



Hamilton Council on Aging is a non-profit charitable organization founded by a dedicated group of retired community leaders focused on supporting and addressing systemic issues that impact seniors.

MISSION

To enhance positive aging - promoting the health, wellbeing, and social participation of ALL older adults - by influencing attitudes, policies and programs to include their voices.

VALUES

Inclusion

We value the wisdom and experience of older adults and their right to experience a high quality of life, free of ageism.

Diversity

We value the rich diversity of the Hamilton community and strive to include the many voices of older adults in all our endeavours.

Collaboration

We value our shared work with volunteers and community partners, and know their insights, knowledge, and experience make us stronger.

ENGAGEMENT & EMPOWERMENT PROJECT

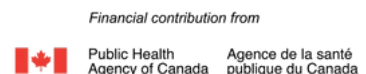
Collaboratively led by the HCoA, the Engagement and Empowerment Groups project builds upon previous successful work to support the creation and growth of local groups that contribute to the development of dementia friendly communities. The project had three main objectives, all of which have been met:

- To support the development of Engagement Empowerment Groups comprised of people living with dementia
- To establish a regional network of people living with dementia and facilitators, working together to strengthen skills, raise awareness, and develop tools that promote the creation of additional groups
- To assess the effectiveness and outcomes of the groups



This project has been a collaborative effort with many partner organizations and community connections.

PROJECT PARTNERS



ENGAGEMENT & EMPOWERMENT GROUPS

DEFINITION

Engagement and Empowerment Groups are defined as **a group of two or more people living with dementia who come together to have a positive impact on each others life and on the world around them.**

Groups also include care partners and others supporting someone with dementia (e.g., youth). Groups may also be supported by volunteers and organizations, but are community based and led by people living with dementia.

11

Engagement & Empowerment groups
in Ontario & British Columbia

70

Members with dementia or other
memory challenges

40

Care partners



“This group is very important to me as it makes me realize I am not alone.”

~ Person living with dementia

Some of the groups focus on advocacy work or organizing community events, others focus on socializing and providing support.

Group members have a number of reasons for joining their group including seeking joy, community, and information about dementia.

For a list of current groups, click [here](#).

Interested in starting a dementia empowerment group? Resources and information for new groups can be found [here](#).



GROUP VALUES

The project adopted the **Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)** model to guide the development and implementation of the Engagement and Empowerment Groups. The ABCD approach focuses on the capacities and strengths of community members to drive change within their communities. Although groups may have facilitators without dementia, they do not make decisions or lead the group.

Nothing about us without us

INCLUSION

The project is grounded in the belief that people living with dementia must be at the center of the decisions that impact their lives.

INDEPENDENCE

All of the groups function independently, determining their own activities and directions, with a focus on empowering people living with dementia.

“The whole experience reinforced that people (regardless of diagnosis) need to remain an active, valued, and supported member of their community.”

~ Professional facilitator

IMPACT ON GROUP MEMBERS

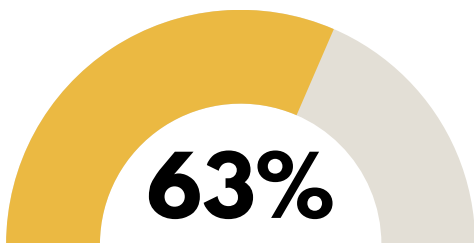
INCREASED UNDERSTANDING

“What you put on yourself when there’s a diagnosis is very self-limiting, but this has opened it up to show that it doesn’t have to be that.”

~ Person living with dementia



15 program participants responded to 9 survey questions regarding increases in knowledge and skills.



Indicated they had improved dementia-related knowledge and skills after group participation.

Group members value the opportunity to meet people who are living with dementia and realizing that they too could live well. These relationships support increased understanding and build self-confidence.

90%

Have more access to opportunities, social events, and activities

68%

Reported knowing more about how to live well with dementia

58%

Were more comfortable asking for help when they need it

“It has been so good to see that people with the diagnosis of dementia are...leading very productive very active lives, contributing to both the dementia world into society as a whole. Nice to see that there are many different faces of dementia and so many of them are positive.”

~ Person living with dementia



INCREASED SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

“I would say our life has definitely been enriched by being here, there’s no doubt about it...”

~ Care partner

Participants of the Engagement and Empowerment Groups reported significant improvements in social and emotional wellbeing including an improved sense of community, reduced social isolation, the creation of structure and routine with group meetings and activities, gaining new knowledge and skills, the development of new friendships, increased ability to meaningfully contribute , and finding their voices. Overall, participants reported greatly improved quality of life.

79%

Feel more connected to other people

68%

Feel more valued

79%

Feel more supported

63%

Are learning new things

“It [group membership] just gives you a sense of community, to be part of the group and people here know, are very patient when you have trouble finding your words and they understand all of your complexities...”

~ Person living with dementia

FOSTERED COMMUNITY & SAFE SPACES

The Engagement and Empowerment Groups have served as an opportunity for people living with dementia to build community with others who are like them.

Members value the opportunity to speak to and be listened to by people with similar experiences. The groups have become a safe space for these discussions.

“I think what we hear most frequently from people who participate in these groups is they’ve found a safe place; they found a place where there are others who are experiencing similar situations and that their voices are listened to.”

~ Project leadership

68%

Feel more included

63%

Feel more a part of a community



“This group is very important to me as it makes me realize I am not alone.”

~ Person living with dementia

The development of this community has helped to reduce social isolation, improved participants mood, and provided a safe space to share and engage with others, meaningfully.

“It’s nice when you’re with people. They have what you have, they learn from you, you learn from them, and its fantastic.”

~ Person living with dementia

IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

Engagement and Empowerment Group events have played a crucial role in raising awareness, shifting public perceptions, and fostering a deeper understanding of dementia and the capabilities of people living with it.

Seed grants played a vital role in the growth and development of empowerment groups. They supported groups to engage in outreach and plan events, including hosting community BBQ's, art exhibitions, trivia nights, socials, workshops, and seminars.

Group members and staff have highlighted the transformative effects of these outreach activities including:

- Increased public understanding
- Improved social connection
- Increased awareness of groups
- Positive change in community attitudes
- Greater appreciation for the social isolation and stigma often experienced by people living with dementia



“They [broader community] know who we are... I know they know we’re out there which is a start. And people have seen that we’re people that can do things that other people can still do.”

~ Person living with dementia



6

Seed Grants



19

Community Events



555+

People Reached

Between January 2024-March 2025

BUMBLEBEE BBQ EVENT

The Bumblebee Memory Group was established in April 2024 in Caledonia as a community for individuals living with dementia to connect and engage with others who have similar experiences. The group is largely a social group aimed at providing support, knowledge exchange, social interaction, and developing cognitive skills.

Using one of the awarded Seed Grants, the Bumblebee Group hosted a BBQ in October of 2024. The purpose of the event was to connect with members of the community with cognitive challenges and dementia, and to socialize and support the connection of new and existing dementia groups.

In addition, the event served as an opportunity to demonstrate to the community that people living with dementia are capable and engaged.



Photo by Tina Brajic

50+

People in attendance

The event was a great success, bringing together families, care partners, local community members, and people who live with dementia, all from diverse communities. This event also gave group members an opportunity to use their unique skills developed during their careers to implement a meaningful community event (e.g., planning, organizing, networking).

“There’s a lot of sharing of skills and people have had really fascinating careers and they haven’t forgotten their careers so they do a lot of sharing that way which is really wonderful.”

~ Person living with dementia



MICE FINAL SHOWCASE EVENT

The Memory Inclusive Communities Everywhere (MICE) group in Haldimand was formed in 2022 and has been very active in community awareness efforts. This has included art-based activities, and public events such as a BBQ and a Memory Cafe. From September 2023 to February 2024, MICE put on a series of arts-based seminars and workshops, including ceramics, spoken word poetry, choir, and painting.

“They [MICE] are very much in the community telling everybody about the amazing benefits of their group and the community is loving them and supporting them...”

~Project leadership

In March of 2024, MICE held a final showcase event where art that was created at earlier events could be displayed to other people living with dementia, care partners, and the general public. This showcase allowed the group to celebrate the work and activities of the group, while raising awareness and developing relationships and connections in the community.

The event was a great success with a large turnout of people. The event was visited by Haldimand Mayor Shelley Ann Bentley and Councillor John Metcalfe and was also featured in the [Haldimand Press](#).

~100

People in attendance



For more information on MICE Haldimand click [here](#).

DEMENTIA EMPOWERMENT NETWORK (DEN)

The DEN was formally launched in May 2024 with a mission to promote the inclusion of people living with dementia on matters that affect their lives.



DEN’s goal is to create a vibrant community of Engagement and Empowerment Groups, with its operations focused on four main objectives:

- Foster community
- Amplify voices
- Share resources
- Create sustainability

The DEN provides comprehensive support to the engagement and empowerment groups:

INFORMATION

Shares information with organizations, and responds to inquiries, collaborates on promotion of groups.

ADMINISTRATION

Coordinates volunteers, and assists with promotion of events and distribution of materials.

CAPACITY

Offers coaching and mentorship to new groups, and provides learning and networking opportunities.

CONNECTION

Fosters connections between existing groups and removes barriers to group collaboration.

The DEN website includes practical guides, inspiring stories, and innovative ideas – for groups and allies that want to make a difference available at www.denvoices.ca

“We have a small group but each and every participant gets so much out of attending. This group has become a small family and given members a sense of belonging. They are surrounded by people who understand exactly what they are going through, which also can provide a sense of community and connection. The relationships that they have built provide ongoing emotional and practical support...”

~ Professional facilitator

TO LEARN MORE VISIT



www.coahamilton.ca

www.denvoices.ca

We would like to thank Engagement and Empowerment group member Peter Mitchell for providing the cover art for this report.