

THE GUIDED LIGHT

LA CROSSE COUNTY'S DEMENTIA NEWSLETTER
FOR HOPE, SUPPORT, AND RESOURCES

Care Beyond the Clinic: Engagement in Everyday

THE EVERYDAY PRESCRIPTION

Engagement is not an extra—it is essential to living well with dementia. Meaningful activity, social connection, and a sense of purpose are not just “nice to have”; they are powerful forms of care. Often described as social prescribing, these everyday opportunities to connect, move, create, reminisce, and belong serve as a kind of prescription—supporting emotional well-being, reducing distress, and helping people stay anchored to who they are, not just what they may be losing.

In this edition, we highlight how engagement shows up in real, everyday life—through intentional routines at home, honoring choices while supporting dignity and remaining strengths with community-based experiences. Whether in a group setting, around the kitchen table, or out in the community, engagement is one of the most effective tools we have to support quality of life, manage symptoms, and strengthen relationships for individuals living with dementia and those who care for them.

ACROSS THE JOURNEY: FROM EARLY TO LATER STAGES

Engagement looks different depending on where someone is in their dementia journey—and that's okay. What matters most is matching experiences to ability, interest, and comfort. In the early stages, individuals often benefit from deeper social and cognitive connections: intergenerational activities, meaningful conversations, creative expression, and community involvement. As dementia progresses, engagement shifts toward simplified tasks, sensory experiences, comfort-based activities, and opportunities for connection that don't rely on memory or complex instructions. We also focus less on the outcome and more on the process.

Adjust Difficulty: To Make It Easier, Break tasks into smaller steps, reduce the amount of choices and decisions needing to be made, use visual cues/labels, and offer gentle assistance.

Every stage offers opportunity—what changes is how we adapt activity to be meaningful and achievable.

ENGAGEMENT: MORE THAN FUN AND GAMES

Engagement isn't only recreation—it's about connection, purpose, and involvement in daily life. When we reframe everyday tasks as opportunities for participation, we enhance dignity and belonging. Many activities we already do can become engagement moments with a bit of intentionality. Daily living is full of engagement possibilities—the key is shaping tasks to be meaningful and accessible. Try it and in no time, you'll have a routine full of exciting purpose!

At-Home Ideas

- Cooking Together — Even simple parts like tearing lettuce for salad or stirring batter can be meaningful. Involve your loved one in steps they can manage or support to get them going on a task.
- Laundry — Matching socks, sorting by color, putting in/out of washer or placing items into drawers gives structure and purpose.
- Plant Care — Watering plants, feeling soil textures, or smelling herbs offers calming rhythm.
- Sensory Engagement — Music playlists with meaningful songs, familiar scents like coffee or lavender, gentle hand massage, or textured objects to explore can ignite curiosity.

Stepping into community spaces can offer something different than what happens at home. Group programs create opportunities for connection, purpose, and shared experience, while also giving caregivers space for rest or personal time. When both partners are supported, everyone benefits. A few local programs to consider:

Community Opportunities

- Embrace Support Group — Combines music, shared experiences, and social support for both caregivers and those living with dementia.
- Hillview Life Center — A unique intergenerational place where people living with early-stage dementia can share skills and experiences with younger generations from onsite childcare center and UW-La Crosse students.
- SPARK! Programs — Ongoing opportunities for creative and social engagement in our community.
- OASIS Day Respite Program — Daytime activities that gives caregivers a break while their loved ones engage with peers in meaningful ways.
- Giving Hearts Choir — brings people living with memory changes together to experience joy through singing.

TIPS TO SUPPORT SUCCESS

Match Activity to Mood & Energy — If alert and upbeat, try music or movement; when tired, opt for soothing sensory experiences.

Praise Effort, Not Perfection — Celebrate small successes and shared time.

Embrace Simple Choices — “Will you help with watering plants or folding towels?”

Use Visuals — Charts, photos of each step, or labeled bins can cue participation.

Use Familiar Themes — Holidays, hobbies, past professions, and family traditions spark connection.

Short, Frequent Moments — 5 to 10 minutes of focus is more successful than long periods.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR! Programs/Events This Quarter

January | February | March 2026

WELCOME TO THE HILLVIEW LIFE CENTER! Where Generations Grow Together

You may have heard the Buzz, now you can experience La Crosse's new intergenerational program for adults with mild cognitive impairment, early-stage neurocognitive conditions, including dementia! The Hillview Life Center expands support for those newly diagnosed and offers:

- **Person-Centered Programs:** Activities tailored to participants' interests and strengths
- **Engaging Wellness Activities:** Guided by the International Council on Active Aging principles to support whole-person well-being
- **Bee Well Program – First in the U.S.:** Hands-on honeybee experiences for mindfulness, nature connection, and wellness
- **Social & Intergenerational Connections:** Small groups, community outings, and shared experiences with onsite childcare, community youth groups and UW-La Crosse Health Science Interprofessional Research Center students
- **Caregiver Support:** Daytime space for loved ones to thrive, plus workshops and peer connections

Drop-in tours and refreshments:
 Tuesday January 20th, 12pm-2pm
 Monday January 26th, 4pm-6pm
 Wednesday Feb. 11th, 8:30am-10:00am

We are welcoming adults with Mild Cognitive Impairment & their caregivers to come learn more about this new program.

Location: Hillview Life Center, 3511 Park Lane Dr., La Crosse, WI
 (Located at Hillview Healthcare Center)
 Questions? hlcadultprograms@vwcalax.org or 608-781-2783 ext. 251

Virtual Powerful Tools for Caregivers

Fridays, January 9–
February 13
10:00am–11:30am

Location: Virtually on Teams
(device needs to have mic
and camera)

Workshop is FREE!
Suggested donation of \$20 for
the Caregiver Workbook
To register call Teresa,
at 608.637.5201 or

teresa.gander@vernoncountywi.gov

2026 Caregiver Education Series

DASH Center
515 Quincy St. Onalaska
Time: 1pm-2:30pm

March 17: Caregiving 101: The Roadmap
April 16: Emergency Planning
May 21: Benefits 101: Medicare, Medical
 Assistance & Veteran's Administration

Contact Kristine Meyer at 608-386-0922 or email
kmeyer@lacrossecounty.org with questions.

Rejuvenate & Recharge: Caregiver Retreat

Program offers well-being, self-care, and fun activities
that foster new connections amongst caregivers.

DATE TBD, Call: 608-785-5700

Winter Memory Camp

Tuesdays 10:30a - 1:30p.

January 13th - March 3rd

The Nature Place | Call OASIS 608.780.0471

Register Friday of the week prior to Camp.

Learn + Connect Class

Designed for individuals living with a
diagnosis and their care partners. Each
session offers practical guidance for
everyday life, tools for planning ahead,
and resources to support independence
and confidence.

Wednesdays- March 4, 11, 18 & 25
10am - 11:30am



**REGISTER: 608-785-5700 or
adrc@lacrossecounty.org**

FOR ONGOING

**local dementia programs,
resources, support...**

BROWSE: La Crosse County Programs
Guide - <https://tinyurl.com/34yt2wbm>

CALL: Aging & Disability Resource Center of
La Crosse County - 608-785-5700