

What would a dementia friendly society look like?

Younger Onset Dementia Summit

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Hugh Grundy

My name is Hugh Grundy and I live in Callington which is a small rural town in South Australia. I am 61 years old and was very recently diagnosed with frontal lobe dementia.

Although my wife cares for me full time, independence is still very important to me. Therefore being able to find my way into and around our main city, Murray Bridge, is crucial to my health and well being. Now having surrendered my drivers licence at the advice of my doctor, I am fortunate in that we have lived in the Murray Bridge region for the past 25 years, and I personally know the owners and drivers of the local bus service. This allows me to feel safe and comfortable to get around town. Initially I found it difficult because I had never needed to use public transport, as I always had a car to drive.

Having easy transportation also enables me to continue to access the local facilities such as banks and shops. It's important to me to be able to continue to do things which were normal everyday activities before I got the disease. It also enables me to go to the men's shed where I can socialise and meet other men around my own age, many of which also have some form of disability.

Having worked as a lecturer at the local TAFE campus, I have a large network of local and rural friends who I see regularly around town for a chat. Most people I talk to have little or no knowledge of younger onset dementia. The comments I usually get are, "you are too young to have dementia" or, "you look and sound okay to me". Fortunately, I have a very outgoing personality and am willing to talk freely about my disease. I feel it is important to educate the community about dementia, particularly those in customer service roles. We often take longer to work out the correct money to pay for goods or to complete forms.

As I progress I hope that I can maintain my independence and feel safe and comfortable to move around town without people treating me differently. To enable people with dementia to live in a dementia friendly society I believe the main requirements are:

- safe and easy access to public transport

- places to socialise and feel we still belong
- understanding and acceptance of dementia throughout the community