

OCFCH Newsletter

Dementia Friendly Ohio Spotlight Interview

Summit County



SUMMIT COUNTY COMMUNITY LEADS

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What inspired you to become a Dementia Friendly Ohio Community Lead?

There were several different agencies in Summit County that participated in the Dementia Friends Champions Trainings. It was during one of the Champions Huddle meetings when we all looked around the screen and noticed that there were several folks from Summit County on the call. Summit County Champions began to meet informally to learn more about, and support, each other's work.

The thought process was that true inclusion cannot happen in silos, and it was decided that we all were more impactful together.

That is when we began working towards the Dementia Friendly Community designation.

“As one of our Team members advised, ‘Keep them [OCFCH] on speed dial!’”

What changes have you observed in community attitudes since launching Dementia Friendly activities?

Dementia Friendly Summit County presentations at community-wide events and targeted efforts to reach out to Summit County agencies and organizations, have activated commitment to dementia-inclusive practices among community allies. **Here are three examples:**

Dementia Friends sessions for Akron Zoo staff (including now regular training for new employees) created an opportunity for the Zoo to build on its already-established commitment to sensory-inclusive and age-friendly service. The Zoo's dementia-inclusive lens is demonstrated here: [Dementia Friends Certification | Akron Zoo](#).

The [Akron Art Museum's](#) Dementia Friends training for staff has been followed by the hosting of Dementia Friends sessions for the general public (in collaboration with ArtsNow) and, in 2025, programming for visitors living with dementia.

The [Stow-Munroe Falls Public Library](#) first invited Dementia Friendly Summit County to provide Dementia Friends for Libraries on their Staff Development Day. The Library's collection now includes Cognitive Health Kits, Dementia Friends sessions have been on its programming calendar, and its website includes Social Stories to support Library visits for all.

What has been the most rewarding moment for you in this work so far?

The coalition of Action Team members, and those we have reached and collaborated with through this work, have allowed us to serve the County in a more holistic and comprehensive way, and have provided so many rewarding moments and outcomes. **Here are a few more, in addition to those shared above:**

DFSC Action Team members had partnered with community organizations ArtsNow and Advancing Independence Network to develop an Accessibility Library that included assistive resources and support to make community events (cultural events, meetings, etc.) accessible to all, including those living with dementia and their care partners. **Visit [The Accessibility Library](#)**. It was very rewarding to then visit Summit County Domestic Relations Court at the opening ceremony of their [new Quiet Space](#) and share that the Accessibility Library and DFSC Action Team members (along with the Autism Society of Greater Akron and the Inclusioneers) helped make this important space for Court visitors, seeking to collect their thoughts and minimize anxiety, possible.

A collaborative project between OCFCH and DFSC Action Team Member Direction Home Akron Canton Area on Agency and Disabilities Ombudsman Program has resulted in a growing number of Dementia Friends sessions for long-term care staff throughout Summit County. We are pleased, too, that this has resulted in invitations to meet with participants in Memory Care Support Groups at long-term care facilities.

We hope a recent engaging, inspiring, and just plain fun day spent with 83 Health/Health Career students at Nordonia High School is an example for future Action Team youth efforts. We'll be visiting the Middle School in March.

What are your next priorities or goals for building a more dementia-friendly community?

Our number one priority is to re-engage members for the Action Team and to recruit new members.

Ensure that Action Team members attend a DF session if they have not, and to build capacity throughout the County by increasing the number of Action Team members and other community members who become Dementia Friends Champions.

We kind of had a lull last year in regards to providing DF Sessions and we would like to see an increase in the number of sessions offered and the number of individuals who become a Dementia Friend.

What advice would you give to another community just starting out on this journey?

Number one, you have to make your Dementia Friendly Community your own. Work to understand what fits best in your context. Don't feel like you have to provide activities that other Action Teams have provided throughout the State. But feel free to network with others. Their experiences can be informative and inspirational.

Remember that the Ohio Council for Cognitive Health is a great resource and support. As one of our Team members advised, "Keep them on speed dial!"