

# PVMCI

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Pioneer Valley Memory Care Initiative | Spring 2023

# QUARTERLY

FUNDED BY THE EISENBERG FAMILY TRUST

## *A Note from Dr. Starr*

Welcome to our updated Pioneer Valley Memory Care Initiative (PVMCI) Quarterly newsletter. The timing of this new edition coincides with the start of spring. We welcome spring as it comes with longer days, shorter nights and warmer weather. We know how hard winter can be for so many of us and look forward to the beautiful tree blossoms and spring flowers. It's a wonderful time to get outside – either for a drive, or better yet, a walk around the neighborhood or local park. The bike paths come alive with riders and walkers alike – and provide a level path for everyone. Our family takes daily walks and talk about our favorite colors and flowers. Afterwards, it may be fun to draw or do watercolors of what was seen. You could also pick up tulips or daffodils to draw. Our parents do not live in the area and we use Zoom to connect as a family and catch up as we paint. It's an enjoyable way to spend time together and as we focus on our painting, it reduces pressure to make conversation. We limit the time to an hour or less so that it doesn't feel tiring for anyone.

This newsletter also comes at the perfect time to share our excitement that, through the generosity of The Eisenberg Family Trust, we have been granted another 3 years of funding for the PVMCI program. We are so grateful for these funds as they allow us to support people living with memory loss and dementia who live in Northampton (including Leeds and Florence), Easthampton and Amherst. These funds also help us provide education, support and connections to community resources for caregivers.

Our amazing team of dementia care specialists is transitioning and growing!

Laura Hummel, our founding Project Manager, used her insight and wisdom to help create the program and retired after a well-respected career of nurse education and program development. You may be familiar with Sharon Asher, our Geriatric Clinic Nurse Extraordinaire. She has now taken on the role of PVMCI Project Manager. While I miss Sharon tremendously in the clinic, I know that the PVMCI program is fortunate to have the energy and passion that Sharon brings to everything she does. Sharon recognizes how important this program is to our community and she is focused on expanding and broadening our program, while working hard to find additional grant funding.

We were very fortunate to have Karen Romanowski take on the role of Dementia Care Specialist after Sharon Levenson retired. Karen's wealth of nursing education, calm demeanor and wonderful listening skills will benefit everyone she interacts with. We also are lucky to have Deborah Peavey join us. Her mental health and art therapy experience and enthusiasm are already apparent and she is continually thinking of ways to improve the program. Our program is rounded out by Christine Grimaldi, who uses her amazing occupational therapy skills to improve on peoples' strengths and quality of life.

Over the next 3 years, our team will continue to focus on well-being and support of older adults with dementia and their family caregivers in the community. We welcome any suggestions and feedback along the way and thank you for your trust in our program.

Warm wishes for a lovely spring,

*Rebecca Starr, MD, Medical Director,  
Geriatrics, Cooley Dickinson Health Care*

# What is Creative Communication?

~Sharon Asher, RN, BSN, MBA, PROGRAM MANAGER



One of the tools that we use is the “fiblet”. A fiblet is a therapeutic technique for communicating with someone with dementia where you may say something that isn’t strictly true. We have all

been brought up not to tell lies. We were probably raised on the story of George Washington bravely admitting that he chopped down his father’s favorite cherry tree. His father was so impressed with his honesty that he hugged and praised him instead of being angry about the tree. For most, it is difficult to go against our ingrained morality to consciously and purposefully tell a lie. And yet, dementia experts encourage using the fiblet as a therapeutic technique. For some family members, this can be quite difficult.

Another way of thinking about this is to consider it creative communication. For example, let’s consider that a husband one day finds his wife Claire is sitting on the couch crying in the early afternoon. Her husband asks her what is wrong. She says that she was supposed to have lunch with her mother and she can’t find her. What are his options for responding to this?

- ◆ He could be factual and tell her that her mother passed away 35 years ago and she already had lunch an hour ago. While true, this will most likely be upsetting to Claire.
- ◆ He could tell her a fiblet. For example, he could say “Claire, your mom called and said she couldn’t make it today.” This may help her feel better. She may be able to move on to something else.
- ◆ He could also consider the underlying feelings that Claire may be feeling. Perhaps she is feeling a little lost, not sure what she is supposed to be doing. Perhaps she is bored or tired. She may be hungry since she is asking about lunch. He could use some creative communication at this point and say “your mom isn’t here right now. I was going to go for a walk and I would love for you to come with me.” If this doesn’t work, he can keep trying other options.

Responding to the underlying feelings and relating to the

person that they are wanted and loved can help reassure the person with dementia who may be feeling lost. Using creative communication techniques and distraction as well as reassuring the person with dementia that they are loved and safe can be a caring and effective way to respond to these situations.

## Easy Asparagus Frittata Recipe



- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 teaspoons butter
- ½ pound asparagus, trimmed, cut into 1” pieces
- 8 eggs
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese, or more to taste
- 7 tablespoons milk
- salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley (Optional)

Directions:

1. Heat olive oil and butter in a 9-inch nonstick pan over medium heat and cook asparagus, stirring occasionally, until soft but still firm to the bite, 10 to 15 minutes.
2. Beat eggs in a bowl until frothy. Stir in Parmesan cheese and milk; season with salt and pepper. Pour egg mixture over asparagus and cook until eggs are set, 10 to 15 minutes.
3. Invert frittata onto a plate and garnish with parsley.





# In the Spotlight

**Staff Member Name:** Karen Romanowski, RN

**Current role at PVMCI:** Memory Care Specialist

**Your professional background:**

For most of my career I worked both as a nurse and a farm manager. While those professions wouldn't necessarily seem similar, they shared many common themes: trying to provide the healthiest environment for growth, making solid plans and being ready to change course due to the unexpected, the cycles of life and death, working with others as a team, and remembering that being present and connected matters the most. I have been a nurse for over 25 years and have worked in many health care settings: in hospital post-orthopedic surgery and stroke care, early intervention care of children 0-3, support for teen mothers and their children, school nursing, homecare, and palliative and hospice care. I hope to obtain my certification in geriatric nursing.

**What drew you to work with older adults with memory loss?**

The same thing that drew me to nursing drew me to working with adults with memory loss. I have a passion for learning about and supporting people at every age and stage of development and in the context of an ever-changing medical system. We are living longer and there is so much to learn about how to do so supporting one another, with care, respect and compassion. Personally, I have been a caregiver to several family members living with memory loss and this has deepened my understanding of the everyday, in-home, challenges. I hope to provide some support to those living with memory loss and their caregivers.

**What is your educational background?**

I received a BA from Virginia Commonwealth in English and creative writing and later obtained my nursing degree from UMASS.

**What do you love about your job?**

I love the following: the inspiration, laughs and creativity that those living with memory loss and their caregivers share with me, my co-workers, working collaboratively with Neighborhood and other local organizations supporting people to live their fullest lives, spreading the word about memory loss and aging, working for an organization that is developing new models of care.

**Do you have any hobbies?**

Hiking, knitting, biking, gardening, reading, cooking, writing, sewing, singing (off key), volunteering, spending time with family, friends and dogs.



**Karen Romanowski, RN  
Memory Care Specialist**

# *The Journey from Family Member to Caregiver*

~Sharon Asher, RN, BSN, MBA, PROGRAM MANAGER

**T**he long and winding road that leads from family member (husband, daughter, etc.) to caregiver can be both an incredibly difficult and incredibly meaningful journey. Long established roles and routines might be painful to change. Watching the person you love go through this struggle can be incredibly painful. There may also be small moments of happiness and feelings of satisfaction as a caregiver which can be treasured when they happen.

It is good to take some time to examine your feelings along this journey—and normal to feel grief and sadness as you lose the person you once knew. This can be a difficult form of grief since the person you knew is gone, but they are also still right there in front of you. You may feel lonely as the person you shared your thoughts and feelings with can no longer communicate as they had in the past. You will most likely have to take on new tasks and you may feel burdened and resentful.

You will watch and feel jealous as other people who do not have a loved one with dementia go on about their lives. The question about what things would have been like if this

hadn't happened may bubble to the surface. You did not choose this journey. But...it is the journey you are on.

At some point you may need to provide hands on help. For some people, they may transition easily into this role. For others, it can be very difficult. It is ok to feel conflicted about this. Some people choose to hire help at this point. For people struggling with bathing or cleaning up after incontinence, having professional may help.

What else can help?

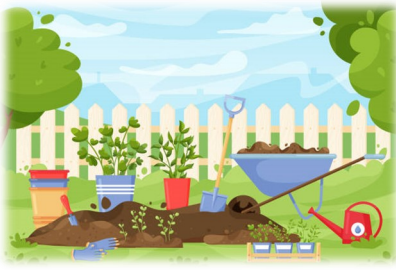
- ◆ Find people that you can talk to, especially people on the same journey.
- ◆ Talk about your feelings to friends, family, loved ones, and, especially, medical providers. Medical providers may be able to help. Depression is very common for dementia caregivers.
- ◆ Make time for yourself! This will make you a better caregiver.
- ◆ Learn as much as you can about dementia and caregiving. Knowledge is power!
- ◆ Try to live in the moment and not borrow tomorrow's trouble. Take things one day—even one moment—at a time.
- ◆ Remember that it is good to laugh. Find moments of joy when they arise.



# SPRING ACTIVITY IDEAS

**S**pringtime is an exciting time of year to be active, even when homebound. Here are some ideas about how to engage in meaningful activities with the start of warmer weather, longer days, and nature's return to life.

**Garden** – gardening is great for light exercise, fine motor skills, and engaging the senses; there are adaptive gardening tools that can assist older adults of all abilities. If you are mostly indoors, plant an herb garden or grow vegetables or flowers. Tending to plants on a regular basis can provide structure and routine, as well as a sense of pride and accomplishment.



**Take a Walk** – venture around the neighborhood, a nearby park, or an accessible trail. Be sure to use a cane, walker, or wheelchair if needed and take breaks.

**Sit in the Sun** – just sitting outside for a short period can help improve mood and reduce stress. Maybe read a book or just watch and listen to birds and neighborhood sounds to engage all your senses.

**Birdwatch** – go out into the woods or put a feeder outside your window. Grab a bird-watching book or even use an app on your phone to identify birds.



Reach out to your local Audubon Society if you would like to learn more about birdwatching in the area.

**Have a Picnic** – get take-out or bring sandwiches to a nearby park, or even your own backyard.

**Take a Scenic Drive** – just going somewhere new, or somewhere old, can be a great source of fun. Enjoy the company of the person you are with, the silence, the scenery, a good book tape/podcast, or your favorite music.

**Arrange Flowers** – create bouquets from flowers purchased or grown, or use silk flowers that can be rearranged and re-used multiple times.

**Join Community Events** – check out town picnics, farmer's markets, festivals, parades, and concerts.

**Plan a Family Gathering / Have a Fire Pit or Potluck** – socializing is essential to staying active and engaged.

Make sure to conserve your energy beforehand and rest afterwards.

**Go Out for a Treat** – sit outdoors at a restaurant or get some ice cream or frozen yogurt.



**Go Fishing** – this is an activity that involves minimal physical exertion, can be easily adapted, and provides plenty of time to enjoy nature and the person you are with.

**Do Some Light Spring Cleaning** – perform small tasks that organize and clear your space. Reminisce while you look at your belongings.

**Go to a Sporting Event** – they are often handicap accessible and tend to provide a fun, stimulating atmosphere. People may be reminded of the sports they loved to watch or play in their younger years.



When planning outdoor activities, be sure to match the activity with your loved one's physical and cognitive abilities and put time aside for rest and hydration. But, most of all, have fun and enjoy the sun!

~Christine Grimaldi, OTR/L, Memory Care Specialist



# Northampton Memory Cafe

Presented by Northampton Senior Center, Northampton Neighbors,  
Pioneer Valley Memory Care Initiative & Highland Valley Elder Services

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**WHERE:** Northampton Senior Center, 67 Conz Street, Northampton MA



**WHEN:** 4th Tuesday of each month from 1:00-2:30pm

A fun activity, a light snack, coffee, tea or beverage will be offered.



**RSVP REQUIRED:** Please call the Northampton Senior Center at 413-587-1228 to register. Space is limited so please RSVP early to assure a space!



**ABOUT MEMORY CAFES:** Memory Cafes are social get togethers for people living with memory loss or dementia and their caregivers. The meetings offer a fun activity as well as time for caregivers to share experiences and connect with other caregivers. Caregivers are strongly encouraged to stay for the duration of the meeting.



**LUNCH AT THE SENIOR CENTER:** Participants can also sign up for lunch at the Senior Center. Separate registration is required. Pre-registration and payment is due 48 hours in advance. You can sign up online at [www.myactivecenter.com](http://www.myactivecenter.com), call the front desk at 587-1228 or stop by the front desk.

## Yes, You CAN Try This at Home!

~Deb Peavey, LMHC, ATR, CDP, MEMORY CARE SPECIALIST

**M**aking art can be a fun, relaxing way for people of all ages to express their creativity, but can be particularly valuable for adults with memory impairment or dementia. Studies have shown that art activities help boost cognitive function in various areas of the brain, enhance communication and social interaction, and boost confidence in people with dementia.

There's no "one size fits all" approach to art-making; what's most important is considering your older adult's current abilities, preferences, and what's feasible in their living space. The idea is to set them up for success and enjoyment, rather than overwhelm or frustration.

Spring can be a great time to try some painting at home. You can find basic supplies at Walmart, Amazon, Job Lots and even the grocery store or pharmacy. Complete kits can be found on specialty sites like S & S Worldwide at <https://www.ssw.com> where reprinted images on good quality watercolor paper, including paints and brushes, sell for about \$25 or less. To avoid making the experience feel



childish, quality paper and real (vs plastic) brushes are best. Keep the theme seasonal, set up a vase full of fresh flowers for inspiration, or choose pre-printed seasonally themed imagery. Play some light classical music in the background. Pre-set the table—clearing away visual distractions and clutter—with all necessary supplies, being sure to include a cup for water (avoid serving anything to drink during this exercise as it can create confusion) and a paper towel for blotting. Using a spray bottle or a wet paintbrush, pre-moisten the paints.

Set up a workspace for yourself and your loved one and invite them to join you in the activity. If you sense any resistance, encourage the person to sit and keep you company while you give the process a try. Model a willingness to be playful and try something new, explaining what you're doing as you go and fostering engagement. Ask if you can help your loved one get started on their piece to see if that will bring down their barriers a bit. When the session is over—it isn't necessary to finish all at once—hold up the work and admire it, each of you expressing (if possible) how the piece makes you feel to look at or how it felt to create. Give the pieces titles. Ask if you can display the work somewhere that it can be appreciated. Most of all, have fun!

## PIONEER VALLEY MEMORY CARE INITIATIVE

**T**he PVMCI is a coalition of health care and community providers dedicated to empowering and supporting older adults living with dementia and their family caregivers to improve their quality of life. Partnering organizations include Cooley Dickinson Hospital, Cooley Dickinson Medical Group, Cooley Dickinson VNA & Hospice, Valley Medical Group, the Alzheimer's Association, Highland Valley Elder Services, and local Village Networks, senior services, and Councils on Aging. The PVMCI is a member of the Massachusetts General Hospital Memory Care Initiative.

Based out of the Cooley Dickinson Geriatrics program and led by Rebecca Starr, MD, Medical Director, Geriatrician, the PVMCI serves older adults living with memory loss, dementia and Alzheimer's disease and their family caregivers who reside in Amherst, Easthampton and Northampton (including Florence and Leeds). We would be happy to discuss this program and answer any questions that you and/or your loved one may have! You can call **413-582-2357** and leave a message with your contact information. A member of the PVMCI team will return your call.

This program is funded by The Eisenberg Family Trust and made possible in part by a grant from Highland Valley Elder Services through funding under the Federal Older Americans Act. To meet our federal requirements, we have been requested to advise you that "there is no fee for the service; however, a voluntary confidential donation is requested. You will not be refused service for lack of a donation. Your donation helps support the continuation of needed services for elders." Interested in donating? Please call the Cooley Dickinson development office at **413-582-2256**. Thank you!

# Upcoming COMMUNITY EVENTS

See your local senior center newsletter for more listings

**Northampton Senior Center Newsletter:** <https://www.northamptonma.gov/2057/Conz-Street-Chronicle>

**Northampton Memory Café:** The Northampton Senior Center, PVMCI, Highland Valley Elder Services and Northampton Neighbors are working together to host a monthly Memory Café at the Northampton Senior Center. The group will meet monthly on the 4th Tuesday of each month from 1:00pm-2:30. A light snack will be provided as well as a fun activity. See page 7 for more details. The Memory Café is free of charge to participants, donations are typically gratefully accepted.

### **Cooley Dickinson Geriatrics Dementia Caregivers**

**Support Group:** Takes place on the second Thursday of each month at 1:00pm on Zoom. Email [CaregiverSupport-Group@CooleyDickinsonGeriatrics.org](mailto:CaregiverSupport-Group@CooleyDickinsonGeriatrics.org) to register.

### **Cooley Dickinson Geriatrics Dementia Educational**

**Session:** Takes place on the fourth Thursday of each month at 1:00pm on zoom. Email [CaregiverSupport-Group@CooleyDickinsonGeriatrics.org](mailto:CaregiverSupport-Group@CooleyDickinsonGeriatrics.org) to register.

**Amherst Senior Center Newsletter:** <https://www.amherstma.gov/269/Senior-Services>

**The Can't Remember Cafe** - Amherst Senior Center - 413-259-3060. Wednesdays from 10:00am-12:00pm Join us for strong coffee and good conversation! The Can't Remember (CR) Café offers socialization for all but especially designed for individuals with mild memory loss and their care partners. We start each Café with an open hour of conversation followed by a rotating group activity in the second hour. Come for the coffee, stay for the conversations.

For a list of upcoming activities see below: April 5: Bingo  
April 12: Paper Art with Pari April 19: Ed the Wizard  
\*Performance starts at 10am\* April 26: Acoustic Memories w/ Sean Fullerton All are welcome!

**Mobile Food Pantry, Amherst:** First Wednesday of month, 1:00-2:00pm April 5th, May 1st, Boulders Apartment Homes, 156 Brittany Drive, Amherst. Mobile food pantry

includes a variety of fresh fruits, fresh vegetables, and meat (when available). All are welcome, no documentation or registration process required. There are no residency or income requirements. Save money and enjoy fresh produce.

**Easthampton Senior Center Newsletter:** <https://easthamptonma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/5434/March-2023-Newsletter>

### **Easthampton COA & Highland Valley Take and Go**

**Meals:** The Highland Valley Take & Go Meals are available every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday to Seniors 60+ who do not receive Meals on Wheels. Suggested donation: \$3. Sign Up: Call Ashley (527.6151 ext. 130) with your chosen dates, or if new, let us know you'd like to enroll. All registrations must be received by 12:00p.m one week before the meal. You will get a call back to confirm. Pick-up: Meals available for pick-up from 11:30am -12:00pm at the Main St. branch of Easthampton Savings Bank in the back parking lot. Enter the parking lot from Campus Ln. or Summer St.

**Veteran Services Hours:** Michelle Murdock, Veteran's Services Officer, is now at the ECOA two days a week for appointments. Call to schedule a time to meet with her: 413-270-2254

**Healing Harmonies:** An informal singing group designed for individuals with diagnosed neurological conditions, particularly those experiencing communication problems due to voice, language, or speech disorders. Caregivers are also welcome to attend and participate. Some possible conditions may include Parkinson's Disease, Progressive Supranuclear Palsy, Stroke, ALS, Traumatic/Acquired Brain Injury, Multiple Sclerosis and Dementia.

**WHEN:** Wednesdays, 5:30-7:00 February 15, 22, March 1, 15, 22, 29, April 5, 19. Join anytime! No Charge.

**WHERE:** New Location at Sunderland Public Library, 20 School St, Sunderland, MA 01375.

**Thursday is for the Birds: A Birding Program Led By Bill Randolph, Refuge Volunteer Naturalist.** Join Bill for a weekly naturalist walk noting the seasonal changes within the park's diverse habitats. Where: Fort River Birding and Nature Trail (handicap accessible), 69 Moody Bridge Road, Hadley, MA 01035 When: Thursdays April 6, 13, 20 & 27, 9:00-11:30am. Sign up for one class or the whole series. To register, email: [Tasha.Daniels@FWS.gov](mailto:Tasha.Daniels@FWS.gov) or Call: 413-658-5403.