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## Removing the stigma of dementia

Northumbria University is hosting a series of activities to mark National Dementia Week this week amid the news that the North East is one of the most rapidly ageing regions in the country.

In its bid to gain “dementia-friendly status,’ Northumbria, in partnership with the Alzheimer’s Society, is running workshops and bite-size activities to raise awareness of dementia.

As part of the week, more than 70 people will carry out training to become ‘dementia friends’ which will see them promising to make a difference to the lives of those with the condition.

The number of people in the NE predicted to have late onset dementia from the age of 65 onwards in 2009 was 30,254. This represents around 5% of the total predicted for England. By 2030 the predicted numbers of people with dementia in the NE is expected to increase to 50,896 which represents a 68% increase on the 2009 figure.

Sue Tiplady, Senior Lecturer in Adult Nursing said: “A lot of nursing students, when they first come to us, don’t realise just how many people are affected by dementia so that’s why we invest time teaching awareness about the condition. We stress the importance of giving a positive image of people living with dementia.

“We invite people who have cared for people with dementia and those living with the condition come in to the University to speak to students so that they have a greater appreciation of the condition and how best to deal with those living with it.”

One person with dementia, who is taking part in the event and gives talks to Northumbria students about his experiences of living with the condition is Ken Clasper who was diagnosed with Lewy Body dementia at the age of 56.

He said: “People don’t understand that people with dementia can lead an almost normal life with support. It’s also amazing how much people learn by spending time with people with dementia.

“We need to change attitudes and remove the stigma. We must do more for those with the early signs of the disease to seek support and educate people in all public places about the illness.”

Newcastle-based Alzheimer’s Society area manager for the North East and Cumbria Caroline Burden said: “We’re delighted Northumbria University has set its sights on becoming dementia friendly and this is a really important step forward in the Alzheimer’s Society efforts to make our communities more supportive of people with dementia.

“This is a really valuable initiative because we are linking in with a university which is involved in training future nurses, social workers and teachers who all need to be involved with us to help improve support for people with dementia and to develop a dementia-friendly environment.”

The events are being attended by nursing students, healthcare professionals, carers and people living with dementia. Activities include information sessions on issues such as how the arts can be used with people with dementia to training to become a Dementia Friend. There will also be a drop-in café where people can discuss any concerns or find out more about the condition. All events will be held in the Clinical Skills Centre at Northumbria's Coach Lane Campus. To find out more or book a place please contact [sue.tiplady@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:sue.tiplady@northumbria.ac.uk)

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