



Mind Matters

By Amy Krause

Eighty-eight year old Joan Planos loves sports, playing online games, knitting and can still hold her own on the golf course. For years, she raised four kids, organized the accounting and billing for her husband's business and, to this day, manages her home finances online using her tablet. Joan is also part of the House of Welcome (HOW) Adult Day Services' Mind Matters program for people living with early memory loss, such as mild cognitive impairment and early stage Alzheimer's disease or other dementias. She was diagnosed with dementia in 2016 and started attending Mind Matters that same year.

Barb Brandt, LCPC, program manager for Mind Matters, said the program—in its tenth year—is a safe place for members to discuss changes they are experiencing due to memory loss. "People with early memory loss are aware of what's happening. Simple things like conversations can become difficult because it becomes harder to process what people are saying," Barb said. "In Mind Matters, there's a strong camaraderie and openness in the group where people can talk about their frustrations, their fears, and their losses, including driving privileges, reading and social relationships."

Co-facilitated by Barb and Jennifer Bacani, LCPC, R-DMT, along with other HOW staff, Mind Matters meets every Tuesday and Thursday from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at North Shore Senior Center's Northfield campus. Registration is required, and interested persons are interviewed prior to joining.

A typical day at Mind Matters starts with coffee and word games as folks get settled. Participants and facilitators wear name tags so that no one has to remember names. Mid-morning, group members participate in a variety of activities related to the theme of the day, which is focused on supporting people living with early memory loss. Mind Matters provides therapeutic activities, including memory and relaxation techniques, music, art and dance/movement therapy, reading strategies and reminiscence. The group holds a support group, which gives participants a chance to talk about the various challenges they are experiencing, an opportunity they might not have elsewhere. The afternoon incorporates exercise such as tai chi, yoga or dance/movement therapy. By the end of the day, participants leave feeling fulfilled from hours of mental and physical stimulation, engagement, support and friendship.

According to Barb, the social connections participants make in the group are very important for people experiencing memory loss. "Family and friends can't fully understand what these people are going through like someone who is experiencing the same things. Being part of this non-judgmental group is empowering, and participants feel good about being involved in something that's helping them navigate through their memory loss."

Joan's son, Rick, feels good about his mom attending Mind Matters and marvels at her artwork. He said she was always good with numbers but was never artistic until she joined Mind Matters and began drawing. Joan noted, "I look so forward to seeing my group each week. My favorite parts of the day are drawing, the quizzes, and the word games because they are stimulating." ■

MIND MATTERS FAMILY CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUP

Family members of people who attend Mind Matters can participate in a monthly support group exclusively for them. Joan's son, Rick, attends the group which he values for its incredible resources. "There is definitely strength in numbers when it comes to caring for someone with memory loss. Our group shares caregiver resources, tips on handling different situations that come up, and so many other things. It's a very supportive group of people," he said. He also has become friends with others in the group, and they occasionally meet for lunch.

The group discusses challenges and changes their loved ones are experiencing such as loss of conversation and changes in socialization. They discuss understanding disease progression, how to continue with activities like travel and when changes need to be made in driving or handling finances. "As a loved one's memory deteriorates, they may become less comfortable with certain activities," explained Barb. "In the family caregiver support group, we share ideas on how to maintain every day activities like going out with friends or grocery shopping. Caregivers leave with more information and strong connections." She noted that they also talk about the added stresses they, as caregivers, are experiencing and how to better manage those situations.

For more information on Mind Matters, contact Barb Brandt at bbrandt@nssc.org or 847.242.6284.