

IMPLEMENTING A MEMORY CAFE

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

INSPIRED BY THE ABCD PILOT PROJECT
DRUMHELLER, ALBERTA

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The Rural Development Network (RDN) sincerely acknowledges that our physical office is located on the Traditional Territories of Treaty 6 and home to Métis Nation Region 4.

From coast to coast to coast, we acknowledge the ancestral and unceded territory of all the Inuit, Métis, and First Nations people that call this land home and who have gathered on these lands for centuries.

We do this to reaffirm our commitment and responsibility to improving relationships between nations and to improve our own understanding of local Indigenous peoples and their cultures.

We are all Treaty People.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

AUTHORS

- Mary McGuire
- Amanda Panisiak
- Gwen Price

MANAGING EDITOR

- Mary McGuire

EDITORS

- Mary McGuire
- Amanda Panisak
- Emika Peterson
- Gwen Price

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*For more information about the ABCD project, please contact:
info@ruraldevelopment.ca*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ABOUT THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

The Rural Development Network (RDN) collaborates with rural communities across Canada to identify and bring focus to rural issues, build local capacity, and find innovative, rural-based solutions to unique issues. A key aspect of that work is to support rural communities in the implementation of the proposed solutions by providing capacity. RDN's initiatives include:

- addressing rural homelessness;
- building affordable housing;
- addressing substance misuse;
- age-friendly rural communities;
- rural immigration;
- rural access to services including transportation, broadband, and justice;
- agri-food initiatives; and
- rural revitalization.

ABOUT ABCD INITIATIVE

In 2021, RDN developed the Awareness Builds Connection in Dementia Friendly Communities (ABCD) initiative. This project aims to support rural communities in Alberta to become more dementia-inclusive and dementia-friendly. An environmental scan was carried out to determine the best practices, challenges, and lessons regarding dementia-inclusive initiatives. Through learning from examples in existing programming, the ABCD team improved their understanding of effective dementia-inclusive programs and created a catalogue based on their findings, selecting initiatives adaptable to rural settings.

Through a call for interest, five rural communities were chosen to pilot the project, those being Taber, Sturgeon County, Spirit River, Strathmore and Drumheller. Drumheller's initiative will be the focus of this guide.

ABOUT THE DRUMHELLER COMMUNITY SENIORS COALITION

The Drumheller Community Seniors Coalition (DCSC) is a team of people from various organizations, such as the Big County Primary Care Network and Drumheller Family & Community Support Services. They rely on partners in the healthcare environment such as Primary Care Network Nurses, Home Care, and Seniors' Mental Health Outreach to ensure clients living with dementia and their care partners are connected to local opportunities.

LIVING WITH DEMENTIA IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Additional challenges exist for people living with dementia and their caregivers in rural communities. These challenges are unique from the experiences of those living in an urban setting. Rural-specific challenges include the lack of transportation, difficulties accessing support and care services, failure of proper diagnoses, and privacy concerns.

Like everyone, people living with dementia and their care partners want to feel like a valued part of their community. However, in rural communities, dementia-related resources providing education, diagnosis and support can be scarce, directly impacting:

- early diagnosis;
- access to diagnosis;
- community education and understanding of dementia; and
- support for care in the home/community when living with and supporting someone with dementia.

PURPOSE OF STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

Informed by research and the experiences of the ABCD pilot community in Drumheller, this guide has been developed to support rural communities that are looking to improve the lives of those living with dementia by becoming more dementia-friendly. Understanding that each community is unique with its own strengths and perspectives, this guide is meant to be flexible and adaptable based on community needs and resources available.



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INTRODUCTION

DRUMHELLER

Drumheller, Alberta is situated in the heart of the badlands on the Red Deer River which is known worldwide for the large number of dinosaur fossils discovered there (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2022). Drumheller is a town in Southern Alberta and is home to approximately 11,000 residents. The Drumheller Community Seniors Coalition shared that according to the 2017 Drumheller Community Social Needs Assessment, of those people, it is estimated that 1,700 are seniors aged 65+, with 815 of those being 75+. This comes out to an average of 16% of the town's total population being senior citizens. The Town of Drumheller is located on Treaty 7 territory, the ancestral and traditional territory of the Blackfoot Confederacy: Kainai, Piikani, and Siksika, as well as the Tsuut'ina First Nation and the Stoney Nakoda First Nation (Drumheller, 2021).

DRUMHELLER'S MEMORY CAFÉ

Summary

The Drumheller Community Seniors Coalition chose to encourage and support their community to become more dementia friendly by implementing a "Memory Café". The initiative focuses on those living with dementia and their care partners, encouraging social gathering and support in an environment free from judgment and stigma. Memory cafés all have the same goal: to provide a welcoming and safe space for individuals living with dementia and their caregivers. Some memory cafés are local cafés that create intentional spaces for those living with dementia and their caregivers to interact, receive support, and learn from others in a similar situation. Other memory cafés are more structured with a host or facilitator providing activities or games for participants. The Drumheller Community Seniors Coalition chose to take their Memory Café on the road, so to speak, where participants had the opportunity to visit local venues such as an antique museum, a learning garden, an adventure park and a movie theatre! As part of their Memory Café program, the Coalition purchased a Polaroid camera, taking instant pictures of the couples and families together.

Highlights

A couple of the Cafés were held in partnership with the Homestead Antique Museum in Drumheller, an environment where participants reminisced together, were entertained by a local musician and attended a presentation by a local teacher about coal mining and the history of the Drumheller

Valley. Another was held at the local community garden where a presentation of the garden took place and participants were able to sample the produce and learn about the bee hotel. The group also spent an afternoon at Barney's Adventure Park, an 'outdoor playground' located on farmland. This location encouraged conversation and memories from those who had grown up on farms, and participants cheered for the pig races, played with baby goats, and took a gator ride through the "live" dinosaur walk. A few other outings included a scenic drive through the Drumheller Valley, which provided another wonderful setting for story sharing about days from the past, and a showing of the movie Grease at a local theatre.

Why was this initiative chosen for the community?

Drumheller is an aging community and in order for people to live and thrive in their homes for as long as possible, accessible supports and programming are necessary. In their application, the Drumheller Community Seniors Coalition expressed that although rural communities are known to have strong social networks the networks can become strained as people age and are diagnosed with dementia and loved ones become caregivers. The Coalition noted the most common scenario in Drumheller in relation to those aging in the community, is the evolving role of the spouse into the caregiver. With this in mind, the Coalition decided a Memory Café would provide a judgment and stigma-free environment for a couple to participate in an activity together where the roles of caregiver/care receiver are not the central focus.

Goals of Memory Café

The intention of memory cafés is to provide a welcoming and safe space where both people living with dementia and their loved ones/care partners can gather together. In doing so, they can find social interaction and emotional support from people within their communities. The goal of Drumheller's Memory Café is to provide a place where socialization and activities can occur allowing people to share their experiences, obtain resources from their community, and enjoy time with each other. Differing from a program providing respite time away for the caregiver, the focus of the Memory Café is for the person living with dementia and the caregiver to do something together. Something not based on routine or the needs and pressures of everyday living.

MOBILE MEMORY CAFÉ: STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

In March 2022, the Drumheller Dementia Coalition submitted an application requesting funding from the Rural Development Network's ABCD initiative for their Memory Café. The Coalition was successful in receiving the \$5000 seed funding and the planning for their Memory Café began in April 2022.

STEP 1: DEVELOPMENT OF BUDGET, WORK PLAN, AND TIMELINE

Budget Considerations

The amount of seed funding provided by RDN's ABCD Project was \$5000. The intention of the seed funding was to support the initial startup costs for the selected ABCD pilot community initiatives, including Drumheller's. Supplies, such as activity equipment, discussion starters, and a Polaroid camera were purchased. Transportation, however, would be a recurring expense. The Drumheller Community Seniors Coalition also aimed to utilize cost-effective resources at its disposal. Once underway, and improvement to participant's quality of life documented, the initiative outcomes would be used as a way to lobby for permanent funding from local municipalities.

Taking a mobile approach and engaging various community vendors and spaces, the Coalition used their budget on the following items:

- Communication (radio ads and mailouts, branding)
- Location space (adventure park, theatre, museum)
- Equipment (Polaroid camera and film)
- Transportation and food

Workplan

Once funding was acquired, an initial meeting was held to discuss and document the goals, objectives and budget of the Memory Café. Ongoing bi-weekly meetings took place leading up to the start of the initiative. Within a month of funding approval, the group surveyed those living with dementia and their caregivers in Drumheller to better understand the types of topics and activities they would like to see offered at the Café. Outreach to local service groups also took place and volunteers were recruited.

One month post-approval, a planning calendar was created, outlining the dates, times and locations of Memory Café activities. The group aimed to hold their first Café 6-7 weeks after approval, which was a goal they met. They planned to keep meeting monthly to evaluate success and areas for improvement.

Anticipated Timeline of Activities and Implementation

This timeline is based on the project implementation experiences of Drumheller Community Seniors Coalition.

TIMELINE	ACTIVITY
MONTH 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning meeting to finalize program plan, evaluation, and budget • Create and circulate surveys to people living with dementia and caregivers • Volunteer recruitment
MONTH 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delegation: who calls participants, who purchases the supplies, where to house supplies • Team meeting • Survey results compiled • Calendar of Events, complete initial assessments/intake of the participants • Communication plan (notify local service groups, advertising) • Arrange transportation • Purchase supplies
MONTH 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First program held • Team meeting
MONTH 3 - MONTH 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program continues once a month • Program evaluation takes place three months into the program
MONTH 6 - MONTH 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program continues once a month
MONTH 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lobbying for sustained funding; seeking of grant opportunities to continue programming
MONTH 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer appreciation/recognition
MONTH 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One year celebration of program

STEP 2: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNICATION

Recruitment/Training of Staff and Volunteers

The Drumheller Community Seniors Coalition aimed to have volunteers help out with events, whether it was giving demonstrations, performances, or just general assistance.

Community Partnerships

The Drumheller Community Seniors Coalition partnered with a number of groups, including the Primary Care Network, Home Care and Seniors Mental Health Outreach. They also are in contact with local therapists, helping them learn the most useful ways to support people living with dementia. Spreading awareness of these groups and the support and care they offer to people with dementia and their caregivers was an important part of the initiative.

Drumheller's Memory Café partnered with the Homestead Museum in Drumheller, using their location to hold their first two Memory Cafés. The location worked as a perfect place to facilitate conversations and reminisce about the past. They also connected with the Valley Learning Garden, Barney's Adventure Park, and the local theatre for additional memory café activities. Local transportation was provided by the Valley Bus and Bubba T's Shuttle Service.

Communications

The Cafés were advertised on websites such as Drumheller Online before the events even started, sharing contact information for people who were interested in attending (Blanke, 2022). Additional advertisement and outreach were done through newspapers and Community Monthly Calendar Mail Outs. Organizers spent time calling those who met the criteria to attend. These calls encouraged attendance and acted as a helpful reminder of the event. Most participants would eagerly wait each month for the call, as it helped them feel welcome and accountable to attend. This strategy worked as there was regular attendance to the events and engaged community partners for each.

STEP 3: ACTIVITY LOGISTICS

1. Connecting with community partners to schedule activity days and times
2. Scheduling staff and volunteers for each activity
3. Arranging transportation, food, and beverages
4. Communicating activity calendar with participants

STEP 4: MEASURING PROGRESS AND OUTCOMES

Data Collection

In consultation with the Drumheller Community Seniors Coalition, RDN created Pre-Memory Café Surveys and Post-Memory Café Surveys for participants to complete.

Pre-Memory Café Survey Questions

- What possible barriers would prevent you from attending a Memory Café?
- How would you rate your knowledge of dementia?
- What would you find beneficial from a Memory Café?
- What other community support would you find helpful for you or your loved one in relation to living with dementia?

Post-Memory Café Survey Questions

- What has been the most beneficial part of attending the Memory Café?
- Do you feel like you have a better understanding of what dementia is?
- Do you feel a sense of community support in connection to the Memory Café?
- Has participating in the Café increased your knowledge about potential resources within the community?
- Would you encourage others to attend the Memory Café?
- How might the Memory Café be improved?

The Drumheller Community Seniors Coalition also developed its own program evaluation, with “yes or no” questions, and the option to provide additional comments, focusing on staff perception and experiences in the implementation of the Memory Café.

Memory Café Program – Staff Evaluation Questions

- Are the target population attending the program each month?
- Were precautions taken to ensure a safe environment?
- Are you prepared for the program each month (doing research, assembling supplies, and preparing the program outline each time)?
- Is the location appropriate for the program?
- Is the length of the program sufficient to complete the objectives?
- Is there sufficient staff and volunteers to assist participants in achieving the goals of the program?
- Were there any visual signs of enjoyment from participants?
- Does the program meet written objectives?

Findings

Pre-Memory Café

Prior to the Memory Café activities taking place, participants completed the Pre-Memory Café Survey Questionnaire, expressing the following:

- Possible barriers in attending Memory Café
 - Worried about stigma and fear of judgement
 - The location of the Café's, going somewhere new, finding a new location
 - Uncertain about the purpose of the Café
 - Weather concerns such as cold temperatures, snow, and ice
- Knowledge about dementia
 - Knowledge varied amongst participants. On a scale from one to five, one representing limited knowledge, and five representing very knowledgeable, participants placed themselves at twos, threes, and fours.
- Perceived benefits of participating in a Memory Café
 - Coffee/social time
 - Getting my loved one off of the couch
 - Visiting with friends
 - Music
- Other supports that you or your loved one may find helpful
 - More programs for people with dementia
 - More education/resources
 - More respite and better hours for respite

Successes

Participant Feedback

Through a survey facilitated by those leading the Drumheller Memory Café, the feedback from participants was positive. Participants felt the most beneficial aspects of the Café were getting out of the house, feeling less depressed, and meeting new friends. When asked if they had a better understanding of what dementia is, one participant expressed "No, but I now know I'm not alone". Participants also shared they experienced a sense of community and support through attending the Café, as they were able to make new friends. One participant expressed that the Café group allowed them to "feel comfortable to come out and try new things". Additionally, those who attended the Café conveyed an increase in knowledge of available resources in the community, as the leads of the Café would share upcoming events and review the community calendar.

Drumheller Community Seniors Coalition Feedback

As part of their Memory Café program, the Coalition purchased a Polaroid camera, taking instant photos of the couples and families together. This provided participants with a special take-home gift, and conversation piece to share with family and friends. It is something they can look back on and often remember as a small piece of the day. The Drumheller Community Seniors Coalition highly recommends this for other groups looking to implement a similar initiative as the feedback from families about the value of these photos has been great.

Challenges

Participant Feedback

Participants of the Drumheller Memory Café did not express experiencing any challenges.

Drumheller Community Seniors Coalition Feedback

The Drumheller Community Seniors Coalition expressed challenges in consistent staffing and capacity for outings, weather issues, particularly during winter, and in coordinating other services such as the bus.

SUSTAINABILITY

As it stands now, the Drumheller Community Seniors Coalition has the mindset and passion to keep the project going. They stayed consistent with the activity schedule, with thoughtful ideas on ways to engage both the community and participants. Café attendance numbers remained consistent which in and of itself indicates the value and desire for ongoing programming by participants. The main hurdle that the Coalition will face in terms of keeping the project running long-term is funding. Once the funding through RDN's ABCD project has been utilized, they will have to apply for municipal funding, which they are aware of and planning to do.

RESOURCES

Resources needed to run a successful Mobile Memory Café include locations, volunteers, food and beverages, activities, and transportation. Some locations are public and therefore free to use, such as a local community garden. To maintain success, dedicated, energetic staff is a must, especially having one person focused on calling participants, encouraging attendance, and searching for new participants.

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