

Dementia and 'wandering' Presentation to 'people who wander' workshop 21 March 2010

Introduce self: Vivienne Boyd, Education Co-ordinator, Alzheimers Canterbury which is a Member Organisation of Alzheimers New Zealand

Outline session – why adults walk, impact of dementia, appropriate responses

Why adults walk - in groups list at least 6 reasons in general:

e.g. get places – supermarket, bank, toilet, exercise, find things, reduce discomfort or pain, complete tasks, reduce stress. Body was made to move.

- People with dementia are adults too. They will want to walk for these reasons. What to us may seem to be wandering will for them have a purpose when they set out.

Impact of dementia

A. Figures and facts re dementia – (source Alzheimers New Zealand 'Dementia Economic Impact Report' 2008 available on

<http://www.alzheimers.org.nz/assets/Reports/AnnualReports/exec-summary-EIDiNZ-report.pdf>

Current estimate over 40,000 NZers have dementia, by 2026 estimate is over 74,000 and by 2050 over 146,000 (p11). Risk of dementia increases with age but not all elderly people will have dementia. Estimate that of over 90 year olds 1 in every 3 (p9). And people under the age of 65 can have dementia. Current estimate in NZ over 2,000 (p43)

B. What is dementia?

Refer to leaflet – definition, types, and symptoms that relate to 'wandering

- gradual memory loss – set off for shops or house of live or deceased family member/friend then forgets where going
- impaired judgement – brain not recognising when weather is hot or cold and on a cold day in light clothes follow others out of a secure unit, falling/tripping on uneven surfaces e.g. woman found down a river bank
- disorientation of time and place – looking for home and not recognising their own home, not recognising hitherto familiar landmarks (though may be able to describe them)
- personality changes – becoming more withdrawn and a crowd can be noisy and a lot of movement so person walks away
- changes in mood or behaviour – feels trapped with a group and wants to be 'free' so walks away, feeling stressed and sees an open door so goes through it
- problems with language- unable to express needs e.g. get to toilet and goes outside to find it
- misplacing things e.g. keys, money so go looking for them

Appropriate responses, my suggestions (SAR):

Slow – if you are on foot speak as you approach them from the front not behind, walk with them or if you are in a car, pull up slowly not fast, and quietly rather than noisily acknowledge - attract their attention calmly, identify yourself, use their name and offer them a ride, tell them and **show** them what you want them to do e.g. get in the car, follow you

Avoid – **arguing**, reminding them they are lost, taking personally any comments or other behaviours at this point

Reassure – that you have come to assist them; then **redirect** them towards home
(Discuss these suggested in small groups)

Acknowledge:

- other Alzheimers organisations' representatives here and assure participants happy to answer questions about dementia/talk further about it with you here and in our areas
- availability of Alzheimers New Zealand information sheet leaflet 'Wandering'