

This week in Parliament I hosted a Dementia Friends information session for fellow parliamentarians. It was nice to see so many people interested in becoming a Friend, a key part of the Prime Minister's Dementia Challenge.

The more I learn about dementia both as a local MP and in my capacity as vice-chairman of the cross party dementia group, the more I realise that the whole community has a role in helping cope with the increasing challenge of dealing with the disease.

Here in Kent we are doing a fantastic job at taking a lead in the Challenge and building the Friends network. The point of becoming a Dementia Friend is to identify people in the community who may be suffering from dementia and to help them, through that recognition, live as much of an ordinary life as possible.

We only ever see pictures of those with dementia in their latter stages, probably incoherent, probably incapacitated. As it happens you can live well with dementia for a long time but everyday life still poses challenges, and sometimes help or reassurance can make it a little less scary.

An example I heard was how a lady went to the supermarket and was stood staring at the oranges in the grocery aisle for 10 minutes. She was confused. She couldn't identify the fruit and then she couldn't remember what it was that she had come for. As it happens another shopper saw and recognised the increasing agitation of the lady and came to help her, instead of passing her by like so many other shoppers. It is this kind of community recognition that the Friends scheme is designed to create.

Dementia used to be taboo. Now we talk about it but we do so with fear. If we as a wider community can help those who suffer from this awful condition maybe, just maybe, we'll all become a little less frightened of it and help the 1 in 3 who will by 2020 have dementia live well in our community.