

Testimony 2/9/2023

I'm Joy Schmidt, a Dementia Care Specialist (DCS) in Dane County, Wisconsin.

The DCS supports people living with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia and their caregivers. We provide information and education, and we connect people to resources. We also support dementia-friendly initiatives, like memory cafes, and promote early detection of dementia through memory screenings.

The pilot DCS program began 10 years ago. It was shown to improve the overall well-being of people living with dementia and to delay the need for nursing home care, which saved taxpayer dollars. We help Wisconsin residents in a variety of ways, including conducting thousands of cognitive screenings statewide; these screenings – which are done by trained DCS workers from a wide variety of backgrounds. They are not done by doctors or clinicians, but just a first step to point people in the right direction; they help individuals with dementia and also their caregivers with more information.

As the pilot program was ending, citizens mobilized to support it. They shared positive experiences from working with their local DCS. Family members and caregivers from across our state came forward to fight for these positions and to support the need for knowledgeable advocates. For some who participated in memory screenings, it meant finding a treatable condition or early detection. For others, it meant getting reassurance about their memory and information about normal changes.

From Joe: "...The last couple of years have been spent thinking and reflecting... I just want to take the time to say thank you, for all your time and council that you gave to Sara and me. At the time little did I realize how far over my head things had gotten. It really became apparent how bad Sara had gotten after she went into the nursing home. It was the most difficult and trying time of my life. I miss her every day. I have often wondered what I would have done without your guidance...."

Joe and Sara had attended a memory café at our Governor's Residence hosted by Wisconsin's First Lady, Mrs. Kathy Evers. Working with the DCS, Mrs. Evers made the Governor's Residence dementia friendly and she is now carrying this mission to other first spouses across the country.

The DCS program has been invaluable to our state. It has provided people with the information they need to access resources, cope with losses caused by dementia and remain engaged in their community. I urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 505, legislation modeled after our Wisconsin program; Maryland will benefit from this.