

Railway colleagues trained in dementia awareness thanks to new call-out

May 17, 2023



Govia Thameslink Railway has partnered with the Alzheimer's Society to help employees recognise the signs of dementia and how to offer support in real life scenarios.

The rail operator set a target of getting 100 colleagues signed up to be 'Dementia Friends', an initiative created by Alzheimer's Society. However, with so many people resonating with the cause and having their own experiences to share, the company has almost doubled its target, with 185 sign-ups so far.

A Dementia Friend is somebody that learns about the condition so they can help their community. A short video provided by Alzheimer's Society helps to provide basic skills to spot someone potentially living with dementia and share practical tips on how to engage with patience and empathy.

GTR already offers extensive training to staff, spanning general health and safety, suicide prevention and caring for the vulnerable. This additional awareness will support railway staff to be even more vigilant when helping members of the public at stations or on trains.

Sophie Court, Accessibility Improvement Manager at Govia Thameslink Railway, said: "Our colleagues

meet hundreds of people on the railway every day. As well as looking out for obvious signs of passenger distress, it's important we continue to raise awareness of hidden conditions too so we can provide people with the help they need. We're very proud of the number of colleagues who've signed up to become a Dementia Friend and hope to have even more on board by the end of Dementia Action Week."

Jackie Swapp, Area Manager for Alzheimer's Society, said: "There are currently 900,000 people in the UK affected by dementia. People with dementia have the right to live the life they want and continue to do the things they enjoy, but often they don't feel included in their communities and face isolation.

"There are more than 3.5 million Dementia Friends taking action in shops, workplaces, schools and family homes since the scheme was launched 10 years ago, ensuring people living with dementia are understood, included and respected."

Anja Vrambout is an On-board Supervisor for Gatwick Express. When her father started to become more forgetful, she put it down to old age.

"He had a routine check-up with a consultant, but when he couldn't remember what day it was, the consultant referred him and that's when he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. From then on, it was almost as if we were all watching him fade away. It was really sad and we felt helpless.

"I wish there was more I knew about the disease. For example, something as simple as shiny surfaces can really confuse someone with dementia because it affects their senses and they could interpret this as a wet surface or glare from a light. People with dementia could also experience changes to touch, taste, smell and hearing. It's a cruel disease and I feel I owe it to my dad to share the signs and experiences with others."

Photo credit: GTR