



JF&CS Releases Memory Café Toolkit Through Generous Funding by MCOA

WALTHAM, MA (August 5, 2016) – Jewish Family & Children’s Service (JF&CS) is pleased to announce the release of the **Massachusetts Memory Café Toolkit** as a public service. This Toolkit was developed through generous support from the Massachusetts Association of Councils on Aging (MCOA) and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA). Its purpose is to support the member communities of the MCOA as well as many other entities that are committed to improving the well-being of people living with dementia and their care partners. This is the only memory café toolkit to include downloadable templates that can be edited and adapted for use by a new memory café.

A memory café, sometimes called an Alzheimer’s café, is a social gathering for individuals living with dementia and their care partners. Individuals are welcome whose dementia is due to any underlying condition and at any stage of disease progression, including those with younger onset conditions. Care partners can include spouses, children, friends, and professional caregivers. Cafés meet in accessible community locations. They strive for an atmosphere that’s more like a coffee house or a neighborhood party than a clinical program. Typically, guests are not asked their diagnosis. This way, individuals who have not been diagnosed or are not comfortable with their diagnosis, feel welcome.

David Stevens, MCOA’s executive director, praises the partnership with JF&CS, and emphasizes the value of memory cafés to care partners. Stevens states, “In addition to being available to other organizations, the Memory Café Toolkit will be implemented at municipal senior centers that are great places for caregivers to find fellowship within the community and to be surrounded by other older adults who understand what caregivers experience. Councils on Aging are ideal organizations for hosting memory cafés because they have compassionate, well-trained staff and friendly, welcoming atmospheres. Caregivers need help to break out of the social isolation that all too often accompanies caring for someone with dementia.” Stevens added, “MCOA is thrilled to be a partner with the Executive Office of Elder Affairs in developing more memory cafés across Massachusetts! We must all strive to make our communities dementia friendly – caring for the caregiver and the adult with dementia, together.”

The number of people affected by Alzheimer’s and related disorders is staggering. An estimated one in eight individuals age 65 or older has a diagnosable condition causing the symptoms of dementia. Thousands of Massachusetts residents under age 65 also live with dementia. Around each of these individuals is a circle of people – family members, friends, coworkers, neighbors – who are also affected. The cost of care due to dementia outstrips that of cancer and heart disease. As our society ages, these numbers will all continue to grow.

Memory cafés are a cost-effective way to offer social connection, enlivening activities, and information to individuals living with dementia, along with their family members, friends, and professional caregivers. They are also a great way to engage the broader community, through volunteer opportunities and business sponsorships. In addition to senior centers, memory cafés have been held in museums, restaurants or coffee shops, historical societies, community centers, outdoor gardens, houses of worship, and many other locations.

Memory cafés are part of the movement to make our communities more “dementia friendly.” A dementia friendly community is informed, safe, and respectful. Municipal governments, businesses, faith communities, first

responders, and other community entities and members all have a role to play, working together to better include and support those affected by dementia. JF&CS is also a leader in this movement, serving with the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs to convene the Dementia Friendly Massachusetts Initiative.

JF&CS started the second memory café in Massachusetts in March, 2014, and coordinates the Memory Café Percolator network. The Percolator meets quarterly to give those starting and sustaining memory cafés a forum to share questions, best practices, and resources. More than 30 new cafés have started with support from the Percolator, making Massachusetts home to the largest concentration of memory cafés in the nation.

The Memory Café Toolkit can be downloaded at www.jfcsboston.org/MemoryCafeToolkit. A list of cafés in Massachusetts can be found at the Percolator online directory, at www.jfcsboston.org/MemoryCafeDirectory.

About Jewish Family & Children's Service

For 150 years, Jewish Family & Children's Service has provided exceptional human service and health care programs, guided by Jewish traditions of social responsibility, compassion, and respect for all members of the community. With an integrated network of more than 40 programs serving communities throughout Eastern and Central Massachusetts, JF&CS helps people of all faiths and backgrounds meet life's challenges. JF&CS programs focus on serving particularly vulnerable populations including children and adults with disabilities or mental illness, new mothers and their infants, seniors living with chronic conditions, and people experiencing financial crisis, hunger, or domestic abuse. Visit www.jfcsboston.org for more information.

About Massachusetts Association of Councils on Aging

Incorporated in 1979, MCOA's mission is to support the independence of adults 60 and older by advocating for programs and services to meet their needs, promote the growth and quality of Councils on Aging and senior centers and strengthen the professional skills of Council on Aging staff. MCOA is a 501c3 trade association representing 349 Massachusetts cities and towns that have established a municipally based Council on Aging Department. For more information, go to www.mcoaonline.com.

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