JF&CS

Memory Café launched

It’s hard to keep relationships strong when you or your spouse has dementia. Friends and family may stay away because they don’t know how to interact with someone who has a progressive neurological disease. For many people with dementia due to Alzheimer’s, vascular disease, Parkinson’s, frontotemporal degeneration or another related condition, loneliness becomes the second affliction they must confront.

To help families living with dementia stay connected, Jewish Family & Children’s Service (JF&CS) of Waltham has joined nearly 100 other pioneering organizations around the country to launch its Memory Café, which opened on Friday, March 7.

The Café does not focus on the disease. No one will be asked his or her diagnosis. Guests are welcome to talk about it or not. Rather, the Café is carefully structured to promote the comfort and involvement of guests at all levels of disease progression – and then the focus is on having fun and being together.

The JF&CS Café also helps people connect across generations. The Waltham Student Group of Brandeis University collaborated in the JF&CS Café’s development, and students will co-host the Café each month. At the March 7 JF&CS Café, a continuous flow of conversation eclipsed the swing jazz playing in the background as guests shared their stories and life experiences with students. One of the guests remarked that it’s so refreshing to interact with young people. And the students? They emailed Café organizers that, “It was magical. Our volunteers left with the BIGGEST smiles on their faces.”

One guest, who attended with her husband who has Alzheimer’s, put words to the feeling of joy in the room. She said, “There is definitely a role for adult day health and other more formal programs. But my husband has so much life in him and those programs can be very passive. This, for us, is so much more invigorating and hopeful. This Café is really the best news I’ve had since he was diagnosed.”

The JF&CS Memory Café meets on the first Friday of the month from 10 a.m. to noon, except on major holidays. It is held at JF&CS Headquarters, 1430 Main St. in Waltham. It is free of charge; donations are welcome. The next Café will be held on April 4. For more information, contact Beth Soltzberg at bsoltzberg@jfcswaltham.org or 781-693-5628. –Beth Soltzberg