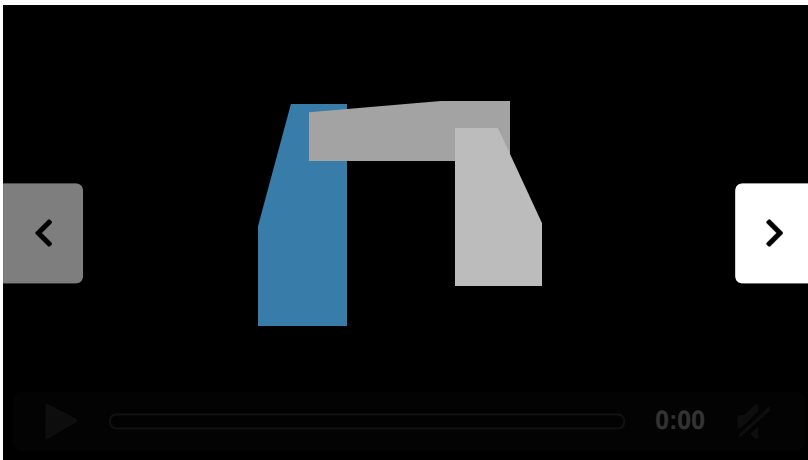




# Lakeland Memory Cafe supports people with dementia and their families



Memory Cafe helps people battling memory loss



By: [Rebecca Petit](#)

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LAKELAND, Fla. — Every Monday morning, a group meets at the Memory Café at First United Methodist Church of Lakeland. Although coffee and refreshments are served, it's not a typical



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cafe.

“We work on the social, spiritual, physical, cognitive and expressive needs,” said certified dementia practitioner Vicky Pitner.

It’s a safe space where people living with memory challenges can socialize and participate in activities that provide cognitive stimulation. Dave Leahy, who is living with dementia, comes without fear of being judged.

“You get to know people. No pressure on you or anything else and you just continue from there,” said David.

At the same time, the Memory Café offers hands-on training for families to learn how to get more out of a person who is suffering from dementia. For Kathy Leahy, it’s been a tremendous help in navigating her husband's memory challenges.

“I’ve done a lot of research, but as far as different activities to do like the games we play, the drawing, having him read more out loud is a big help,” said Kathy.

The free program includes reading, conversation, music, art and exercise.

An estimated 6.7 million Americans age 65 and older are living with Alzheimer’s dementia. Pitner teaches families how to provide appropriate cognitive stimulation without adding unnecessary stress.

“We work on communication; how do you communicate with someone? The word ‘remember’ we want to take remember out of the vocabulary because when you ask a person who cannot remember, ‘Do you remember?’ You’ll see the shame and embarrassment come on their face,” Pitner said.

The Memory Café coordinator emphasizes that early intervention is critical.

“What’s key is engaging. What’s key is meaningful activities. What’s key is keeping social needs met, keeping active, staying out in the community. So often families just stay at home and isolate, and cognition will decline so much faster,” said Pitner.

The Memory Café is open to the public. Contact Pitner by emailing [vpitner@firstumc.org](mailto:vpitner@firstumc.org).

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