

Social prescribing for people affected by dementia

Connecting families to the Alzheimer Society of B.C.'s First Link® dementia support

Background

Dementia in British Columbia

- In 2020, 85,800 people were living with dementia across the province, with approximately 250,000 projected to live with dementia in B.C. by 2050.
- There were approximately 50,400 family, friends and neighbours supporting a person living with dementia in 2020. That figure is expected to almost triple to 144,900 care partners by 2050.

The practice of social prescribing

Social prescribing is the practice of linking individuals with non-medical community supports that address their social, emotional and practical needs. This strengths-based approach positions individuals as active participants in their health by embedding social prescribing within health check-ups, annual care plans or support planning, and implementing follow up. Benefits of social prescribing include:

- **More holistic and person-centred approach to care.**
- For the individuals: **Increased self-efficacy, sense of belonging, improvements to overall quality of life** and a decrease in social isolation.
- For health-care providers: **Greater health and social outcomes** for their patients, **increased capacity to deliver more clinical care** and assurance that information and support doesn't stop once patients leave the office.

First Link® dementia support

- First Link® dementia support is a referral system embedded into health and community-care networks to link individuals and their families to a suite of dementia-related information, resources, programs and services.
- A partnership between the Alzheimer Society of B.C. and the B.C. Ministry of Health, First Link® is the social prescribing pathway to ongoing, dementia-specific, community-based supports.
- Any health-care provider, community connector or someone in a social prescribing role can refer a person to First Link®.
- In 2021-22, 543 health-care providers in B.C. referred 2,627 people in 413 communities to First Link®.

Findings

As a result of accessing First Link®:

- **82%** of respondents report an **increase in their knowledge** of dementia.
- **84%** of respondents report an **increase in their ability to apply what they learned** to their daily lives.
- **74%** of respondents report an **increase in feelings of connection** to others in a similar situation or a decrease in feelings of loneliness.

Participant-reported strengths of First Link® include:

- Information about how to access health and community resources
- Practical information and strategies
- Empathetic listening and the support of others
- The encouragement to take action in their lives
- Knowing that they are not alone in their experience

For participants living with early symptoms of dementia, a key benefit of the program is the **opportunity to be in a social situation where they feel understood** and encouraged to participate.

Overall, 95% of participants reported that they have benefited from these programs and services and are likely to recommend them to others. Areas where some participants expressed dissatisfaction centred around the inability of First Link® to have a direct role in their provision of direct care hours or other community supports, such as adult day programs, which is outside of First Link's scope of practice.



Individual support: Ongoing support calls every three to six months to help identify changing needs and offer relevant information and resources specific to someone's situation.



Support groups: In-person and online groups for caregivers and people in the early stages of dementia.



Dementia education: In-person and online workshops on a variety of topics from diagnosis to end of life.



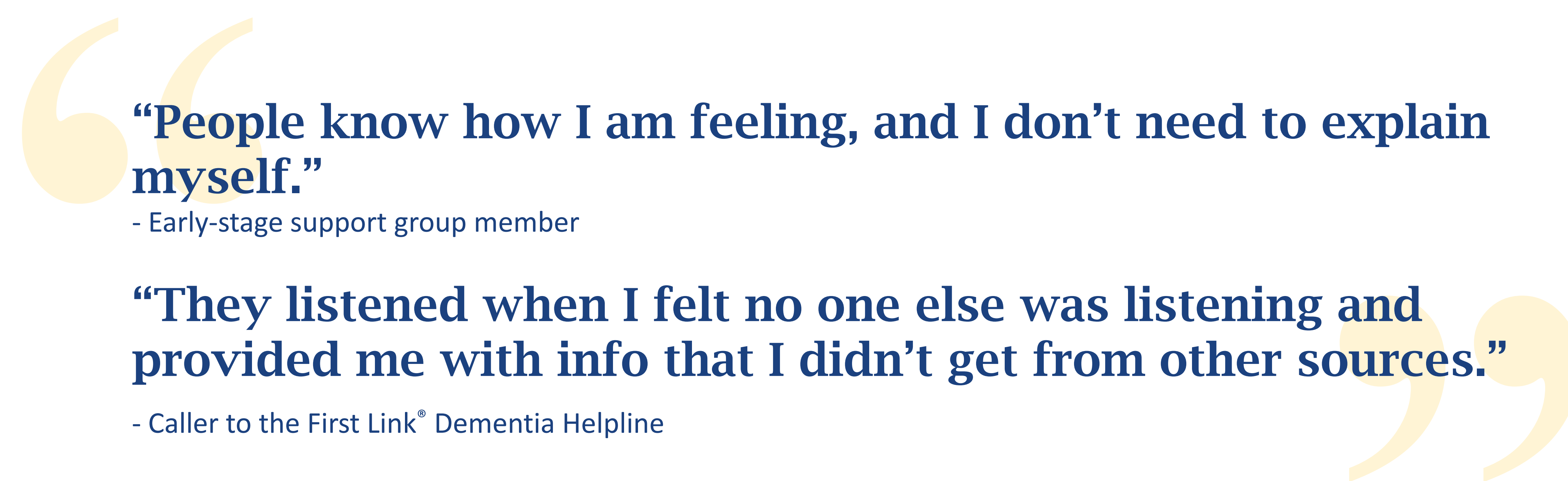
Coffee and Chat: A social program for individuals to have fun while connecting with others in a similar situation.



Information: Resource handouts, brochures, fact sheets and videos, as well as quarterly newsletters containing updates on events in a specific area.



Minds in Motion®: A social and fitness program for people in the early stages of dementia to attend with a care partner, based in community centres.



“People know how I am feeling, and I don't need to explain myself.”

- Early-stage support group member

“They listened when I felt no one else was listening and provided me with info that I didn't get from other sources.”

- Caller to the First Link® Dementia Helpline

Conclusion

First Link® feedback surveys consistently report **increased feelings of social connection, increased dementia-related knowledge and greater confidence** in applying newfound knowledge to daily life. These outcomes align with the key aims of social prescribing: increased self-efficacy, decreased isolation and improved well-being.

Growing community-based supports and programming, such as First Link® dementia support, alongside practical tools such as social prescribing to connect families to those supports, helps to alleviate the personal and social consequences of dementia while filling the current gaps in health care. These resources also empower health-care providers by addressing the education, information and support needs of people affected by dementia beyond what can be provided during medical visits.

By referring an individual and their family to First Link®, social prescribers in B.C. can play an important role in mobilizing a broad community of care around people affected by dementia to ensure they have the information, skills and support they need to live well with dementia.

Any health-care provider, community connector or others in a social prescribing role can refer someone to First Link® by completing a simple referral form at any point along the disease progression.

Download a referral form and learn more about the benefits of a referral to First Link® at alzbc.org/refer.

Methods

Online feedback surveys continuously measure clients' perceived increase in knowledge of dementia and increased confidence to apply what they learned from the programs and services to their daily lives. Surveys also measured the impact of these programs and services on clients' feelings of connection to others in a similar situation or a decrease in feelings of loneliness.

From June to December 2022, 1,168 clients who participated in First Link® programs and services completed the online survey to provide feedback on their experiences.

Acknowledgements

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If you have questions about Alzheimer's disease or other dementias, call our **First Link® Dementia Helpline** for information and support:



English: 1-800-936-6033

Cantonese and Mandarin: 1-833-674-5007

Punjabi: 1-833-674-5003

Alzheimer Society
BRITISH COLUMBIA