



Bridging the Gap: Understanding and Supporting Residents with Cognitive Changes

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Opening Karakia

Kia hora te marino

Kia whakapapa pounamu te moana

Hei huarahi mā tatou I te rangi nei

Aroha atu, aroha mai

Tātou i a tātou katoa

May peace be widespread.

May the sea be like greenstone; a pathway for all of us this day

Let us show respect for each other, for one another

Bind us all together



[Michael Melford Photography](#)



Tamayo, 2022

- ∞ Ko Ingarangi Olmecas/Zapotecas te whakapaparanga mai
- ∞ Engari Ko Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz the whenua tupu
- ∞ Ko San Martin te maunga
- ∞ Ko Coatzacoalcos te awa
- ∞ Ko **Gulf of México** (Atlantic) te moana
- ∞ Nō México ahau
- ∞ Ko Aotearoa te México te kāinga
- ∞ Kei Tāmaki Makaurau au e noho ana
- ∞ Ko Amado tōku papa
- ∞ Ko Esther tōku mama
- ∞ Ko Luis tōku tane
- ∞ Ko Orquidea tōku ingoa

**Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa
Xtyozēn yuad**

Content

1. Understanding the **psychological and emotional** impact of cognitive changes on residents and their immediate and extended family/whānau, friends, significant others
2. Focusing on Wellbeing to uphold residents Mana, and exploring best practices for supporting residents with dignity and care
3. Communication strategies and creating a supportive, **dementia-inclusive and enabling** environments

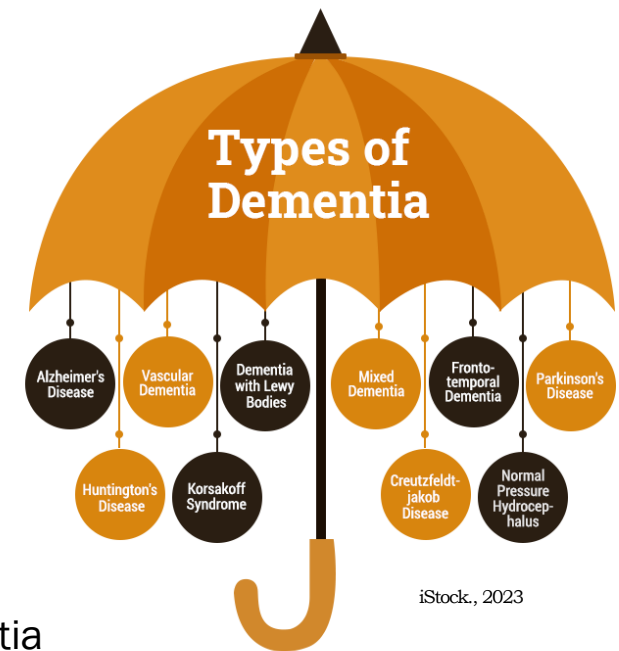
Cognitive Changes

Cognitive changes are changes in the knowledge of participants and relate to how people observe, think, problem solve, and remember (Grassian and Kaplowitz, 2009).

Language is powerful, especially when talking about the D Word:

Dementia

- Memory Problems
- Cognitive Issues
- Cognitive Impairment
- Cognitive Decline
- Alzheimer's Disease
- Vascular Dementia
- Lewy Body Dementia
- Younger Onset Dementia
- Frontotemporal Dementia



Psychological and emotional impact of cognitive changes on the resident

Residents will experience a range of emotions, not limited to:

- Afraid
- Anger
- Anxious
- Appear distant
- Confuse
- Disbelief
- Fear
- Frustration
- Grief
- Insecure
- Lonely
- Lose confidence in themselves and their abilities
- Mood changes
- Relief
- Shock
- Social Isolation
- Uninterested in things



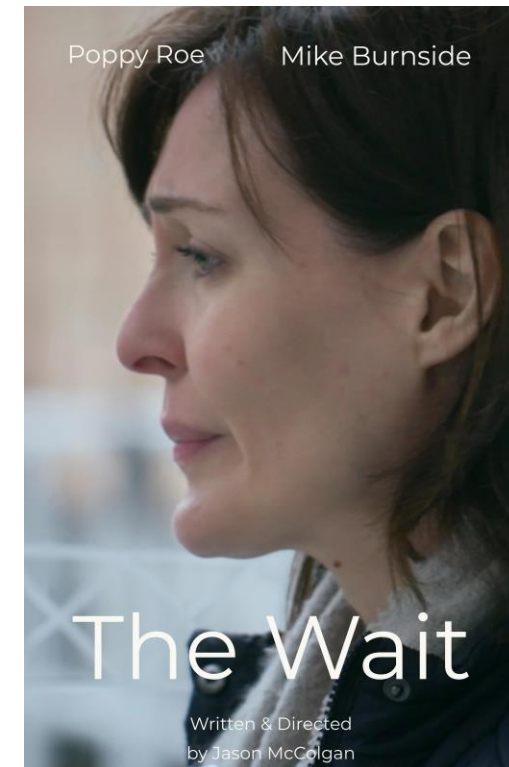
The Harvard Gazette, 2025

What other impacts have you noticed?

Psychological and emotional impact of the resident cognitive changes on immediate and/or extended family/whānau, friends, significant others

People close to the resident will experience a range of emotions, not limited to:

- Anger
- Anticipatory Grief
- Anxiety
- Burnout
- Confusion
- Fear
- Financial and Relational Strain
- Frustration
- Guilt and Regret
- Helplessness and Distance
- Loneliness and Social Isolation
- Misunderstandings
- Overwhelm
- Relief
- Role reversal (emotional conflict)
- Shock and Scare
- Stress



The Wait (Short 2018) - IMDb

What other impacts have you noticed?

*Mā te whakarongo, ka mōhio
Mā te mōhio, ka mārama
Mā te mārama, ka matau
Mā te matau, ka ora*

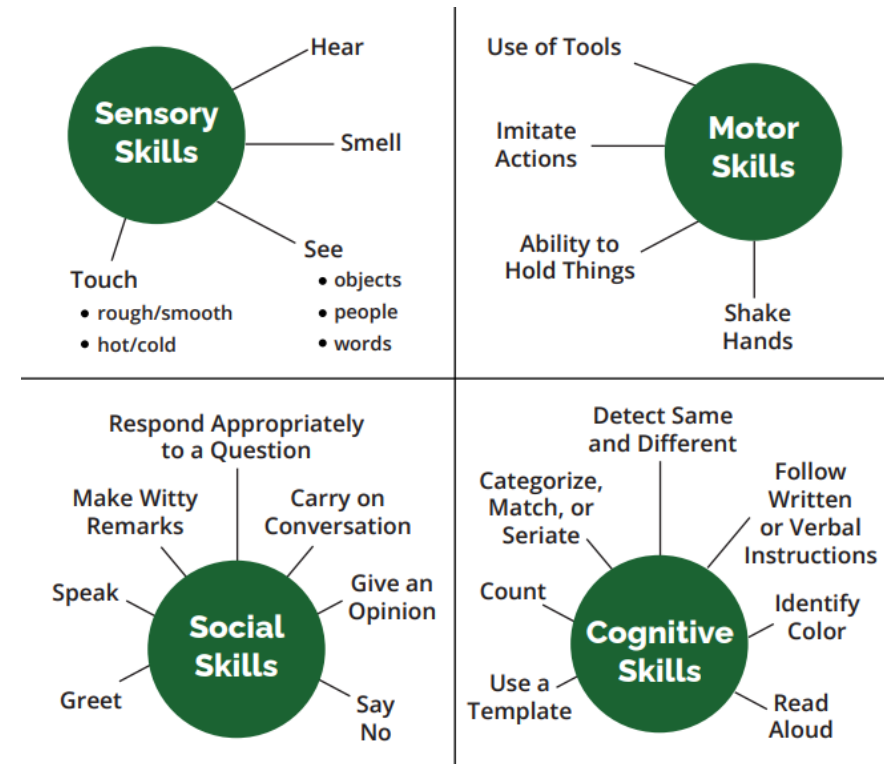
*Through listening, comes knowledge
Through knowledge, comes understanding
Through understanding, comes wisdom
Through wisdom, comes wellbeing*

Whakataukī (Māori proverb)



Focusing on Wellbeing to uphold residents Mana: Exploring best practices for supporting residents with dignity and care

- ✓ Reactions to diagnosis, the process of moving into care, and staff supporting the resident and their loved ones throughout the roller-coaster of emotions and feelings during the journey
- ✓ Supporting the resident to maintain confidence and self-esteem
- ✓ Being truly aware of **all** the unique needs of the resident with cognitive changes and Not only Medical and Clinical needs (e.g. ADLs, Mobility, Restraint, Pain Management, Communication) focus on other important needs not limited to, Diversity, Intimacy, Sexuality, Spirituality, **Culture**, Emotional, Social, Psychosocial, Intellectual, Leisure and Recreation, Occupational, Environmental
- ✓ Upholding Mana for Overall Wellbeing & Quality of Life = Life of Enjoyment, Life of Engagement, Life of Meaning



Focusing on Wellbeing to support immediate and / or extended family / whānau, friends, significant others

- ✓ Acknowledge their reaction to the diagnosis with empathy and compassion
- ✓ Validate their feelings and emotions
- ✓ Support them with education (e.g. **use of technology**, dignity of risk, **meaningful activities when visiting**)
- ✓ Remind them to look after themselves
- ✓ Built a good caring and support relationship with them
- ✓ Get to know the role the person plays in the life of the resident (e.g. childhood friend)
- ✓ Understand their needs when visiting (e.g. privacy)
- ✓ Keep them informed and involved
- ✓ Uphold their Mana as well

Uninvited Guest by a Daughter ☺

<https://vimeo.com/128873380>



Having a parent with Dementia

Case Scenario

John, an 86-year-old resident living cognitive changes in a Memory Care Centre, has been frequently entering other residents' rooms without invitation. John appears calm but curious when entering these spaces, often rearranging items or sitting quietly for a short period before leaving. Despite the benign nature of her actions, this has created significant challenges for other residents.

What are the impacts on other residents?

- Anxiety and Frustration
- Loss of Privacy
- Escalated Conflict

What approaches have been taken by the team?

- Environmental Modifications
- Redirecting and Engaging
- Structured Routine
- Collaboration with Families
- Resident Mediation



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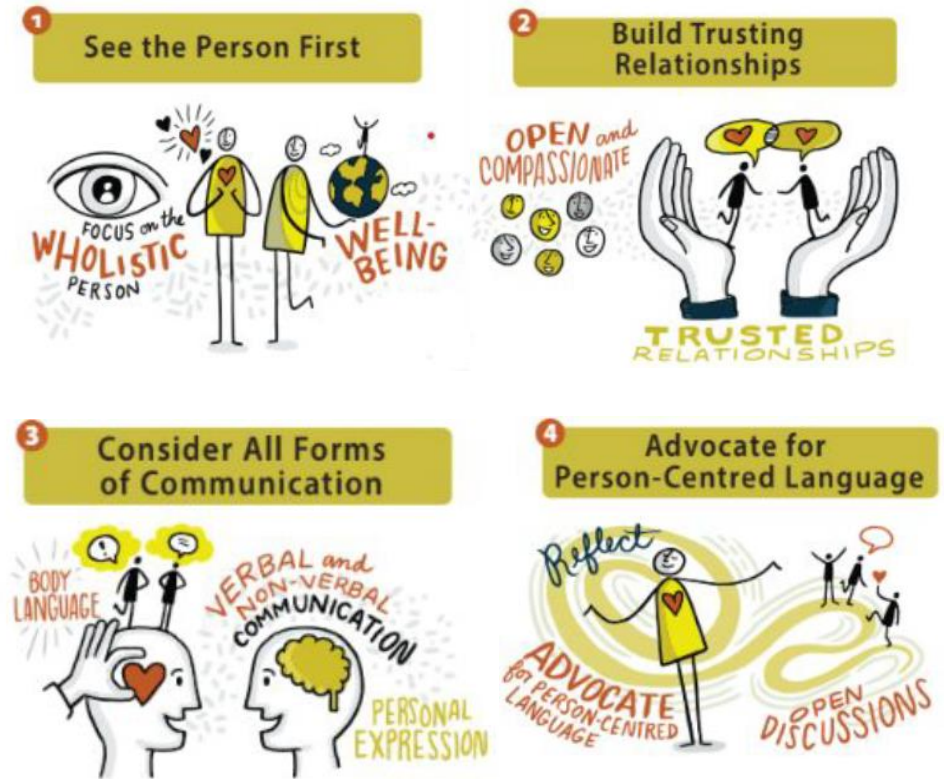
Communication strategies

The three factors that make up the messages we communicate – pay attention on how you present yourself when communicating with a person with cognitive changes (Lanzi, A., Burshnic, V., & Bourgeois, M. S., 2017):

1. Body language (the message we give out with our facial expressions, posture and gestures), which accounts for 55 per cent of communication
2. The tone and pitch of our voice, which accounts for 38 per cent of communication
3. The words we use, which account for seven per cent of communication.

Environments for good communication:

- ✓ Avoid competing noises, such as TV or radio
- ✓ Stay still while you are talking
- ✓ Maintain regular routines
- ✓ Keep a consistent approach – it is less confusing for the resident if everyone uses the same style of communication. Repeating the message in exactly the same way is important for all supporting the person



Case Scenario: Other Strategies & Innovation

Other Solutions

- Eliminates disruptive noises (e.g., bed alarms, call bells).
- Alerts staff discreetly when assistance is needed.

Strategies for Inclusion & Privacy

- Encourage residents who desire more privacy to close their doors and use a “Private Room” sign
- Identify why the resident is entering other rooms—understand their needs and motivations
- Foster a culture of warmth and kindness among residents to build mutual comfort and understanding
- Educate families early on about the community’s inclusive philosophy, setting realistic expectations that things may occur

Activity & Environment Considerations

- Ensure open spaces where residents can move freely and engage in meaningful activities
- Shift perspectives from seeing this scenario as a problem to viewing it as part of a communal living experience
- Engage residents in discussions to find solutions collaboratively
- Provide the option for residents to lock their doors if desired
- Use programs like Music Club to foster engagement and socialization

Identifying Patterns & Unmet Needs

- Observe if a resident is drawn to specific rooms—could these spaces feel more comfortable or familiar?
- Maintain open dialogue about cognitive changes through newsletters and meetings to reduce stigma and fear
- Equip residents with strategies to manage unexpected visitors
- Leverage others in the community to help build relationships, fostering empathy and inclusivity



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Danielle Braun, 2024



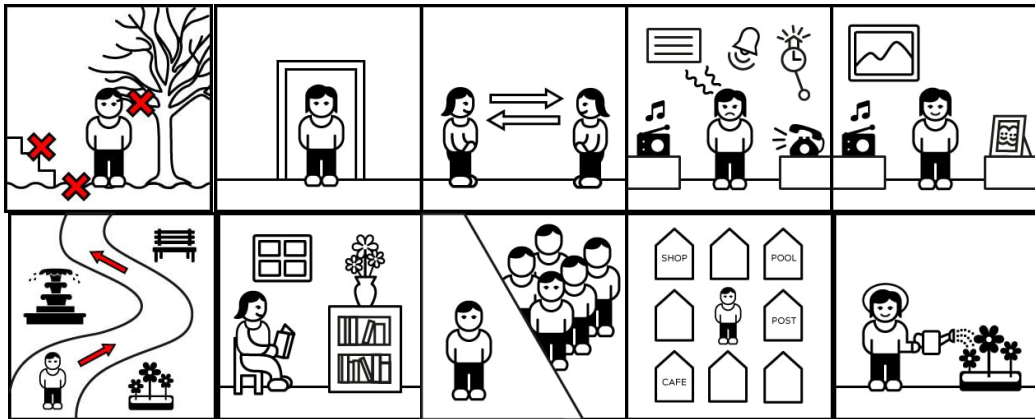
Marta Cinta González Saldaña recreates moves from Swan Lake. Photograph: Música Para Despertar, 2020

Focus on Calling In Environment

Example of Calling Out
'You shouldn't label residents like that. It's disrespectful'

Example of Calling In
I noticed you referred to Mr. Smith as 'aggressive'. Could we consider focusing on why he might act this way, rather than labelling him?

Creating a supportive, dementia-inclusive and enabling environments



AWA Dementia Enabling Environments, 2025

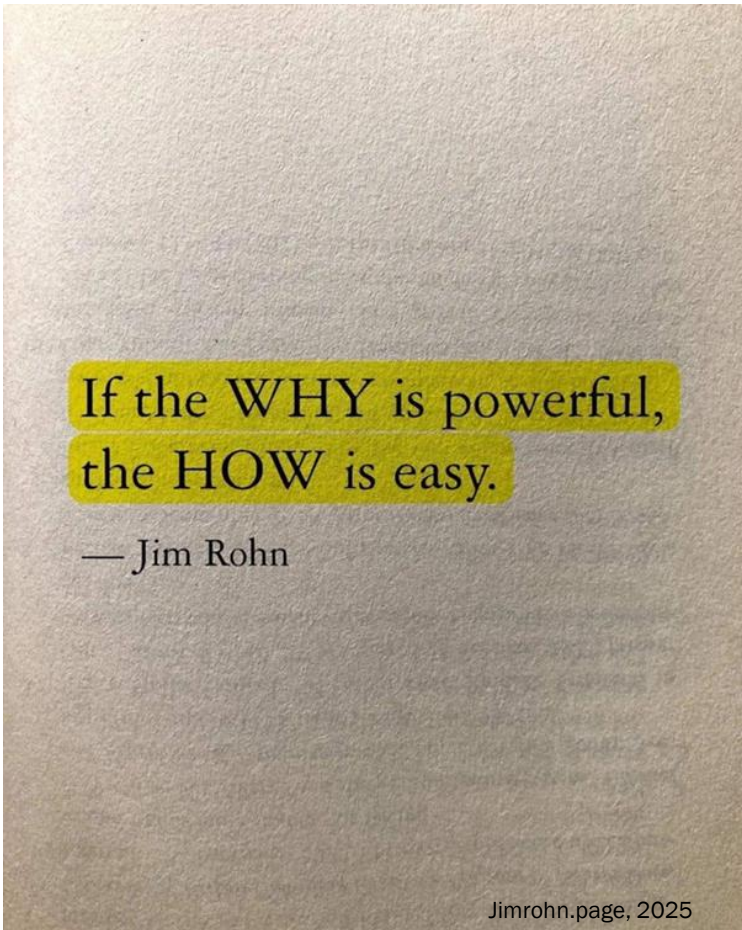
Inclusion is not simply about the support we provide, about how friendly we can become with someone living with cognitive changes, is not only about the environments we built...Inclusion is a choice we make every day, and intentionally planning for the success of all!

Conclusion

There will always be challenges when understanding and supporting residents with cognitive changes, however solutions also exist. We must acknowledge and understand the psychological and emotional impact these changes have on residents and their loved ones.

Embedding good practices when providing care and support enable us to uphold the person's mana in a meaningful way, it makes life living with cognitive changes worth living.

Focus on the person and not the diagnosis, details matter, validate needs, assess for skills, abilities, interests, routines, preferences. Effective communication matters - *Be a true voice for the person, not just an echo*, adapt the environment, optimise opportunity for success based on what is meaningful and purposeful for the person, and nurtures belonging.



If the WHY is powerful,
the HOW is easy.

— Jim Rohn





Tamayo Mortera, 2023

nāga mihi nua

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Closing Karakia

Kia whakairia te tapu
Kia wātea ai te ara
Kia turuki whakataha ai
Kia turuki whakataha ai
Haumi e. Hui e. Tāiki e!

Restrictions are moved aside
So the pathways is clear
To return to everyday activities



Vecteezy, 2024