



PULLING TOGETHER: Alzheimers and dementia consumers and their carers have the support of the Alzheimers Society to help them deal with the degenerative disease.

Photo: Kate Bleasdale / CCN210910KBalzheimer

Helping manage Alzheimers

■ Kate Bleasdale

John Baber has to rely on his wife Joan for many things.

Mr Baber, Karori, is suffering from a degenerative form of dementia and is slowly losing the ability to complete many everyday tasks.

"I used to be hi-ho on the computer and now I barely know how to turn it on," he says.

"I can't handle money or drive a car. Brick walls come up all around the place."

The Babers joined the Alzheimers Society Wellington soon after Mr Baber was diagnosed.

"We're both very glad to have the Society," Ms Baber says.

Dementia consumers meet regularly through the Society for social outings, lunches, or to just speak with each other about what they're going through.

Meetings are also organised for carers, who are often spouses or family members.

When Kathy van Duyn, Waiwhetu, was diagnosed, she says she felt "ashamed".

"I swore my family to secrecy and I didn't want anybody to know. I felt if people knew I had it they'd be looking for signs of it."

"It's taken me a long, long time to accept it and be comfortable with it."

"Coming here to the meetings is the best thing that's ever happened to me."

Ms van Duyn says she decided to visit her doctor after noticing problems with her memory.

"The family said I'd started repeating myself. One day I was going out and I thought 'I don't know where that street is'."

Robin Fenwick, Stokes Valley, has experienced his wife Carolyn coming under the effects of Frontotemporal dementia over the last three years.

"The personality goes first, and logic," he says.

"When those two go it's sort of hard to manage from there on."

Mr Fenwick says he picked up

on changes in his wife's personality, for example, she developed a fear of dogs, and forgot how to turn the computer on.

"At the end it was very distressing for us and the family, until the day came that I couldn't manage around the house."

Ms Fenwick now resides at Manor Park Private Hospital in Lower Hutt, which Mr Fenwick says has made some things easier.

"It has helped in the sense that she's much less anxious now, and that's a tribute to amazing staff."

As well as receiving help from the Alzheimers Society, there are facilities set up in Karori, Island Bay, Redwood and Kapiti for people to go and spend the day.

Mr Baber spends two days a week at The Marsden Club in Karori.

"They take them out around the place, so they get company and volunteers come in to assist," says Ms Baber.

Alzheimers Society Welling-

ton manager Clare Denny says carers take on a huge workload in looking after someone with dementia.

"The frustration with a lot of carers is sometimes they don't understand why someone is doing something, but it's not just them, it's the disease, and it's not something that they can change."

Mr Fenwick says as the country's population is ageing, more people are becoming aware of dementia, and usually know someone who is affected by it.

"When we do collection, it's a very widely known name. I think over a third of people will recognise what we're on about."

The Wellington office of the Alzheimers Society is based in Petone.

There is also a satellite office in Kapiti, and four mobile community workers who cover the Wellington region.

More info:

■ 939 0133 or alzheimers.org.nz.