

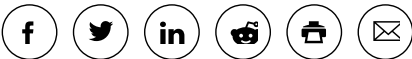
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July 7, 2021

Senior living community trains first responders to 'take it down a notch' through dementia education



[Kimberly Bonvissuto](#)



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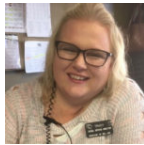
ing difficulty communicating with a man with dementia.

"This young gentleman had no idea what to do with this old man," Cote, a certified dementia practitioner, told *McKnight's Senior Living*. "I thought, 'Wow, they really don't get it.' "

After helping the officer coax the man into the back of a police cruiser to help him find his way home, Cote thought other first responders could benefit from learning techniques to communicate with people who have Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia.

As life enrichment director for Edgewood Retirement Community in North Andover, MA, Cote regularly provides dementia training for staff and family members. Edgewood was the first continuing care retirement community in the country to receive the Hearthstone Institute's I'm Still Here Center of Excellence certification. Every staff member at the community receives Hearthstone training to learn the latest techniques for communicating with and caring for residents living with dementia or memory impairment.

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After her experience with the police officer, Cote decided to put her training to use by creating free training sessions for first responders to try to increase successful interactions with individuals living with dementia.

Edgewood hosted four training sessions for North Andover firefighters before the pandemic. Cote said the senior living provider was able to align the training with recertification requirements for the firefighters. And providing a big lunch didn't hurt either.

Cote said the secret is to be a friend first, then be a provider. She taught first responders to get on the person's level, look him or her in the eyes and, most importantly, slow down and "take it down a notch."

"It's the little things that help that you don't even know," Cote said, adding that first responders are trained to rush into a situation and work quickly. "It's so much about the approach, eye contact, being a little gentle and talking them through it instead of just rush, rush, rush. They [people living with dementia] don't do well with rushing."

Ambulance drivers, physicians and even emergency department nurses aren't educated on how to handle people with dementia unless they work on a special unit, Cote said. People living with dementia are scared when they see "big guys in front of them with a stretcher and machines," she added.

"It's scary," Cote said. "People with dementia can't express that. They're scared."

"You need to treat them with kindness, compassion and not craziness."

Now that pandemic restrictions have relaxed, Cote said she intends to relaunch the training sessions — both in-person and online — for first responders and family members.

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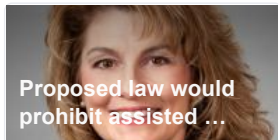
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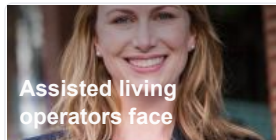
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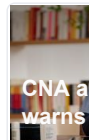
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