

The Alzheimer's Care & Enrichment Program (ACE) is a three-day-a-week respite program that uses live music, dance, visual art and intergenerational programming to create a stimulating, joyful environment for participants with dementia. Based in New Orleans, ACE works hard to create an atmosphere where every participant feels seen, heard and appreciated, and their unique contributions to the group are welcomed and celebrated.

For caregivers, ACE provides much needed free time, as well as opportunities to meet each other and share stories, struggles and discoveries through our regular support group.

For participants, art is at the center of our respite care programming because—based on our thirty-three years of experience—we see first-hand all the ways that art enriches their lives.

We see the ways that music can bring joy and revival to our members, some of whom may be withdrawn or have difficulty speaking. And so we hire local musicians to come and perform for our group on most program days, and have an ongoing partnership with the Loyola Music Therapy program where they send students to lead weekly music therapy sessions with us.

We see the ways that art can bridge a divide between caregivers and their loved ones with dementia. And so we host events—like our recent visual art show—that celebrate the creativity of our participants, and offer opportunities for our participants and their caregivers to bond over the creative arts and socialize with other families in similar circumstances.

We see different individuals in the program responding to different artistic disciplines. And so we've created a rotating artist-in-residence position where we hire a poet or a choreographer or a painter etc. to come in once a week for eight consecutive weeks and lead a creative project with our participants. The residency often results in a concert or art show or collected edition of the group's poetry that serves as a meaningful opportunity to gather as a community.

We see how intergenerational space is life-affirming for everyone involved. And so every Monday at 10:45, we bring together our elders with JCC nursery school children to swap songs and visit with each other. Our cadre of 14 volunteers (most of whom are recently retired, and many of whom have been supporting ACE bi-weekly for more than five years) also cherish the children's visits.

We see the need for caregivers to find social connection and support in addition to reprieve. And so in our support groups, we offer referrals to services and opportunities for therapeutic engagement with others on a similar caregiving journey, and regularly invite caregivers to come together in celebratory, arts-based gatherings.

We know that representation matters around dementia. And so ACE has cooked for community-wide holiday parties, and brought participants onto the radio to read their original poetry, helping change public perception of people with Alzheimer's Disease.

For our participants with dementia, ACE is the place where they feel valued, have friends and engage in meaningful work. Even though many do not remember the names of fellow participants, staff members or volunteers, they still come in beaming because they recognize our close-knit group and know that they belong.