

Celebrating Community Partners

"I wanted to make sure people didn't fall between the cracks."

Stephanie Houston, Senior Outreach Specialist, Wisconsin Alzheimer's Institute Regional Milwaukee Office

The Alzheimer's Association celebrates community partners who support those impacted by Alzheimer's and dementia. We salute leader Stephanie Houston for her support to the cognitively impaired, medically underserved African American older adults and families in Milwaukee. "African Americans are 2x more likely to be impacted by Alzheimer's disease," says Stephanie. "We know how important early detection can be and my role is to make sure people are evaluated earlier and, if needed, have support services put in place to help them on their journey."



Connecting Families to Resources

Stephanie is a resource and a service link for older adults and their families who are seeking a proper assessment and diagnosis for Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. She manages a case load and provides social work interventions to assure client's health, psychosocial and socioeconomic needs are addressed by referring individuals to diagnostic clinics, social service Aging providers and other community agencies for resources and support. She provides clients and families with dementia-related educational materials and resources for support groups. Stephanie is a member of the healthcare team at Milwaukee Health Services Inc. an affiliate WAI dementia diagnostic clinic in Milwaukee County. She meets with patients, families and informal caregivers within the clinic, conducting interviews and sharing resources and information available in the area community.

The Wisconsin Alzheimer's Institute Milwaukee Regional office has been partnering with the Alzheimer's Association for many years. "We could not perform the meaningful work that we do without the strong partnership and support of the Alzheimer's Association," says Stephanie. "We are able to connect families to services such as respite, support groups, education and training opportunities." Annually, the Alzheimer's Association and the WAI Regional Milwaukee office partner together in outreach to host community forums.

Healing through Song

One of the signature programs Stephanie manages is the Amazing Grace Chorus®. It is a Milwaukee-based, diverse chorus made up of people living with dementia and their caregivers. The goal of the chorus is to increase social engagement for those living with dementia with the goal of improving quality of life. The engagement is also an opportunity Stephanie uses to share resources with families.



With COVID-19, the chorus transitioned to virtual delivery to stay connected with their members. Stephanie wanted to ensure the chorus community felt connected so she went to great lengths to keep the program going virtually. In addition to finding a platform to reach the group, she also sends participants a PowerPoint for the sessions to ensure everyone can follow along. “We have phenomenal conductors who lead the chorus virtually,” say Stephanie. “I’m pleased to report we have a regular rehearsal – warm up, singing, break, chat time and more singing!” The group will continue to meet monthly.

Challenges from COVID-19

“When COVID-19 hit, we learned a lot of lessons about accessing resources,” says Stephanie. “In Milwaukee County, African Americans account for 27% of the population, but they represented 70% of the people dying.” For families who are impacted by dementia, isolation became a huge problem with stay-at-home restrictions, and no access to day programs. “People needed us more than ever,” say Stephanie. “I wanted to make sure people didn’t fall between the cracks, and connect people who needed testing or may not have health care providers. Access to resources was a barrier we had to overcome in order to get people the support they needed.” Virtual resources, such as programs that the Alzheimer’s Association provides, was one of the ways that support could be accessed.

Another focus that surfaced with COVID-19 was making sure families are prepared if the person they are caring for falls ill. “I talk to caregivers about backup systems, how to prepare for the hospital, and even discussions about advanced directive for health care,” says Stephanie. “And for those with a loved one already in a facility, I help navigate techniques and advocacy efforts for their family member.”

Serving Milwaukee

The Wisconsin Alzheimer’s Institute (WAI) Regional Milwaukee office opened in 2008 and serves 30,000 individuals annually through outreach, research and services. The Milwaukee office focuses on providing support, advocacy and resources specifically to communities of color who are impacted by Alzheimer’s and dementia.



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Thank you to community heroes like Stephanie, who help support this fragile community.