

## **Frequently Asked Questions about the Connections Program**

Q1. What is the Connections program?

A1. The Connections program is a grant-funded, no-cost, 8-week, in-home program to assist caregivers who are caring for family members with Alzheimer's Disease or other forms of age-related dementia. It is designed to answer the caregiver's question, "What can we do at home all day?" Home visitors work with the caregiver and the family member to set up activity stations that will keep the family member active and engaged. The activities are based on the family member's prior interests, hobbies and activities and are tailored to the current competence and capabilities of the family member.

Q2. How can I sign up for the Connections program?

A2. Call (540) 825-3100, ext. 3476 or call (540) 825-3100 and ask for Connections, or e-mail [jdalton@rrcsb.org](mailto:jdalton@rrcsb.org).

Q3. Who is eligible to participate in the Connections program?

A3. Residents of 5 counties in Virginia are eligible to participate in the Connections program - the 5 counties are Culpeper, Fauquier, Orange, Madison and Rappahannock - all located in the central part of the state. The person with dementia must live at home and be cared for by a family member or long-term partner.



**Connections Team Members plan activities for the families they will be visiting.**

Q4. Does there have to be a doctor's diagnosis or referral for participation in the program?

A4. No, if your family member has age-related dementia or memory loss he/she may participate. No official diagnosis or referral is required.

Q5. My father lives in an assisted-living facility. May he be a part of the Connections program?

A5. Not at this time. A person with dementia must live at home to be eligible to participate in the 8 in-home visits during this grant-funded Connections program.

Q6. My spouse lives at home with me, but I have paid caregivers who stay with her during the day while I work. Can she participate in the Connections program?

A6. Yes, she can. If there are paid caregivers who stay with your family member, your family is still eligible to participate in the Connections program. Because we work with family members to develop the activities, we will schedule our visits at times that you are home so the Home Visitors can work with you to develop the activities for your spouse. The Home Visitors have flexible schedules so they are available during the evenings and on weekends to accommodate the schedules of family members that work or have other commitments during the day.

Q7. How much does the Connections program cost?

A7. The Connections program is free to all participating families.

Q8. Is there an age limit for participation in the Connections program?

A8. No. So long as your family member has Alzheimer's Disease or an age-related dementia or memory loss, he/she is eligible to participate in Connections. We have participants as old as 98 and as young as 59.



**A Connections participant enjoys building and painting model airplanes.**

Q9. My family member is in the very late stages (or very early stages) of Alzheimer's Disease. Will the Connections program work for him/her?

A9. We have found that persons in all stages of the disease respond favorably to our home visits. The activities for persons in the later stages will be simpler and the person may not be able to initiate the activities on his/her own, but even persons in very late stage dementia respond favorably to companionship and human interaction. Persons in the earlier stages may be less interested in activity visits if they remain fairly active and engaged on their own. We take each person on a case-by-case basis and work with the caregiver to develop activities appropriate to their interests and competencies. If the family member or caregiver desires to discontinue the visits they can do so at any time.

Q10. My spouse has Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) that occurred when he was deployed to Afghanistan with the Army. Is he eligible to participate in Connections?

A10. No. The program is designed for family members with age-related dementia or memory loss.

Q11. How many home visits are there and how long do they last?

A11. We begin the program with an initial assessment visit or two that last about an hour to an hour and a half each. Then we will visit once a week for eight weeks. Each visit lasts from 1 - 2 hours, depending on the interest and desires of the family member with dementia. There are also three follow-up visits after the 8 activity visits have occurred.

Q12. What if we have to miss a visit because of illness or a trip out of town?

A12. No problem. We will simply skip one week and then reschedule for the following week. We continue to reschedule missed visits until we have completed the 8 in-home visits.

Q13. Once the 8 visits have been completed, what then?

A13. We will visit three more times over the next 3 months to follow-up with the family and assess how things are going. In addition, during our initial assessment visits we will be able to refer the family to other resources available throughout the community - and any services that are initiated based on those referrals may continue after the end of the Connections program.

Q14. Once I sign up for the Connections program, how long before the home visits begin?

A14. The initial assessment visits will begin within a week or two after you are enrolled in the program. One aspect of the Connections grant involves a research study. You do not have to enroll in the research study to receive the 8 home visits, although we strongly encourage every family to participate in the research. If you agree to participate in the research, there may be a delay of a couple of months between the initial assessment visits and the activity visits. The Connections Project Manager can explain the details of the research study to you when you talk to her on the telephone or by e-mail.



**Painting pictures on velvet is a favorite pastime of many Connections participants.**

Q15. If my family is not eligible to participate in Connections, is there anything else you can offer to assist me in developing activities to keep my family member active and engaged?

A15. You may order a copy of the Connections Toolkit for \$34.95 plus \$5.00 shipping by sending a check, money order or credit card information to the Alzheimer's Association Central and Western Virginia Chapter at 1160 Pepsi Place, Suite 306, Charlottesville, VA 22901. The Toolkit provides a resource to help determine the effectiveness of current activities and develop new ones as needed.

Q16. Does the family caregiver receive any benefits from the Connections program and the home visits?

A16. We have found that many family members look forward to the home visits as much as the person with dementia. Ideally, the family member will be able to engage in the chosen activities on their own, without caregiver assistance or support. In those cases, the caregiver gets a much needed respite while the family member is engaged in the activity. Even in cases where it is necessary for the caregiver to assist the family member with the activity, the caregivers often feel more empowered and more competent in developing activities and in keeping their family member happy. Sometimes other family or friends re-engage with the person with dementia once there is something interesting to do while visiting. All these results help relieve caregiver stress and enhance satisfaction with their caregiving duties.

**Creating seasonal decorations keeps many Connections participants busy for hours – and the results are spectacular!**



Q17. My family member used to speak English fairly well, but has now reverted to his/her native language. Can we participate in the Connections program?

A17. As long as there is a family caregiver who speaks English and can assist the home visitor in communicating with the person with dementia he/she may participate in the Connections program.

Q18. What if I'm not ready to sign up for the Connections program now? Can I wait a few months to sign up?

A18. You can definitely sign up as late as April 2012. The program may be extended beyond that date, but at this time we're not sure when the program will end. The best advice is to contact the Connections Project Manager at (540) 825-3100, ext. 3476 or e-mail [jdalton@rrcsb.org](mailto:jdalton@rrcsb.org) and discuss the timing issue with her.

Q19. Where can I get more information about Alzheimer's Disease and other forms of dementia?

A19. The Alzheimer's Association has a web-site filled with helpful information about Alzheimer's Disease and other forms of dementia. The web-site is located at [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org). They also maintain a 24-hour help-line at 1-800-272-3900.



**One of the Connections Home Visitors  
Demonstrates pot-holder making techniques.**

Q20. As a caregiver, sometimes I feel like I'm at the end of my rope. Is there anyone I can talk to about what I'm going through?

A20. There are 5 caregiver support groups that meet throughout the 5-county area. We encourage you to attend the support group nearest you. In addition to learning from the experiences of other family caregivers, you can learn about additional resources and supports available in the 5-county area. The caregiver support groups are:

Culpeper: 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays, Powell Wellness Center, 6 – 7:30 PM  
Stephanie Vick, (704) 277-9053; [scvick@email.virginia.edu](mailto:scvick@email.virginia.edu)

Fauquier: 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesdays, Warrenton Senior Center, 10 AM  
Mollie Snurr, (540) 347-2797; [msnurr@rrcsb.org](mailto:msnurr@rrcsb.org)

Fauquier: 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesdays, The Villa at Suffield Meadows, Warrenton,  
4 – 5:30 PM  
Mary Kasky, (540) 428-3525

Locust Grove/Orange: 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesdays, Lake of the Woods Church,  
10 – 11:30 AM  
Norma Ervin, (540) 972-0652

Rappahannock: 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursdays, Reynolds Memorial Baptist Church,  
10 AM – Noon  
Larry Stillwell, (540) 827-8366; [lstillwell@rrcsb.org](mailto:lstillwell@rrcsb.org)