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## **First Link® program connecting families and their loved ones earlier with supports**

For patients and their families learning for the first time of a Dementia diagnosis, support with understanding the disease and how to cope with its effects is an important first step. Recognizing this need, LHINs across Ontario, in partnership with the Alzheimer Society, supported the development and funding of First Link® programs as part of the Aging at Home Strategy.

First Link® was launched at the Alzheimer Society of Windsor & Essex County in late October of 2010. The program aims to connect individuals and families affected by dementia to opportunities for learning, community services and support. To date, 131 First Link® clients have been registered, resulting in over 200 referrals to education, support, day away, and in-home respite programs offered by the Alzheimer Society of Windsor & Essex County and other community service providers.

For Kathy, a caregiver to a loved one with dementia, the First Link® Learning Series surpassed her expectations, providing information about diagnosis, day-to-day living, positive approaches to care, strategies for challenges and how to prepare for the end of life.

“The First Link® Series has been an excellent experience for me. I now have a better understanding of brain functions and changes in relation to the journey dementia takes. As a caregiver, my focus has shifted from myself to the feelings of frustration, anxiety, fear, dependency and isolation someone with dementia experiences. This course has made me feel more equipped to care for and enhance the life of my loved one. I am more able to make suggestions and decisions regarding daily routines involving medications, safety, hygiene, stimulation, and day-to-day living. I've gained knowledge in the legalities of planning for the future. It gives me great comfort in knowing that the Alzheimer Society provides a wealth of services to clients and caregivers as they travel this difficult journey. Thank you for providing this wonderful course.”

A Community Liaison Officer with the Alzheimer Society provides outreach to family physicians, specialists, pharmacists, and other primary health care providers supporting patients with dementia, increasing their awareness of First Link®, the importance of early connection to community supports, and the services available in the community to assist their patients.

First Link® is also funded at the Alzheimer Society in Chatham-Kent and Sarnia/Lambton.