



## CASE STUDY



THE ALZHEIMER  
SOCIETY of IRELAND



# Alzheimer Society of Ireland supporting family caregivers of people with dementia through Moodle

The Alzheimer Society of Ireland (ASI) is the leading dementia specific service provider in Ireland. There are currently an estimated 55,000 people with dementia (PWD) in Ireland with this figure forecasted to rise to 94,000 in 2031.

Numerous reports have highlighted the importance of supporting family caregivers of people with dementia (Cahill et al2 (2012) pp29, Department of Health (2014) pp 31), so that they can continue to provide home based care.

ASI has provided classroom based family carer training for over 10 years. This is delivered by experienced tutors to groups up to 15 family carers.

Though ASI's face to face course was extremely popular there was a target audience who were not being reached - those who were geographically isolated or for other reasons could not attend face-to-face classes.

ASI carried out a survey in March 2015 among family caregivers who were attending their face- to-face Insights course, to ask them about the plausibility of running online training.

The findings were highly supportive of the idea that there is a market for an online course with 89% of respondents indicating that it would also be important to be able to communicate with other caregivers on the proposed online course.

Following a successful application to Erasmus+ (a funding stream from the European Community) in 2015, ASI in partnership with organisations in Norway and Belgium, started work on Home Based Care - Home Based Education (HBC-HBE).

The main aim of this project was to develop and run an Online Distance Learning course for family carers of loved ones with dementia. The course aimed to:

- Improve the learners' carer skills.
- Increase learner knowledge and awareness of dementia in their family and community.
- Combat the stigma of dementia that may still exist.
- Help address issues of isolation, stress and anxiety of a family carer.

# Problem

Family carers need privacy to air their feelings and emotions, so a closed, password protected LMS was seen by providers as being essential to foster this sense of a 'safe space'.

A key component of the successful and popular face-to-face Insights course ran by ASI (and one which was highlighted in their research) is that it facilitates and encourages student participation and engagement.

ASI needed their online course to also be engaging, whereby course participants can develop a sense of mutual support and respect. This is only achieved through the sharing of caring experiences.

ASI are aware of the loneliness and isolation many family carers feel both from members of their own immediate families and from wider society. Therefore their online course must be

easy to use, engaging, concise, informative, collaborative and fun.



# Action

ASI decided to use Moodle as the online learning platform for their Home Based Care - Home Based Education (HBC-HBE) project.

Fergus Timmons, Training Manager at The Alzheimer Society of Ireland, is familiar with Moodle having used the platform at his previous role at IT Sligo where I managed a distance learning course – the Higher Certificate in Arts in Custodial Care – a programme for recruit prison officers working with The Irish Prison Service.

**“We decided to use Moodle as we knew it had a wide range of activities that would promote social learning,” commented Fergus.**

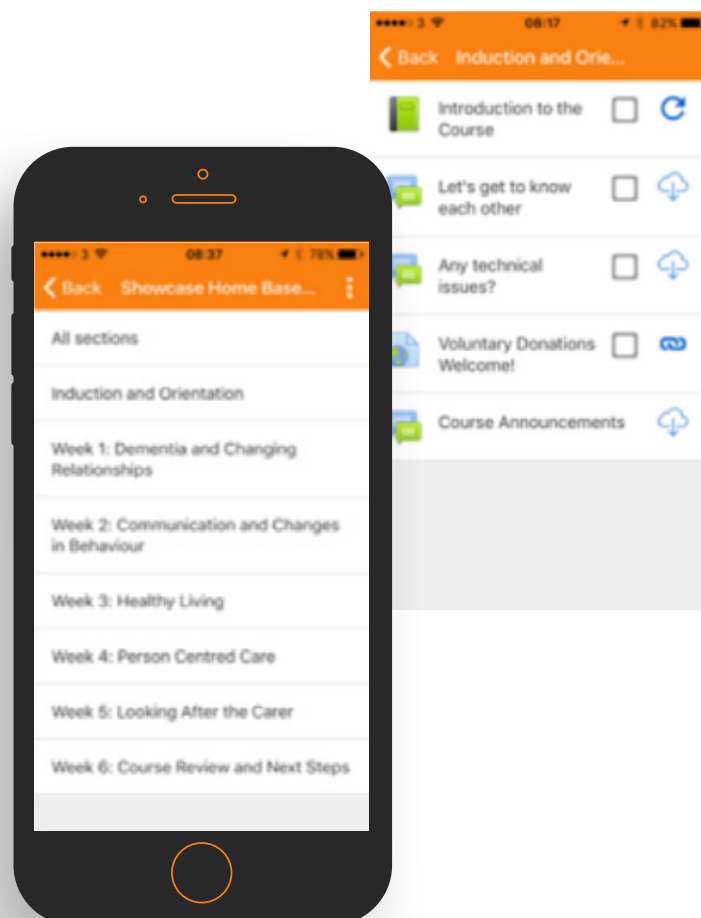
The final course structure of the online course has evolved through feedback from earlier pilot versions through learner and tutor feedback.

ASI has also changed the layout/structure of the course so that it is more user-friendly. For example, they now use Moodle’s Book Module which has resulted in a more effective learner centric online instructional design.

Materials can now be downloaded and used offline. Book Module can be printed by chapter or entirely.

Content is clear, concise and unambiguous in its instruction. It can be accessed across a variety of platforms including desktops, mobile and tablet technologies, as demonstrated in the screenshots of ASI’s Moodle Mobile site below.

ASI worked with Moodle HQ for some suggestions around usability of the course, with the use of the Book feature having particular importance. The usability study for this feature saw tidying up a lot of content into one resource and greatly reduced the amount of scrolling / swiping required of the learner.



# Results

ASI is now providing a very successful fully online course for family carers looking after a loved one with dementia.

Whilst no formal assessment makes measuring impact difficult, learner satisfaction is high and has been the best results for the online course, as indicated in the comments below.

**“Some of my colleagues on the Course were amazing. Thanks to your openness I learned a great deal. It isn’t always easy to talk openly about a subject like Dementia - in most cases because of the extent of the problem to be addressed. I’m at a different end of the spectrum compared to most of you and at this point in time I would appear to be in a slightly better place....but this will change. Thanks to you I’m in a better place than I was before participating in the Course. Your commitment to caring for your loved ones is fantastic and I’m in no doubt but that you’ll all do a wonderful job.”**

“Very simple non-confrontational approach. Issues raised were well addressed by tutor. But key aspect was the depth of information included....brilliant”.

“The content was excellent but I found the other participant’s input and situations hugely beneficial. I really enjoyed the online chat.”

“Video clips were excellent”, “The information given - as to what to expect (early part of the course) and importantly, sources of information and support (latter part of the course). Module 10 was particularly valuable (and dense).”

Demand for the course continues to be extremely high.

ASI had initially planned to run a pilot for 15 learners, but, due to high levels of interest they have run the course 7 times between April 2015 and February 2016, with approximately 15 students enrolling on each course.

This has allowed ASI to gather substantial data on how to improve course structure and content.

They issued pre- and post-course questionnaires to learners on the course in an attempt to measure the changes in reported self-confidence, knowledge and skills. Online Pre-course questionnaires were completed by 40 participants, while post-course questionnaires were completed by 25 participants.

Learners were asked to rate their understanding of dementia on a scale of 1 to 5. Pre-course, 49% of learners rated their understanding as of dementia as low (18% at 1 and 31% at 2 on the 5 point Likert scale).

Only 6% had a high (4 or 5) understanding of dementia before course. Post-course sees a dramatic shift. There is a large reduction in low understanding now down to 4% from 49%, a -45% swing. Those who reported a high understanding (4 or 5) increased to 80% rating their understanding at level 4 an overall swing of 74%.

During the course ASI provided a range of links and websites for a whole range of supports.

They then asked participants what they thought of the statement ‘I know where to find relevant information to help me in my caring role’ along a 5 point scale from Totally Disagree to Totally Agree.

There was a 25% reduction in those who disagreed or totally disagreed with the statement. And there was a 41% increase in those who agree or totally agreed with it.

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## More Information

**Tip for using Moodle from ASI:** Moodle has really improved in terms of functionality and usability in the past 5 years. There is a very good range of activities that can be easily set up.

These can greatly encourage active and participatory learning among any group of students.

Experiment with the various options / activities to see what best suit your learners.

**For more information about ASI**

Visit the website at <https://alzheimer.ie/>