

# AARP Wisconsin: Whitewater library plan to create more Memory Activity Kits for those with dementia selected for grant

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A proposal submitted by the Irvin L. Young Memorial Library to purchase Memory Activity Kits that will provide therapy and help occupy the time of people living with dementia so that their care partners can have some time to themselves has been selected to receive this month's AARP Wisconsin "Small Dollar, Big Impact" grant.

The library currently has six Memory Activity Kits and is in the process of creating two more, according to Suzanne Haselow, the library's Outreach Services Specialist. Each kit has a theme, such as sewing, games, gardening, puzzles, assembling, and even a history of Whitewater, that are designed to be used in the home to entertain, engage and enrich the lives of those affected with memory loss.

"The whole idea is to keep them busy for a while so their care partner has a little free time to take a shower, pay bills, get dinner ready or do whatever they need to do," said Haselow, who plans to use the \$1,000 grant from AARP Wisconsin to purchase therapy dolls and motorized pets "specifically designed for use by people living with memory loss, who are a vital and important part of our community."

Two of the new kits will contain therapy dolls - one Caucasian and one Hispanic - that will allow the person living with dementia to have something to cuddle and care for. The other two kits will include motorized therapy pets that actually respond when petted and are programmed to make cat and dog noises at

acceptable sound levels.

“These are kits that we would never have been able to afford on our own,” she said.

Items in all of the kits are selected to spark memories, create positive feelings, and increase meaningful activity, Haselow explained. “The kits we currently have were developed in partnership with Whitewater’s Dementia Friendly Community Initiative. Ideas and feedback, as well as donations of items, were curated in that partnership. The goal is to make people with dementia as visible and present as their comfort and safety allow,” she said.

Haselow expects to purchase the therapy dolls and pets soon and have the new kits ready to loan out to library patrons by the end of this year. The kits can be checked out for a period of three weeks at a time and can be renewed once.

AARP Wisconsin is awarding one grant each month throughout 2022 to projects across the state that are designed to improve communities and make them better places for everyone to live, work and play as they age. Judges selected this project after reviewing dozens of proposals submitted from all over Wisconsin. “These grants are exactly what the name describes – short-term, low-cost solutions that could have a remarkable impact on the shaping of local communities,” said Amber Miller, Associate State Director of Community Outreach for AARP Wisconsin. “This project hits the nail right on the head.”

AARP Wisconsin’s launched its “Small Dollar, Big Impact” grant program in 2020 and is now in its third year of helping proposed projects move forward in rural and urban parts of the state.