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The Dementia-Friendly Airports Working Group Launches Survey to Research How to Make Airports More Dementia-Friendly

ROSEVILLE, Minn. (July 8, 2019) – The Twin Cities-based Dementia-Friendly Airports Working Group has launched an online survey, “Traveling with Dementia – Airport Stories Survey,” to gather information and stories about air travel experiences from persons with dementia and their care partners.

The Working Group is made up of researchers from the University of Minnesota School of Public Health and a group of area residents, professionals in aging and dementia services, Australian researchers responsible for the Brisbane Airport’s dementia-friendly designation, and others. The effort is organized and led by the Roseville Alzheimer’s and Dementia Community Action Team (Rsvl A/D).

The motivation for the Traveling with Dementia - Airport Stories Survey is the recognition that airports are often difficult places to be for people living with Alzheimer’s disease or other forms of dementia. Navigating security and dealing with the noise and crowds can lead to anxiety and confusion. While there are many anecdotes about air travel experiences of people living with dementia, there is almost no hard data. This survey is designed to address that gap, and will hopefully lead to improved services.

The survey covers travelers’ experiences, from booking flights to arriving at their destination, and encompasses travel within and outside the U.S. Respondents will remain anonymous. It is available now at <http://bit.ly/DementiaFriendlyAirports> through Sept. 15, 2019.

The survey project began in 2018, when Professor Joseph Gaugler, a dementia-caregiver researcher at the University of Minnesota, was lecturing in Australia. He learned of Brisbane Airport’s dementia-friendly designation and met the Australian researchers responsible for this work. Gaugler contacted Rsvl A/D founder Sara Barsel and suggested that Rsvl A/D lead similar efforts locally. Barsel proposed a collaboration with the Brisbane Airport project’s lead researcher, Dr. Maria O’Reilly, and the Dementia-Friendly Airports Working Group was organized.

“There is tremendous excitement about this effort on the part of dementia service providers, travelers and their companions dealing with dementia,” said Barsel. “Navigating airports can be daunting for anyone, but especially for people with hidden disabilities like dementia.”

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The Roseville A/D is a volunteer group active in working to improve community understanding of dementia issues and conditions for persons with dementia and their family/informal caregivers. It is composed of representatives from the city of Roseville, library system, school district, persons with dementia and their caregivers and professionals in aging and dementia services.