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THE ANNA TRUST FOUNDATION, Italy

Meeting The Holistic Care Needs of Catholic Sisters In Care Facilities Today

I am a Roman Catholic Sister and am committed to the care of religious sisters across the world who live with or care for their members living with different forms of cognitive impairment, Alzheimer's disease and dementia. I am a Program Officer at The Anna Trust Foundation, a new Catholic foundation dedicated to addressing the needs of elderly Catholic sisters globally.

Currently there are 700,000 Catholic sisters in the world, most serving the poorest among us. As with all populations, a percentage will develop dementia as they age. The focus of our work at the ANNA TRUST COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT PROJECT is to offer high quality research based professional care, education and support to sisters living with any form of dementia in any area of the world. We believe that appropriate care is wholistic, involving not just biomedical support, but spirituality, and personal accompaniment that witnesses to the healing, liberating and empowering love of Jesus and empowers sisters to live out their religious lives with grace and dignity.

We have trained sisters in Best Practice Dementia Care at the DSDC, Dementia Services Development Centre, Stirling, Scotland and these sisters are now offering very high-quality training to a large number of congregations in their home countries in Africa. The vision is that 85% of all sisters in their communities will receive this training who in turn will roll out the training to local care givers in their areas so that all members of society benefit from this essential work.

We will continue to offer webinars, on-line training and a certificate programme in Dementia Care from the Anna Trust Foundation, in partnership with the Avila Institute for Geriatrics in the United States.

As a presenter at the Conference, I would like to speak to the particular needs of Catholic sisters, who are often cared for in lay institutions, and the leadership role that Catholic sisters could play in a global research effort on Alzheimer's and dementia. Sisters live in congregations in all parts of the world and represent every ethnicity. Congregations are mixtures of young and elderly sisters. There is the opportunity for Catholic sisters to join with research centers or a global research effort and become part of, one might say, a new Framingham, but focused on dementia. This has never been done before, but Catholic sisters might be leaders in the effort because they are an organized force for global good.

Sister Siobhan O'Keeffe