Mind Matters Podcast:
Cognitive Support Across the Continuum

Welcome to another episode of the Mind Matters podcast, where we talk about brain health, dementia care, and many topics in between. In this episode, we're diving into an important topic: cognitive support across the continuum and the comprehensive programs, tools, and services Acts offers to strengthen cognitive health and provide support for residents at every level of living in our communities.

When we talk about the continuum, we mean all levels of living offered within our communities: Independent Living, OakBridge Terrace (assisted living), WillowBrooke Court (skilled nursing), and dedicated memory support neighborhoods that may be located within OakBridge Terrace or WillowBrooke Court.

It's important to recognize that although these levels of living differ, cognitive support is present in all of them. No matter where a resident lives, they have access to proactive support for cognitive well-being and brain health. At Acts, cognitive support is not just one program or one intervention. It is a holistic, person-centered approach that evolves with residents as they move throughout the continuum of care.

We see cognitive support as a journey. A resident may move into independent living and later transition to another level of living, but our goal is for support for cognitive health, memory, and overall well-being to grow and adapt alongside them. Across all settings, we aim to preserve dignity, promote autonomy and independence, create meaningful opportunities for engagement, and enhance quality of life.

Independent Living: Building Cognitive Health Early

Independent living is where we place a strong emphasis on supporting and strengthening cognitive health proactively. The focus begins with education, awareness, and reducing the stigma or fear that can surround cognitive change. By introducing these conversations early—ideally when residents first move into the community—we can frame cognitive health in a positive and empowering way.

A key part of this approach is identifying and addressing risk factors for cognitive decline. Many of these risk factors are modified through everyday lifestyle choices, so we want to help residents understand where they stand and what steps they can take to support their brain health. Early detection of cognitive change is also important, as it allows us to monitor changes over time and offer support sooner.

At its core, independent living focuses on healthy lifestyle habits that support both cognitive health and overall well-being. Cognitive health is a critical part of thriving in place—not just aging in place.

Acts offers a variety of tools and programs in independent living to support this work. One example is Cognivue Clarity, a global screening tool that can provide proactive cognitive screening in as little as 10 to 15 minutes. We also identify potential risk factors through nurse practitioner visits and a growing range of well-being assessments, including fitness assessments, Thrive screens, culinary assessments, emotional well-being assessments, and spiritual life assessments.

These assessments are not designed to categorize residents or determine placement. Rather, they are intended to help residents understand where they are right now, identify strengths and goals, and determine where support might be beneficial. Cognitive health is influenced by many factors—nutrition, movement, social connection, purpose, and spiritual life all play a role.

Acts also offers several programs specifically designed to strengthen cognitive health. These include:

- MindBank, a program focused on strengthening cognitive reserve
- SmartFit, an innovative dual-task training technology
- Brain Gym, a pilot program that combines physical and cognitive exercise
- Thrive Mind, a speech therapy-based program that offers personalized activities to support cognition

In addition to these programs, residents also have access to educational resources such as the Mind Matters platform, videos, and podcasts that provide information about cognitive health and cognitive change.

Independent living residents may also benefit from support services such as Acts Home Services, which can provide companion support, help with activities of daily living, assistance with routines, medication reminders, and speech therapy. We also recognize that many residents in our communities are caregivers themselves, so support extends to them as well through caregiver support groups, educational workshops, Memory Cafés, and respite programs in some communities.

While many of these tools begin when a resident moves to independent living, the goal is for them to extend throughout the continuum so that cognitive support remains consistent as needs change.

OakBridge Terrace (Assisted Living): Support That Preserves Strengths

As residents' needs change, they may benefit from the additional support offered in OakBridge Terrace (OBT), Acts' assisted living setting. This support may include help with activities of daily living such as bathing, dressing, mobility, continence care, medication management, or nursing support for ongoing medical needs.

One of the great benefits of OakBridge Terrace is the presence of nurses and CNAs who see residents every day. This daily contact makes it easier to notice subtle changes—whether health-related or cognitive—and respond sooner. Early recognition of changes can lead to earlier intervention and better outcomes.

At the same time, OakBridge Terrace is not about doing everything for residents. The goal is to support independence, preserve strengths, and maintain abilities. If a resident can still do something, the team works to encourage and support that ability rather than taking it over.

Some residents in OakBridge Terrace may also be living with mild to moderate cognitive changes. They may need reminders, cueing, help with the sequencing of tasks, support with routines, and encouragement to eat regular meals and remain socially engaged. Team members in OakBridge Terrace receive specialized dementia education so they can recognize changes, communicate effectively, and respond with person-centered support.

The approach is rooted in person-centered and person-directed care. Residents are not expected to fit into staff schedules or routines. Instead, the focus is on the individual resident: their preferences, their history, their strengths, and what matters most to them. Team members are trained to understand that behavioral expressions are a form of communication and may signal an unmet need. The goal is to understand what the resident is trying to communicate and respond in a way that improves quality of life.

OakBridge Terrace also offers a more supportive, home-like environment where many of the day-to-day burdens of maintaining a household are reduced. Residents no longer need to worry about things like housekeeping, laundry, or meal preparation, which can reduce stress and free up energy for meaningful engagement, social connection, and well-being.

Programming in OakBridge Terrace is highly intentional and guided by a holistic approach to well-being. Engagement teams focus on the seven dimensions of wellness: cognitive, emotional, spiritual, occupational, physical, social, and environmental well-being. Activities are designed not just to fill time, but to stimulate learning, create purpose, and support multiple areas of health.

Many Acts communities also use Magic Tables, an innovative interactive projection system that promotes physical, cognitive, and social engagement through games and movement. Movement and exercise are also a strong focus, as physical health and cardiovascular wellness directly support brain health.

Residents in OakBridge Terrace often remain deeply connected to the larger community. They may continue participating in independent living activities, dining venues, clubs, and friendships. In many communities, a resident who enjoyed a bridge club or another social activity before moving to assisted living can continue participating with friends, just in a slightly different setting. This continuity helps preserve purpose, identity, and social engagement.

WillowBrooke Court (Skilled Nursing): Clinical Support for More Complex Needs

WillowBrooke Court (WBC) is Acts' skilled nursing setting and is designed for residents who need a higher level of medical and personal care. These residents may have complex medical conditions, significant mobility limitations, wound care needs, or more advanced cognitive impairment.

Residents in WillowBrooke Court often require a setting where safety, comfort, and support can be more closely managed. In many cases, this is also where residents with moderate to advanced dementia may receive care, particularly when a more structured and supervised environment is needed.

Care in WillowBrooke Court is highly collaborative and relies on an interdisciplinary team approach. Residents are supported by physicians, nurses, certified nursing assistants, rehabilitation specialists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, social workers, life enrichment professionals, and dietary staff. This team works together to address medical, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and engagement needs in a coordinated way.

The focus is not on what a resident has lost, but on what they can still do and how those abilities can be supported. Emotional support is especially important in this setting. Even when someone's ability to communicate changes, they still experience feelings, emotions, and relationships. Team members are trained to understand and support those emotional needs in meaningful ways.

Care plans in WillowBrooke Court are individualized and may include support for dietary needs, medical needs, emotional and behavioral needs, and cognitive engagement. Activities and engagement opportunities are adapted to residents' current strengths and abilities. For example, the Magic Table can be especially effective for residents with lower levels of cognitive functioning because it provides immediate feedback, simple interaction, and a sense of success.

Engaged Worship is also available in WillowBrooke Court and is adapted to meet residents where they are cognitively and spiritually. For some residents, spiritual engagement may rely heavily on long-standing routines and muscle memory—such as prayer, familiar hymns, or rituals that remain meaningful even when other abilities change.

One-on-one visits are another valuable part of life in WillowBrooke Court. In addition to life enrichment staff, some communities have resident volunteers from independent living who visit residents individually. Music, conversation, and companionship can create meaningful moments of connection. Sensory engagement is also an

important part of support in this setting. This may include music, flowers, gardening-related sensory experiences, familiar scents, tactile items, or other sensory cues that connect residents to their past interests and memories.

An overarching theme in WillowBrooke Court is consistency. Predictable routines, familiar team members, a calmer environment, and strong relationships all help reduce confusion and stress. These neighborhoods are designed to feel supportive and manageable for residents who may be overwhelmed by a busier environment.

Memory Support Neighborhoods: Specialized Care for Residents Living with Cognitive Change

In some Acts communities, specialized memory support neighborhoods are offered within OakBridge Terrace, WillowBrooke Court, or both. These neighborhoods are intentionally designed to meet the needs of residents living with cognitive change and to provide highly individualized support in a safe, structured, and engaging environment.

Memory support neighborhoods are typically secure, smaller, and home-like with consistent team members who build meaningful relationships with residents and learn their preferences, routines, and histories. This consistency helps create a strong sense of security and familiarity.

Routine is a cornerstone of memory support. Both residents and team members benefit from predictable rhythms and familiar patterns. These neighborhoods also provide support with activities of daily living and dining in ways that are tailored to each resident's needs.

Programming in memory support neighborhoods is highly intentional and based on resident interests, current strengths, and meaningful engagement. Activities may be offered in smaller groups or shorter time frames to better match residents' attention spans and energy levels. The goal is not simply to keep residents occupied, but to create opportunities for connection, enjoyment, comfort, and purpose.

Sensory experiences are a key part of this environment. Residents may have access to Magic Tables, Engaged Worship services, robotic pets, music, reminiscence opportunities, and other sensory-based programs designed to support engagement and quality of life.

Many memory support neighborhoods also include life stations; these are meaningful spaces or setups designed to encourage independent engagement. Examples might include a nursery area with baby dolls, a cat tower with robotic pets, a dishwashing station, a desk, a woodworking bench, or other familiar environments that reflect residents past interests, hobbies, or roles. These stations are not static; they can evolve over time based on the interests and needs of the residents living in the neighborhood.

Life stations are especially helpful for residents who are more restless or who like to walk throughout the neighborhood. As they move through this space, they may come across a familiar activity and engage with it on their own terms. This supports independence, reduces anxiety, and offers comfort through familiarity.

Examples of meaningful engagement in memory support can be simple and powerful. When visiting an Acts memory care neighborhood, you might find the residents baking cupcakes together, cracking eggs, stirring batter, singing along to music, and enjoying participating in a familiar pleasure. These experiences often tap into memory, identity, and joy in a very natural way.

Team Member Education and Support Across the Continuum

A major strength of Acts' approach to cognitive support is the emphasis on team member education across every department and every level of living. Dementia education is not limited to nursing or memory care staff. Team

members in culinary, environmental services, nursing, life enrichment, and other departments all receive ongoing dementia training because creating a cognitively supportive community requires everyone's involvement.

Acts provides ongoing dementia education at every community through dedicated trainers and a wide variety of learning formats. Core dementia training topics include:

- Understanding cognitive change
- Supporting residents through person-centered care approaches
- Effective communication strategies
- Meaningful engagement
- Compassionate responses to behavioral expressions
- Building meaningful relationships

In addition, many communities are implementing the Best Friends™ approach, which focuses on building meaningful, relationship-based support for residents living with dementia. This training helps team members see the person first, understand their history and preferences, and respond with empathy and connection.

Acts offers online webinars, online dementia education, in-person courses, and community-based training opportunities. The goal is to create a truly dementia-inclusive environment where residents are supported by knowledgeable, compassionate team members no matter where they live or who they encounter in the community.

The Role of the Memory Services Team

Another unique part of Acts' approach is the dedicated Memory Services team, which supports communities across the organization. This team provides guidance in cognitive health, life engagement, dementia education, and memory support across all levels of living.

The team partners with community leadership, direct care staff, life enrichment teams, and residents themselves. Support may include helping communities implement best practices, problem-solve around individual resident needs, strengthen engagement calendars, provide team education, or offer presentations and educational programming directly to residents and families.

This support extends throughout the continuum, reinforcing the idea that cognitive health is everyone's concern and that communities do not have to navigate these challenges alone.

A Commitment to Cognitive Health at Every Level

Although each level of living looks different, some things remain constant across the continuum. Acts is deeply committed to supporting cognitive health and holistic well-being, preserving dignity, and ensuring person-directed care, meaningful engagement, and support for caregivers and families. The tools and services may look different depending on where a resident lives and what support they need, but the underlying philosophy remains the same.

The focus is always on the person: their strengths, their preferences, their goals, and their quality of life. Cognitive support is not limited to one neighborhood or one stage of change. It is woven throughout the entire community experience.

Thank you for joining another episode of the Mind Matters podcast. We hope this overview has been helpful in learning more about the programs and services Acts offers to support cognitive health across all levels of living in our communities. We hope to see you next time—and always remember, your mind matters.