Speaking Out

In a bid to help children understand memory disorders, school-aged children and grandchildren of people living with dementia have taken part in a series of videos speaking frankly about their experiences with a dementia diagnosis.

The videos, which can be viewed on YouTube by searching ‘Kids 4 Dementia’, are part of a new classroom-based dementia education program aimed at children in Year 5 and Year 6.

UNSW Research Psychologist Dr Jess Baker received funding from the NHMRC/Dementia Collaborative Research Centres to design the program. She says the videos are an important tool in breaking down stigma and raising awareness about dementia.

“I would love to think that we can get to a point where by the time every child leaves primary school, they will know about dementia and understand that a person with dementia is still a person,” Dr Baker says.

Jack, nine, says he took part in the video series so he could help others. He thinks children are capable of dealing with the challenges of a relative who is diagnosed with dementia.

“I’m not amazing. I think kids can deal with it – it’s not amazingness, it’s kindness,” he says.

Grace, 13, says she also hopes to educate other children about what it is like having a loved one with dementia by participating in the video series.

“I think it is really important for people to know about dementia, because it has been hard for me and I wanted to help,” she says. “I really liked talking about it because we don’t often speak about grandma. It was good to speak to an outsider who won’t judge us. If you speak to a friend about it, they might think it is weird.”

The videos are part of a dementia education program developed by Dr Baker and a team of teachers, people with dementia, children and academics. It features the videos along with seven short modules covering topics including what causes dementia, how it feels to have dementia, how to keep the brain healthy and what happens in an aged-care facility.

The modules are told through the story of Ollie, Ruby and their Pops. Each one is accompanied by a class activity, such as an interactive brain, role-playing game or drawing exercise.

How do you feel about having a parent or grandparent with dementia?

Jack talks about his family’s experience with dementia.