

2026 Anti-Stigma Award

Recognising outstanding contributions challenging stigma around dementia and promoting inclusion

28 October, Dublin

Alzheimer Europe

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About the award

Welcome to the 2026 Anti-Stigma Award

These awards recognise individuals and organisations whose work helps challenge stigma and promote inclusion for people living with dementia. This year, Alzheimer Europe and the Alzheimer Europe Foundation are proud to highlight the transformative power of music.

We are delighted to honour European initiatives and artists whose work combines music and dementia in a meaningful way, whether through involving people with dementia in musical activities or through musical creations that address stigma and promote a positive image of dementia and those living with the condition.

Together, we celebrate the power of music to connect, inspire and foster understanding. We extend our sincere thanks to all those whose work contributes to a more inclusive society, and congratulate this year's award recipients and nominees.

Programme

Anti-Stigma Award Ceremony
28 October 2026 from 19:30 - 00:30
The Round Room at the Mansion House | Dublin, Ireland

19:30 - 19:50 Welcome drinks

19:50 - 20:00 Welcome by
- **Miriam O'Callaghan**, Television and radio presenter
- **Heike von Lützau-Hohlbein**, Chairperson, Alzheimer Europe Foundation

20:00 - 20:10 Welcome by
- **Kieran O'Donnell**, Minister of State for Older People and Housing

20:10 - 20:15 **Third prize** presented by **Heike von Lützau-Hohlbein**, Chairperson, Alzheimer Europe Foundation

20:15 – 20:45 First Course

20:45 – 20:55 **Second prize** presented by **Miriam O'Callaghan** and **Kevin Quaid**, Chairperson, European Working Group of People with Dementia

20:55 - 21:40 Main Course

21:40 – 21:50 **Honourable mentions** presented by **Miriam O'Callaghan** and **Maria do Rosário Zincke dos Reis**, Chairperson, Alzheimer Europe

21:50 - 22:00 **First prize** presented by **Miriam O'Callaghan** and **Nina Carberry**, MEP (Ireland), Co-Chair, European Alzheimer's Alliance

22:00 - 22:40 Dessert and Coffee

22:40 – 00:30 Celebration with dance floor & DJ

Five years of Anti-Stigma Award

Alzheimer Europe is proud to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the Anti-Stigma Award in 2026. In just a few years, the award has recognised a wide range of creative and innovative initiatives that challenge the stigma associated with dementia.

We have been continually impressed by the diversity of European projects, as well as by the commitment and dedication of the people leading them. Across Europe, individuals and organisations are making an outstanding effort to challenge dementia stigma. Their creativity, commitment and positive impact continue to inspire us all.

On the following pages, we are delighted to introduce this year's Anti-Stigma Award winners and showcase the remarkable initiatives behind their success.

3 Third prize



A River Rolls On

Mike Hanrahan with the Forgetmenots Choir
Ireland

"'A River Rolls On' is inspired by my mother. I imagined my mum's life as a beautiful meandering river heading to its ocean. It was my deepest wish that the ancient sea folk would carry her past the storm of dementia and welcome her to a peaceful rest beyond the breakers."

Mike Hanrahan's mother had been living with dementia since 2012. After a restricted window visit with his mother in her care home during the COVID-19 pandemic, he wrote "A River Rolls On" as a tribute to her life and dedication to caring for others. The song was recorded with Dublin's Forgetmenots Choir, a dementia and age-friendly community choir, and released on 28 May 2021, the day she sadly passed away. His mother's passing has had a profound effect on Mike's life, motivating him to promote awareness and to hopefully develop a national conversation on dementia and family care.



A scene form the music video

Listen to the song



Cover Art



Second prize 2

The Dementia Choir – Voices of courage beyond the diagnosis

Brit Olssøn

Norway

"Through openness, participation and authentic storytelling, the choir members transform public perceptions of dementia from loss and limitation to dignity, capability and human connection. Driven by volunteers and now spread across the country, the choirs show how music and community can create belonging, visibility and meaningful change for people living with dementia."



The aim of The Dementia Choir is to present dementia from the perspective of people living with dementia and have them represent their identity, abilities, emotions and social engagement on national TV. It challenges misconceptions about dementia, reduces stigma and promotes an understanding of dementia as a chronic brain disease rather than a normal part of ageing. Music and singing are, at their core, a means to sustain identity and belonging, and enable the choir members to cope and participate in meaningful cultural activities.



The Dementia Coir at Deichman Bjørvika

Listen to the song

1 First prize



A minha Tita era assim

Lyrics: Marlene Rosa
Portugal

"By bringing dementia into children's stories and songs, we hope to replace fear with understanding, nurture empathy from an early age and help build a society without stigma."

"A minha Tita era assim" (That's Who My Grandma Tita Was) is an original song created as part of the broader Cortex School Bag Initiative, the first educational initiative in Portugal specifically designed to introduce the topic of dementia in primary schools.
The project was created after recognising a silent reality: many children experience dementia within their families but are rarely given the language, tools or emotional support to understand what is happening to a grandparent they deeply love.





Marlene and Hugo Floro (Music Teacher) in Agrupamento de Escolas de Pombal, Portugal



1

Music Composition: Francisco Saldanha
Portugal

"Music has the power to reach where words sometimes cannot, creating emotional bridges that help children understand dementia with greater sensitivity, empathy and openness."

Dementia is often portrayed through fear, silence and loss. Many children witness changes in a grandparent's behaviour without understanding what is happening, which can generate fear, confusion and social distance from an early age.
This project challenges that narrative by using music and storytelling to explain dementia in a way that feels honest, accessible and emotionally safe.





Illustration by Renato Salgado



Illustration by Renato Salgado

Listen to the song

Honourable mention

Niftakarna

Daniel Cauchi

Malta



"Niftakarna is a Maltese-language song that won second place in the music festival Mużika Mużika 2026. Inspired by a deeply personal experience of dementia, it transforms that experience into a message of love and dignity, reminding us that even when memories fade, the person and the bonds we share remain."

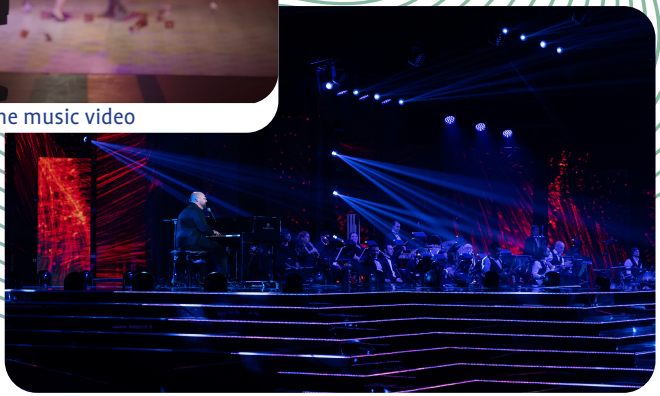
"Niftakarna" was presented at Muzika Muzika, Malta's leading festival of original Maltese-language music. Inspired by Daniel's personal experience of his mother's memory loss, the song explores themes of memory, love and care. Its aim is to translate a deeply personal story into a shared emotional experience that resonates with a broad audience, fostering reflection on the human dimensions of dementia.

By engaging both artistic audiences and the wider public, the initiative bridges personal experience and public discourse, encouraging emotional connection and broader societal understanding.



A scene from the music video

Listen to the song



Daniel performing at the Mużika Mużika Festival



Honourable mention

Når vi er sammen

Claus Christensen

Denmark

"The cameras for national tv stopped rolling, but we never stopped singing. Two years later, our dementia choir was turning memories into songs, writing and recording a radio hit – and creating a new narrative about what people living with dementia can do. 22 Danish celebrities joined the choir on the song."



The choir in the music studio

In autumn 2025, a choir consisting of 14 singers living with dementia recorded and released the benefit song "Når vi er sammen" in support of the Danish Alzheimer's Association. The song features both professional actors and musicians together with choir members. The initiative broadens public understanding of living with dementia while also highlighting the benefit of leading an active lifestyle.
By fostering joy, meaningful social connections and a sense of belonging, the Dementia Choir has had a lasting impact on participants and their families, while also serving as a model for more than 200 dementia choirs established across Denmark.



Claus and the choir at rehearsals

Listen to the song

Honourable mention

Diff'rently the Same & I Still Love You

James McKillop
United Kingdom





James and his wife Maureen

"If you get it right for people with dementia, you get it right for many many others"

After experiencing stigma and indifference from others, who no longer treated him as a living person following his dementia diagnosis, James McKillop became determined to speak up on behalf of himself and others who would follow in his footsteps. He emphasises that, although people living with dementia face challenges, they remain human beings with rich lives, histories of contributing to society and families, and continued value to future generations.

Believing that people might not read articles about dementia but would listen to music, James chose songwriting as a way to challenge stigma and influence public attitudes.



James and Yvonne Lyon (Singer)

Listen to "Diff'rently The Same" & "I Still Love You"





Honourable mention

Music, meaning and memory

Naaheed Mukadam
United Kingdom

"It felt really meaningful using South Asian music and dance to tell the stories of South Asian people with dementia and tackle the stigma surrounding this condition"



Performance Poster

"Music, Meaning and Memory" is an innovative music and dance project created by Professor Naaheed Mukadam in collaboration with sarod musician Soumik Datta and dance artist Jesal Patel. Designed to raise awareness of dementia within South Asian communities, the performance uses traditional South Asian music and dance to explore themes of memory, identity and connection. Through artistic expression, the project highlights how people living with dementia can continue to engage with and enjoy music and movement, while challenging stigma and promoting a more hopeful and person-centred understanding of dementia.



Soumik Datta performance

Watch the performance

Honourable mention

Musical-Theater for People with Alzheimer's disease: Beautiful Greece

Dimitrios Kalamaras & The Choir of Alzheimer Hellas

Greece



"Memory is life; singing is breath. Memory and art are, therefore, inextricably linked. Singing turns breath into memory, and open, inclusive art into life and healing."

"Beautiful Greece" is a multidisciplinary musical-theatrical production presented by the Alzheimer Hellas Choir at the Aristotle Theatre in Thessaloniki in February 2026. The inclusive choir, active since 2001, consists primarily of people living with dementia who take part in regular rehearsals and public performances across Greece. Through a combination of choral and solo singing, theatre and movement, the production placed people with dementia at the centre of a professional cultural performance. Its aim was to challenge stigma and promote a more positive image of dementia by showcasing the creativity, abilities and self-expression of people living with the condition.



Christmas Performance

Watch the performance



Dimitrios with the choir

Thank you!

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who participated in the 2026 Anti-Stigma Award, and to all those whose continued support makes this initiative possible.

Your dedication, passion and commitment to fostering a positive change inspire us all. Together, we are helping to create a world where stigma is challenged, voices are heard and every individual is valued.

Thank you for being part of this journey.

Acknowledgements

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The Alzheimer Society of Ireland

Learn more about the Abti-Stigma Award at:
www.alzheimer-europe.org/our-work/anti-stigma-award

Alzheimer Europe a.s.b.l. 5b, Heienhaff;
L-1736 Senningerberg, Luxembourg