

A Class for Families Caring for Loved Ones with Memory Loss: *Findings from Savvy Express*

INTRODUCTION

Los Angeles County is home to upwards of 30,000 family caregivers or care partners of older adults who need help with their daily living. One of the largest group of family care partners are those who care for someone with dementia due to Alzheimer's disease and other neurological diseases that cause significant changes in memory, behavior, judgement, and personality. Although "caregiving" can be meaningful and a source of satisfaction for many families, care partners can also experience worry, frustration, sadness, and isolation in their caregiving role. Moreover, many care partners have limited knowledge of the diseases that cause dementia, and lack information on care strategies and services available to help their family member with memory loss.

This project tested a psychoeducational, skill-building intervention called *Savvy Express* which was adapted from the evidenced-based Savvy Caregiver Program. The overall purpose of *Savvy Express* is to increase care partners' physical and psychological wellbeing, knowledge about dementia and where to go to for help. *Savvy Express* is comprised of 3 weekly group classes led by trained facilitators from Alzheimer's Los Angeles. Classes are free and located at community agencies or health clinics in Los Angeles County. Participants completed 3 interviews: at baseline; immediately after the classes ended; and 3 months after baseline.

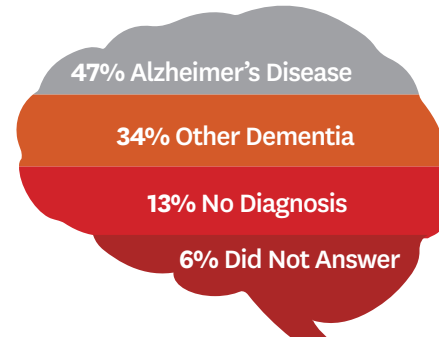
WHO WERE THE CARE PARTNERS IN SAVVY EXPRESS?

- 116 participants
- Between 26 - 93 years of age
- 64 average age
- 81% females
- 19% immigrants

EDUCATION

Post Bachelor's Degree	28%
Bachelor's Degree	23%
Some College	28%
High School	13%
Below High School	5%
Did Not Answer	2%

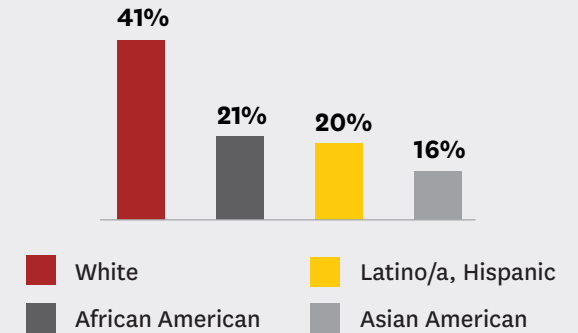
FAMILY MEMBER'S DIAGNOSIS



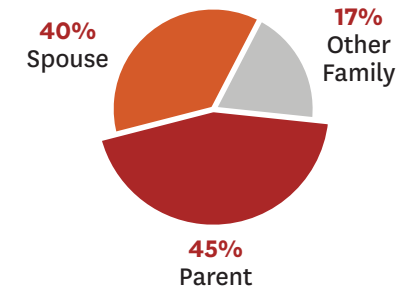
ATTENDANCE

- 66% attended 3 class
- 24% attended 2 class
- 9% attended 1 class

CARE PARTNERS' RACIAL/ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION



WHOM DO THEY CARE FOR?



32% Provide around-the-clock care.

Others provide on average 27 hours of care per week.

89% would recommend the program to other caregivers



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Our findings indicate that *Savvy Express* increases wellbeing and improves role management for care partners who provide care to a family member with dementia. Future work should (1) extend the follow up period to assess if these improvements continue over the long term; (2) compare *Savvy Express* with other caregiver programs to assess their relative effectiveness in enhancing families' long-term outcomes; and (3) offer classes for limited English-speakers.

Care partners rated how often they thought about their caregiving experiences. They experienced statistically significant improvements in the following areas:

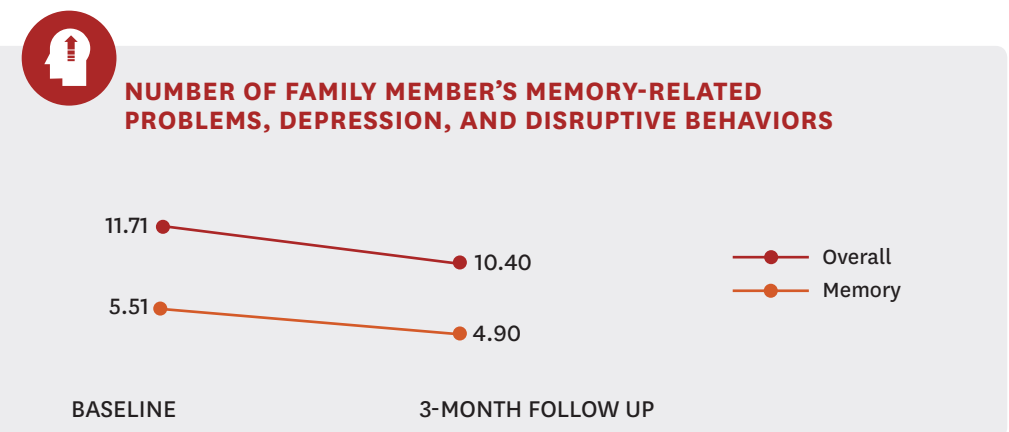
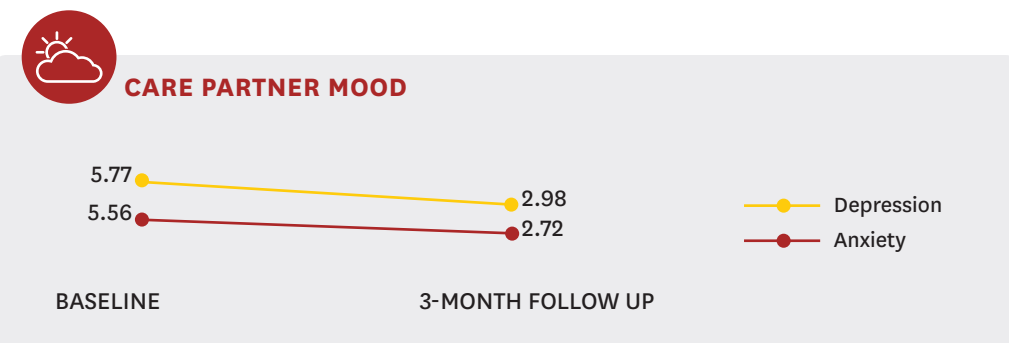
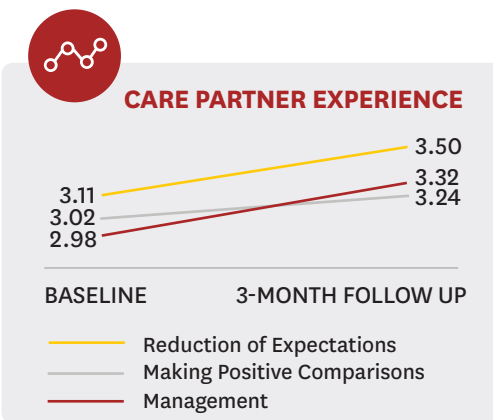
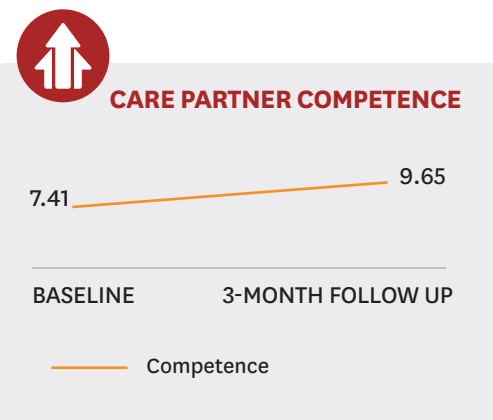
- **COMPETENCE:** feeling competent about oneself as a care partner (a sum score of 4 items on a 4-point scale from “never” to “very often”).
- **MANAGEMENT:** learning as much as one can about the illness (1 item on a 4-point scale from “never” to “very often”).
- **MEANING:** reduction of expectations (a mean score of 2 items on a 4-point scale from “never” to “very often”).
- **MEANING:** making positive comparisons (a mean score of 3 items on a 4-point scale from “never” to “very often”).

When asked about their mood, care partners experienced statistically significant decreases in depression and anxiety.

- **DEPRESSION SYMPTOMS** was measured using the PHQ-9 indicating an improvement in sad mood, loss of interest in daily activities, etc.
- **ANXIETY SYMPTOMS** was measured using the GAD-7 indicating an improvement in feelings of anxiety and fears.

Care partners evaluated their own degree of “reaction” to 24 items related to the family member’s memory and behavior problems. Care partners reported statistically significant lower problems and reactions for:

- **BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS:** the family members’ memory-related problems and the overall behavior problems were reduced.
- **SPECIFIC REACTIONS:** feeling bothered or distressed by the family members’:
 - Memory
 - Depression
 - Disruptive behavior



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