

Announcer ([00:02](#)):

You are listening to the Safety Moment Podcast by Utility Safety Partners. Safety is always a good conversation and it's a click away. Here's your host, Mike Sullivan.

Mike Sullivan ([00:16](#)):

Hey everybody. Thanks for joining me on the podcast today. My guest today is Mr. Kelly Morstad. Now, Kelly is an interesting gentleman. He's done all kinds of things in his life and over the last six years he's been working on a project, really, not so much a project, but I'm not sure how you call it. I'm going to call it a project called YouQuest, and it's providing people who have early onset dementia with a better day. Kelly, welcome to the Safety Moment podcast. Apparently this is episode number, believe it or not, 54, our 54th podcast episode of the Safety Moment. I'm blown away. We started this during covid. So many things started during Covid, and here we are. We're 54 episodes later and we're still going strong. So welcome to episode 54.

Kelly Morstad ([01:07](#)):

Well, thanks Mike. We're going

Mike Sullivan ([01:08](#)):

To be talking today about something that's become very near and dear to me, and I know it's near and dear to you is YouQuest, and I'm going to let you explain what YouQuest is. But before we go there, maybe just take a few moments to introduce yourself and let people know how you, well, your background, but really how you got to what YouQuest is and how you got connected.

Kelly Morstad ([01:33](#)):

Well, UQuest is a startup, and I guess my background is startups. I've been involved in tech startups since about 1995, I think was my first one. So I've always enjoyed the startup game. When I left the high tech business into kind of a post career stage about 10 years ago, I started spending a lot of time figuring out what a good use of my time would be when I'm not going into a job every day. And the sport of disc golf was one of my daily activities. And I was exposed to and became very good friends with a gentleman who at the age of 48 was diagnosed with dementia. He had been working in the actuarial type of work at the Royal Bank and found he couldn't handle his applications and organizational things that he'd been doing his entire career. And if you can believe this, went home at one day at lunchtime and said to his wife, I don't know what's going on. They got a doctor appointment that afternoon and he never worked again at

Mike Sullivan ([02:43](#)):

48.

Kelly Morstad ([02:44](#)):

And his wife who, so at the time his wife was most concerned about what do you do during the day when this hits at that age, you're still raising a family and the financial pressures and all of the things that at that point in your life are about as high as they're going to be. But on top of that, she had the concerns about what he was doing during the day to live a quality life and circumstances, had him exposed to the sport of disc golf, and he started making a point of going out there not only for his outside fitness but his social interactions and some of the meditation that can come from either golfing

alone or the golfing with people became fundamental to his existence. So the main thing that comes out of that is in doing so every day I became very good friends with him on the Disc golf course and his wife talked about other people in a similar circumstance and she wanted to start this organization that ultimately became you, quest.

[\(03:55\)](#):

And her and another lady put this thing together, went through all the nonprofit things and all that stuff, and I was kind of participating only as a good friend of her husband who was going to be kind of core to this group. But then we went to the very first day where we had six or seven different participants where we're all being introduced and as I was watching it, the activities that we were trying to figure out how to give people a quality day when they were away from their caregivers and out of the home, I said, you know what? Music would probably be kind of a fun thing. I mean, Mike, who knows better than you and me, what a relief it is to get out with buddies and play music. Right? So just as a notion, I brought my guitar to the second day and we did some playing and third day brought some eggs and did some playing and said, we just kind of declared that we're going to be the band.

[\(04:55\)](#):

We're not going to be performing to you. You are going to be part of the band that just has exploded. And today there's over 50 musicians involved in YouQuest. We perform two to three times a week. There's different performances and it's grown into its own music scene. But that's pretty much how it came together, was just kind of following what felt right, the guiding premise of YouQuest is make every day a good day. And that doesn't matter if you've got dementia or if you're on top of the world. I mean, we all have the same objective. Make it a great day. And when you're guided by that, there's a lot of things that fit into that bucket.

Mike Sullivan [\(05:34\)](#):

Well in YouQuest, I mean now I've been part of this for a very brief period of time, but it's connecting people with music and with sound, really with music. And music has been an enormous part of my whole life since I was a little kid. My whole family, everybody played a musical instrument, and if you didn't, you probably weren't going to part of the family much longer. That's what it felt like when I was growing up. So I was exposed to all kinds of musical instruments and because of that, I play a few instruments, which is nice, but I never really gave it much thought the way music can connect beyond just the social part of, oh, that's good song. I like that song. We, we share the same interests in musical genres or whatever, but in terms of people's health, mental health, yeah, it makes sense. I want to listen to music that's going to get me excited or calm me down or slow me down. Music for somber occasions, music for weddings, whatever it might be. It just makes sense when you start to think about it and to see what you've done with you. Quest. And this is brand new. I mean, it's not brand new, but it's only in Calgary, right? It's nowhere else.

Kelly Morstad [\(06:48\)](#):

Yeah. Oddly, as far as we know, we are the only dementia organization specifically focused on people with young onset. Typical programs would be, their intakes would be to people with young onset and people who are in advanced years. And there's a completely different way that you can approach it, but in both cases, it's a quality life, right? Give a quality, participate in help in a quality life while you're going through whatever it is you're dealing with.

Mike Sullivan [\(07:20\)](#):

What are some of the signs of early onset dementia? I mean, I know you're not a clinician, but what are some of the signs or physician I should say, what are some of the signs that people might be not even aware of? Because we're talking people as young as even 45.

Kelly Morstad ([07:35](#)):

It presents in so many ways that I almost hesitate to ask it or to answer it, but the things that when John's case, he found that he couldn't handle his computer apps where he had done that in the past. In my case, I walk into a room and forget why I'm going there. I don't have dementia. That is though something that a lot of people start dealing with in their fifties and sixties and say, do I have it? Do I have it? That in no way predicts it, and I want to make that point because people ask me with terror and they lose their confidence if they think that they may be early stage. So you don't want to take what is typical symptoms of just growing old and perhaps even caring less.

Mike Sullivan ([08:22](#)):

Well, there's that, I get that get

Kelly Morstad ([08:29](#)):

With dementia, but if you do have serious concerns, mention it to your doctor and get yourself baselined so you can go back in whatever the appropriate interval is and see if indeed there's a degradation. But our brains change as we age. So it's important to know the difference between typical and what might be a bit of an outlier warranting medical attention.

Mike Sullivan ([08:56](#)):

I've been going to YouQuest now as a musician for must be going on three years, I think maybe two for sure, maybe three. And the people I've met there, and I am having a hard time articulating because the connection, it's nothing we're saying, there's no physical connection. We're 10 feet away from the people who are listening to us. And yet, it's interesting, you have people there who are various levels of that early onset dementia, and you can see every single one of them. At some point there's a spark. And while we're playing, and I know the guys I play with, Wayne and Don and the Corleone we call ourselves, we try to play music that has a beat to it. It's kind of uppity and it's almost sing-along type music that people, well my age and a little older, a little younger are familiar with.

([09:59](#)):

And it seems to connect, but at some point, every time we get there, I notice a spark and people are getting more and more into it and to the point where they're getting up out of their chairs and they're dancing, which really, I've been playing in pubs and clubs for decades. And as you rarely see that people sit around, they want to converse, whatever, but to be in an environment like this and with people my own age and all of a sudden they're getting out of their chairs and you see this far more often than I do, what does that tell you? What is that doing to you? I know what it does for me.

Kelly Morstad ([10:42](#)):

I know what it does for me too. And I think that's been one of the most interesting things that come out of this. When I first started saying to musicians, look, I am a member of this group. They're getting tired of me as the only musician, and I think you would enjoy it. And the first response is, well, first it's the middle of the day, and secondly, what are they paying and that kind of stuff, and how am I going to get anybody to join? But I can't tell you that I know of a musician who didn't come once and say, whenever

you need me and I can be available, I'll be part of this. And I think what has been inadvertently discovered here is the reciprocity of musician to performer to audience and audience to musician. It's an engagement level that you don't get when there's VTS in the room or the Calgary flames on TV or the kind of things that as musicians we deal with when we're performing live in here, there's total immersion. And I think as performers, we get more out of it and the idea that they get more out of it, and then you get on this circle of satisfaction of the group that it is deeply moving. It really is.

[\(12:11\)](#):

There's times I'm up there and I watch a caregiver come in to pick up a partner, and the partner may be somebody that is quite advanced and they will make eye contact and suddenly they're dancing like teenagers, and this could be, I don't know, months, years, how long has it been since they looked at each other that way? So you end up kind of adjusting your set list to probe the memories to see what connects. And you've seen it, right? There's certain songs where people will suddenly look up as if some part of their brain has been re-triggered to a moment, and they're in that moment. And the pathway, as I understand it, with no clinical expertise at all of music, whether it's audible or triggering a memory or the words to a song can kind of reawaken things in our brain where suddenly something that was forgotten has been found by another path. And I think music is one of the most effective tools for doing that to discover places that are blocked by the disease.

Mike Sullivan [\(13:27\)](#):

Well, as a musician, I agree with you. I mean, I have the luxury of a lot of people now where I work from home. And ever since Covid, I worked from home and I have a guitar in my office that I rarely pick it up because I don't quite like this guitar. But I will go downstairs, get a coffee in the main floor or whatever, and if I'm working through something in my mind, there's a couple of other guitars and I have other instruments in the house, different places in the house, and there's one guitar I have that's really beat up, but I love the sound of it now. I walk by and I'll pick that one up and I'll just plunk for maybe it could be 10 seconds, could be two minutes. And by the time I put that thing down, I know what I'm going to do.

[\(14:12\)](#):

I haven't even thought work, but I just went somewhere else entirely. But it just seems that it got the creative process flowing again because I was doing something totally different, but it was creative. And now I go back to my office and I work on what I have to get done, but it changes the firings in the brain, obviously. And I mean, I don't know what I would do without music, and yet my wife will find it peculiar. Here I am, a guy who's been playing music his whole life. If you get in my car or in my truck or we drive somewhere, I never have the radio on ever. I don't listen to music, I just don't. And yet I get a lot out of it. But when I'm driving, I am driving. I'm not thinking about music. But you're right, it does something.

[\(15:02\)](#):

And I'm sure there's studies of this, and I'm sure I've seen it at some point where they have a CT scan of a person listening to music and the brain is firing in different ways that it's got to be rejuvenating. It has to be. And here I am, and I can tell you myself and it, we've witnessed this. I've witnessed it. And even just recently, the last time I was performing, I have to take a minute here because I'm a volunteer and the gentleman I play with, Don and Wayne, they're volunteering as well. They're retired and they have a little bit more free time than I do. But my employer, we put a policy in place a couple of years back that allows my staff and me, our staff to go out and volunteer, I think it's 16 hours per year or something to that nature, and allows me to get out every quarter and do this.

[\(15:55\)](#):

And I see this firsthand. I see the people benefiting from this. And sometimes, and I'm not going to lie, sometimes it's like, oh, I got to go to YouQuest here this afternoon. How am I going to do this? And I go, because I have to and it's scheduled, but I'm involved with something else. And I get there, and when I come home, my wife says to me, it had to be good. I said it was, it's a moving experience. You see people coming into this room that, I hate to use the word catatonic, but there is an element to that and to a degree for some people, some of the folks there, and then all of a sudden they come alive and we were part of that. And you said, make every day a great day. And we were part of that. So I'm very thankful that I get to do this, and I'm very thankful that we have this policy in place that we get to give back to our communities and we get to help people. And what you're doing by organizing this and recognizing this, where do you think this can go? Right now it's just in Calgary, but there's no borders on health and safety here. It can go anywhere.

Kelly Morstad [\(17:15\)](#):

Yeah. Well, there's a lot to unpack in what you just said, Mike, this notion of the creativity in our lives, wherever it comes from and how it affects our employment performance. And I would venture that I got immersed in music when I was 45. I didn't play opposite of you, but when I started playing, all of a sudden my job performance became far more interesting because the creative side of how you look at things was awakened and the right brain starts coming in. Interestingly enough in meetings, that's a more valued brain I found people weren't looking at me from my left brain considerably mediocre meeting, I don't know. But once you're bringing right brain thinking, all of a sudden so many more things become possible. So that's the one thing. But to unpack some of the other things on what you were saying, yeah, the gratification that comes out of fundamentally finding somebody who may have been lost for years. It's like a thrill like few others. And you don't go in there to do that thrill. But I'm constantly having moments in there where sometimes it gets hard to perform because you get choked up by what you're seeing because you're aware that there's been a breakthrough for somebody however long it's going to be that is uncovering something lost in them. And you can go back to your place of work after that and you still do great work, but you've already had a great day.

Mike Sullivan [\(19:09\)](#):

Now, even though dig safe month is the month of April, let's face it, every month is dig safe month as we get into May and June and July, that's when the digging really begins in earnest. In Alberta, once we hit that Victoria Day long weekend, you're out there, you're planting, you're working in the garden. And if you think I'm not digging deep enough, I don't need a request to locate, think again. If you're digging anywhere on your property, click to know what's above and below click before you dig. I can talk about that. But the cows come home, but so you said you have over 15 musicians now, and it started with just you. And how many years ago did this start?

Kelly Morstad [\(19:54\)](#):

We're completing our sixth year since startup. We started at S, and we've been at the Jewish Community Center for the last three or four years. Terrific partners for us. And the program grew from one day to two. We're a startup. We stretched to three and found that we couldn't quite financially support ourselves, so we backed off to two again. And as we're retrenching to keep going, but there's an estimated 1500 people in Calgary alone that have a diagnosis of young onset dementia. Not all of them are appropriate to our program. We've already have discovered that we want people who are able to physically keep up, and that would mean that some of them are just very fit. We can take 'em for hikes

in the morning, and then when you finish, we start in the morning with you, get together, have a coffee. In shockingly good conversations, I mean, when people with dementia are in a room with other people with dementia, it's this peer support and understanding that is so powerful.

[\(21:01\)](#):

And so while we have a couple recreational therapists and a host of volunteers, the dialogue around people who are dealing with dementia has been shockingly informative. And from those typical sessions with a coffee and a muffin, whatever, we head off on a hike, take advantage of all the beauty of Calgary. I mean the nature of the healer. Well, it certainly is this case because they finish a morning where they've had a robust workout, love to go to a lunch place, and the lunch place, obviously it can be a pub or it can be a restaurant, or we went to Sentara last week and watch them make meals, the chef. It was phenomenal. But at the end of that, they come back, usually some activity, but then we hit 'em with music and it's live performance. It's not up there singing this little light of mine on a guitar. It's bands like yours that are paid bands performing everywhere. And what I like to say to musicians is, look, if you're going to rehearse once a week anyway, put a set together and bring it to YouQuest and give yourself a chance to play these music, see what's happening, get the feel for it. You can try songs, you write, whatever, but you go there for true performance. We have lighting. We have a great PA system. That place is the Rockies music scene in Calgary, right through Covid, right?

Mike Sullivan [\(22:30\)](#):

As you talk

Kelly Morstad [\(22:31\)](#):

About everybody shutting down during Covid, we were just cruising right through. We were best thing in town going on. I think we've had, over the course of the six years, Mike, I think we've had about 350 performances, live performances, and the music has discovered a lot of things in people. They come up to you afterwards and they can be coherently talking about how much they love Bob Seeger or that time that they were rocking with their buddies in the high school parking lot listening to Trooper or something like that. Those

Mike Sullivan [\(23:04\)](#):

Moments. And it comes back to them, right?

Kelly Morstad [\(23:06\)](#):

Yeah. They tell you all about it. They tell you all about it, and then the next time you see them, it's a different thing. But for those moments, everybody's equal, right? Music is a great equalizer.

Mike Sullivan [\(23:18\)](#):

Well, that's an incredible moving thing.

Kelly Morstad [\(23:20\)](#):

Yeah. The caregivers say to me, how do I get to be part of YouQuestion? Well, the way we started it was to give caregivers relief. You can imagine 24 by seven with somebody who is going through various symptom and expressions of their disease, how fatiguing and that could be. So our goal was to give caregivers a day for themselves, and that's pretty much how it's worked. But we're finding more and more caregivers saying, you know what? There's nothing better than spending a great day with my

spouse and coming home and actually being able to talk about it with them. So our volunteer community has been just fantastic. And YouQuest, last year we had over 5,300 volunteer hours, 5,300 volunteer hours were given to you. Quest. It is considering that we're looking after at the moment about 25 participants. That's extraordinary overlap. But what we found is that volunteers get as much therapy, the staff do we all just benefit musicians? Do we all benefit at the end of the day from the outpouring of goodwill, kindness, and commitment to a good

Mike Sullivan ([24:33](#)):

Day? Now, Kelly, you're absolutely right, and to give the caregivers that break. But it's interesting, like you said, I'm seeing more caregivers attending now, these YouQuest performances, live music performances. And I think they're getting something out of it too, because they're seeing their spouse really come back and come alive and they get to enjoy it with them. And so to witness that as well, it's not just the people who are going through this but their partner, right? I mean, this is not an easy thing. This is a very hard thing, and I'm not sure if you know the stats on dementia, but for me, I've been fortunate that the majority of my family hasn't been hit with, well, no, we have not been hit with early onset dementia in later years. It's a little bit more common and some family members have gone through that or are going through it, and

[\(25:34\)](#):

So far so good. But when you see people of your own age and even younger, you're there to support each other. I mean, throughout life, it doesn't matter what you're doing. We're there for each other and nobody's an island and everybody needs a hand and everybody needs to be lifted. And so for me to be part of the community that's doing that means a great deal to me. And I have to thank you for seeing an opportunity here to make a difference. It is clearly making a difference. And when I came home the last time we played about 10 days ago, my wife, she was going to say, I could see, I could see it. She was, how was it? She didn't even bother saying You had a good day. And I really did. I said, there was somebody there had had a massive breakthrough.

[\(26:32\)](#):

They hadn't smiled in a very long time. And that day they did, and not a very long time. And we take that for granted, just the ability to smile, smile a nice sunny day. You see your grandsons or you see something and you smile to not have smiled for months and months and months and then all of a sudden to smile again. There's a connection there that we just take for granted. And it really moved me beyond whatever. And this is why I wanted to have you on our podcast today to talk about early onset dementia, but more so to talk about what's out there that if you are going through this, you're not alone. Maybe you can speak to that for a moment if you're not aware of this. Maybe you can talk to that for a moment.

Kelly Morstad ([27:27](#)):

As a small organization, we aren't really well known, and it has been word of mouth by word of mouth, by some doctors and so forth that we get references to. But awareness of us has been critical. And that's why I'm so delighted to have the opportunity to speak with you about YouQuest today. So in my experience, my mother had dementia and she was reasonably young. And when I reflect back as she was going through it, how little I knew about dementia, and I would be typical of just about anybody. You first off go through the denials, whatever you've got going on, scraping your car or you got lost on the way here or something like that, and those kinds of things. And you don't want to admit that you're seeing these things. And so ultimately it took her life. But I thought about how I would do things

differently if I knew now or if I knew then what I know now. And in the end, I would've done a lot more fun things with her, right? I have to know she was dealing with her private terrors, so that would be the solution for just about anybody, whatever their health situation is. But in her case, that's something that kind of guided me. And when I got involved early on with my friend who had it, I didn't need to guide him much. He was committed to a good time.

[\(29:16\)](#):

But what we did find was his attitude about it was infectious and that other people coming in almost always with real tentativeness coming into the program, they haven't left home perhaps confidently without their spouse for a long time. Spouses dropping 'em off the first day is frequently a traumatic thing. But as they start finding their way, you get these breakout moments like what you witnessed last week with one of the ladies that's been with us six months. Her state was certainly one of non expressive response to outside stimulus. And to watch her when you were blasting out, I dunno, the traveling wilbury or something like that, she stands up and shuffles her way onto the dance floor and we're all watching her and she shuffles along onto the dance floor and it became evident that that was her dancing. And God bless, one of the volunteers went up and grabbed her hands and started shaking them with her. And all of a sudden her steps got bigger and suddenly she was moving as more physically familiar. And next thing you know, there's a little bit of a change in her expression and then the smile. And then by God, we saw our teeth and it was like this earthquake hit us. It was phenomenal. And I doubt that there's been a performance of the traveling wilburys since then or before that that affected somebody like that.

Mike Sullivan [\(30:51\)](#):

That instance of somebody all of a sudden coming alive and the music has hit them, they're in the moment, it's all come together, really is what it comes down to. Everything has just come together for them again. Whereas prior to that moment, we will never know what that person was going through, what was going on in their mind. Were they way inside there trying to get out and was a door opened or we'll never know. We'll never know what that looked like or felt like for them, but you can witness what it did for them in that moment. And all of a sudden, like I said, the top of our podcast today, to see somebody come alive again and be the person that they so desperately probably want to be again, there's nothing more moving than that. Kelly, I want to thank you for being on this episode of our podcast today, the Safety Moment.

[\(31:54\)](#):

It's a bit of a deviation from our regular health and the safety topics, but I wanted to talk about this for a couple of reasons, and one of 'em was that we volunteer and the ability to give back. And if you work for somebody or a corporation that allows you to do that, it gives you time to do that. I strongly urge you to try and do so and find the time. Not everybody can I get it, but if you can find the time and give back to the community, you may not see right away the way I've seen right away the impact of that of your time, but trust me, it's there. The impact of your time is going to be felt. And the second reason is early onset dementia. It's a real thing. And if you think maybe one of your spouse or your partner or whomever may or you might be feeling the effects of that, talk to your doctor about it. And as Kelly said earlier, it could just be forgetfulness. And I do the same thing. Where did I put my keys? I can't find 'em. We all do that. This is more than that. And if you're worried about it, then talk to your doctor and if your partner or somebody is going through it, and maybe this is something you want to learn about, reach out to you. Quest. Kelly, what is the website you have for you? Quest

Kelly Morstad [\(33:19\)](#):

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YouQuest YOU, quest.ca.

Mike Sullivan ([33:23](#)):

And there's a lot of information on there about what you guys do, right?

Kelly Morstad ([33:26](#)):

There's information. There's some great pictures about the activities that we engage in and reach out and we can get back in touch with you and know that you're not alone and that if you're going through this, there's a lot of good days still in front of you.

Mike Sullivan ([33:42](#)):

Kelly, thank you so much for doing this. I sincerely appreciate it.

Kelly Morstad ([33:45](#)):

Thank you, Mike. It's my pleasure. And let's keep pushing creative for our mental health. Honestly, you leave room for that in your life. There's a whole bunch of other things just start looking a little bit easier to deal with.

Mike Sullivan ([33:59](#)):

That's going to wrap things up on the podcast. I want to thank our producers stories and strategies, and I hope you choose to follow this podcast on any directory you're listening on. And please do leave a rating. It means a lot to us. You can follow us on formerly Twitter, now X at Utility Safety, and we're also on Instagram and Facebook. If you'd like to send us a note, maybe you have an episode idea, email us at info@utilitysafety.ca and put podcast in the subject hitted, big bold Letters. I'm Mike Sullivan, president of Utility Safety Partners. Click to know what's above and below. One click costs you nothing. Not clicking could cost you everything.