

THE DEBENHAM PROJECT



Dementia - Caring for the Carers

Hello everyone, another month and the project continues to thrive. It is now becoming well known throughout Suffolk (and beyond) and is increasingly being asked to give talks and presentations to professional groups and meetings. In addition we have been included in **The Suffolk Ideas Cookbook** – a collection of the most significant collaborative projects in the county – www.suffolkideascookbook.org.uk. The project also contributed to the debate on Radio Suffolk about the impact of the difficult financial decisions that are facing the County Council and how projects such as ours can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of support services. Although this sort of activity takes time and effort, it is very important as it not only helps us with our funding, but also encourages other communities to follow our lead.

However, the trustees and I place what we are doing directly for carers and those they care for as our highest priority. They are “What it is all about”.

On June 26th we all enjoyed our annual **Garden Luncheon Party** (this is actually the 2nd!) when about 60 of those who are directly involved as volunteers, carers, or cared-for joined us to celebrate “One year on”. Wonderful weather, wonderful company, and wonderful food. I just want to thank Mike and Lyn Rouse for their generosity and unstinting support.

Our first **Awareness Campaign** has now finished. It started with our volunteers “spreading the word” using the “personal touch”. Then, leaflets were distributed through the Surgery and the Pharmacy, the Post Office and the Library, and posters began appearing in various key locations. We hope that all the parish councils in our area have also started to help – the district and county councils generously offered to distribute our material. Ruth and Steven Boulton from Websters Newsagents, and Stephen Tuckwell from the Southolt area, have kindly delivered them with the newspapers to the villages outside Debenham. Volunteers have dropped them through the letterboxes of almost every house in Debenham itself. We have already had 15 carers contacting us to ask for information and quite a few are getting involved in our activities. We have also been able to recruit some new volunteers. Other approaches linked to The NHS and to Adult Care are being considered.

If you know of someone who might benefit from our support please gently encourage them to “make contact”. This is not about them actively seeking support but to let them know help is available when they need it and, hopefully, to avoid a crisis.

Last month, Julia Dawson of the Alzheimer's Society ran a course of 4 **information and advice** sessions for family carers. They covered areas such as understanding dementia, finance & legal issues, gadgets for the house, who is there to help, and looking after yourself. The feedback from the participants was that it proved very worthwhile and enjoyable – so many thanks to Julia and her speakers.

As with all community projects we must always put in a lot of hard work to obtain the **money** necessary to run and develop the services. We have been very fortunate that the Mid Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership generously provided our first year's funding. We have now submitted bids to enable the project to continue and expand over the coming two years. Despite the current serious financial constraints, especially in the local authorities, I am confident that we will succeed - but we must not "count our chickens".

Several more private individuals have come forward to offer their financial help. I can't thank them enough – in difficult times to say "I want to help" is precious – thank you.

Last year the Project was in its infancy and who could have foretold how it would have grown. It seems incredible that something that started from such small beginnings could now be recognized across the county of Suffolk as an important contribution to tackling the massive problems that face carers for those with dementia, and those that they care for – we have been blessed by tremendous goodwill in the local authorities, NHS and the charities.

As always, thanks to all in Debenham, the surrounding villages, the local authorities, and our partners for all their support.

If you would like to know more please see our display in the Post Office; or ring 01728 862003; or call in at the Library Resource Centre or visit www.the-debenham-project.org.uk

Lynden