

Progress Report – 3 Years On

October 2012

It is just three years since the public launch of The Debenham Project at the Leisure Centre. At that time we had only just about managed to put together a couple of rudimentary services and a website (that didn't work on the night!). On the other hand, we had already captured the attention of some key people in the local authorities, the NHS Mental Health Trust, the GP practice, the charities, and significant local organisations. And, of course, we were all so aware of the tremendous goodwill in Debenham and the surrounding villages.

The project's clear aim then was, and remains, to provide practical and emotional support to all family carers in the Debenham area who are caring for someone with dementia, and also to those for whom they care. The only rule to be applied in seeking to achieve this was to "get on and do something". Over the subsequent years we have tried to keep you all in touch with how the project has been developing, and its successes, through our regular newsletters and magazine articles. However, three years seemed an appropriate time for us to look back and summarise our achievements. This month we have published the 2nd edition of "This is: The Debenham Project" which you will all receive, and which describes the project and tells its story to date. Together, I know that we have achieved something special – a model for other rural towns and villages in Suffolk and the UK to think about and, hopefully, try to do something similar.

But it doesn't tell the whole story. It doesn't try to detail the actual numbers involved. So, I have put together a, sort of, picture of the project's achievements in directly supporting family carers, those they care for, and a number of elderly frail residents in Debenham and the surrounding area. It is approximate in as much as a few participate in more than 1 activity, there are a few that might have been counted twice because of the way they appear in the database, and over the past year or so we have had some leave due to death or moving out of the area. Anyway, this is the best I can do to give a rough but representative picture.

Total number of families to whom we have provided some level of support ranging from advice and information to regular participation in one or more activities: 65. This is almost 60% of our current estimate of the number of people (110) with dementia in our catchment area and should be compared with a guideline average for the percentage of those with or seeking a diagnosis of 36% across Suffolk (and for the UK nearer 30%).

Total numbers of family carers, cared-for, and others participating in our regular activities:	75 - 85
Lunches (monthly for 3 clubs)	20 -25
Carers Club and Info Cafe (fortnightly)	15 - 20
CAMEO (fortnightly)	15 – 18
Fit Club (weekly)	18 – 20
Total number of "client sessions" per month: (e.g. 15 people attending a fortnightly activity = 30 "client sessions" per month)	175

It is difficult to measure other services such as the weekend Confidential Telephone Support Line, the routine calls coming throughout the week, the Advice and Information Centre, and linking carers to professional and statutory services. They are very difficult to quantify. For example the Confidential Telephone Line has had only a handful of calls but family carers continue to say how important it is to have someone there if they really need to unload, and the attendance of professional support workers at the Carers Club and Info Cafe has greatly improved successful access to professional services.

Individuals along with friends and family members make their own decisions about how to cope in difficult times, depending on their unique set of circumstances. "One size does not necessarily fit all".

On behalf of the Trustees of The Debenham Project I would like to thank all our volunteers for their goodwill and perseverance. The success of the project has been entirely due to the numbers of people who have, and continue to, offer their time, effort, skills, experience and wisdom. Many will have experience of other communities and how they function, and we always look for new thoughts and ideas. An understanding of "rural issues" is particularly welcome! We would also like to think that we are approachable to be listeners, and perhaps offer advice and practical help should the time come when we, ourselves, might need it.

Periodically, I look through our list of volunteers and am so very grateful for the tremendous goodwill it represents:

Total who have offered their support in one way or another and are "on our books"	107
Those who have provided actual time and effort to date.	50+
Those who are "in training" so to speak e.g. the volunteer carers group.	15
Those who currently, or have, regularly helped out in activities and running the project.	35

We try to have a lot of people who do a little rather than a few who do it all - and to have people with a wide range of skills to be able to call on occasionally.

These are the statistics and whilst they are important the true measure for a community-based project such as ours lies in the difference that it has made to individual family carers and for whom they care. I regularly receive unsolicited thanks but one that I received recently really touched me deeply.

Dear Lynden,

Please accept this cheque – I am sure it will help towards postage on your very welcome newsletter – a small token of my heartfelt thanks for the compassionate way you and Vicki helped me find my way out of a very dark place earlier this year. Your personal approach, and especially the follow up 'phone calls, was in stark contrast to the pseudo-compassion of officialdom.

Thanks to the Debenham Project, Crossroads, and Age Concern I am now moving forward and handling things in my own way, and feel so much happier knowing you are just a 'phone call away.

How is Nellie?

Sincerely, -----

I believe that this says exactly what we are all about.

Lynden Jackson (Chairman)