



The Debenham Project



It is now just over 5 years since the public meeting took place which was pivotal in the way that Debenham and its surrounding villages are addressing the challenges of their ageing population. That meeting led to a unique project in which our community has taken responsibility for the welfare and support of those who are family carers looking after someone with dementia, and of meeting the health and social needs of those that they care for.

The Debenham Project has, over the ensuing years, developed a comprehensive range of local volunteer-based services which “draw in” the best professional support. The breadth and quality of the facilities are now “second to none” in the County of Suffolk (and perhaps the UK) and will continue to be expanded and developed in the future.

The project continues to be recognised as an example of innovation and best practice across Suffolk and beyond. It challenges the public sector to respond by initiating, encouraging and supporting its “roll out” to all rural and semi-urban communities. The Debenham Project is established and will continue to evolve and develop its caring approach (Caring in the Community, Caring for the Community, and Caring by the Community) throughout the coming years. Our plans are ambitious, and our aspirations are governed only by:

“If it is not good enough for my mother, it is not good enough”

A great measure of the success of the project is that we all just “get on and do our bit” and thereby it has evolved with the minimum of bureaucracy and the maximum of goodwill and motivation. So it has become accepted as part of our regular pattern of life. Perhaps though, we need an occasional reminder of how special each and everyone’s contributions are – volunteers, participants, professionals, support workers, etc. I am often asked to give presentations about The Debenham Project and sometimes amazed to realize the full extent of everything that goes on.

Since our very early days the Project has continued to evolve so that now we have provided or arranged a very wide range of help and support within the community:

Advice and information	Signposting to professional services	Confidential telephone helpline
Carers Club and Info Café	CAMEO activities and social afternoons	Lunch Clubs
Debenham on Call emergency respite support	Carers Co-op professional carers transport	Volunteer
Liaison with professional agencies	Dementia awareness training	Professional and voluntary carer training
Clinical support	Fit Club exercise therapy	Research

This has all been achieved due entirely to the tremendous goodwill and freely given support of not only our volunteers, but also of all those professional organisations – the local authorities, the NHS, the charities, and the support agencies – together with local groups, donors, and the community at large.

Highlights of the Year 2013 / 2014 and for the Future

Dementia Friendly Communities:

Debenham became one of the UK's earliest dementia friendly communities.

The Debenham project featured when The Prime Minister's Challenge came to the Eastern Region

Debenham Parish Council took the lead in promoting dementia awareness and dementia friendliness

This year's campaign – "Dementia – Be Aware - Be Positive" focuses on shops, businesses and schools

Funding:

Finances are still good but "times are changing" – annual cost £8,500

Grants from Sports Relief and AXA

Debenham's Pop-Up Department Store shows our businesses are coming together to support the project

Private donations are so important and gratefully received

Research:

"The Experiences and Perceptions of Family Carers in our Community"

"Putting it all Together - a System for Care"

Working with Others:

Healthwatch – Mental Health Focus Group

Publicity and presentations across Suffolk and throughout the region

Dementia Learning Hubs

Social Care Institute for Excellence

Associated support groups

Statistics:

Volunteers continue to offer their time - 100+ and still counting

Fortnightly Cameo, Carers Club and info Café, weekly Fit Club and 2 monthly Lunch Clubs

Overall, near to full capacity of about 200 person sessions per month

Support to over 60% of families coping with dementia