



Hello everyone,

In caring for someone with memory loss and dementia, when all is said and done, it is generally the simple things and the personal things that can make the most difference. Over the last 9 years our experience in the project has amply confirmed this, and we can think of the Carers Club, CAMEO, Way Back When, our lunch clubs, Fit Club and so on. They informally feed well-being, friendship, sharing without stigma of any sort. One problem, however, has always concerned me – how those who are living with the impact of dementia on their lives can keep their close contact with friends and relations when they need them most. Sadly, it is very common that friends who called in regularly stop coming, relations who loved a family party become a bit reluctant, visits to someone in a care home fall off, and others who would stop and chat in the High Street can only spare a brief “hello”. Why is this?

Well, of course, the person with the illness has changed and is no longer the person that they knew, but very often it is because much of our normal conversation is about everyday events and the people we have recently met. When someone’s short term memory is frail and they have become repetitive, such “chatting” becomes hard work and usually descends into embarrassing silences. Visits get cut short. However, often the long term memories of those with dementia are amazingly intact and they greatly enjoy reminiscing about the “old days” and their past adventures, – Who doesn’t! Which is why I was delighted to learn about an initiative called “Please Tell Me” created by Julia Jones.

Within the Project we have always suggested that families gather together old photos, music, objects, personal memories, etc that have meant a lot and can be used to stimulate conversations. What Julia has created is a very simple way of not only helping a family carer to start this but also to make it something that they can enjoy doing with the person they love. It is just a booklet – a scrap book – of pages that can capture the best bits of the past with individual pages that can be filled in together – a “Life History”. But it can be much more than that. Anyone, friend, neighbour, carer, or relative, can be involved and contribute when they visit or simply use it to open up a conversation. So, over the next year we will be working with Julia, thanks to a grant from the Dementia Together Service, to develop her ideas, and to explore how we can get them into use in, not only Debenham, but also in hospitals, care homes and communities throughout Suffolk.

Yet again, I am so grateful for everyone’s support. Particular thanks go firstly for two very generous donations of £200 – one from The Forge Church and the other from a private donor, and secondly, to our volunteer drivers – like the NHS it is proving to be a very busy time for them – and thirdly, to Roger Cockerton for preparing, and Charles Rickards for auditing our accounts – these require a great deal of effort and time and their help is so much appreciated.

With best wishes, Lynden

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