

8th July 2010



Dedicated to giving practical and emotional support to all in the Debenham area
who care for those with dementia

Breaking the Mould

The Debenham Project

“Dementia – Caring for the Carers”

“A Vision of Caring”

Integrating Health and Social Care in a Rural Community

“A Social Enterprise”

On the 23rd of April last year a public meeting was held in Debenham, a large village (or very small country town depending on your viewpoint) situated in mid Suffolk. The subject: Dementia. It had been initiated by a meeting of those concerned with parochial care in the local church but it was very quickly recognised as “something the whole community* needs to be aware of”. The senior partner of the local GP group practice, an eminent retired consultant neurologist, and a retired mental health (ASW) social worker had offered to talk about the problem that dementia presented to a rural community, and they hoped for an audience of more than “a few”. There were over 70 (standing room only!) who came to listen and discuss what might be done. Three important things emerged which are the key watchwords of The Debenham Project.

1. That there was an enormous amount of **goodwill** towards carers of those with symptoms of dementia and for whom they care.
2. That we should be focused and “**get on and do something**” about the problem that dementia presents.
3. That we should have a long term **vision** to provide high quality local care for all frail elderly people.

22 local people offered to help “there and then” – “tell me what to do”

The Debenham Project was publicly launched on October 6th 2009 with presentations by senior figures in the project, the County Council, the NHS and the charities. In less than 6 months the project had, by then, initiated a set of services which included:

1. an advice and information centre,
2. a confidential telephone support line,
3. family style luncheon clubs,
4. a medication management and advice service,
5. activities and social sessions, and
6. A website.

Since then, The Debenham Project has developed and evolved so that there are now some 50 active volunteers and another 30 who have offered their help when it is needed. More are offering support day by day. The project has developed a profile throughout Suffolk and has been acknowledged as an important pilot and significant contributor to the implementation of Suffolk's Dementia Strategy.

The project's approach is for the community to take the lead - volunteers providing local care services and drawing in, in partnership and collaboration, the best professional skills from the local authorities, the NHS, and the charities – a uniquely different direction to the traditional “service provider” model :-

A “Social Enterprise” focused on the individual carer and those they care for

Over the next year The Debenham Project will develop a comprehensive set of dementia support services in integration (more than collaboration!)** with the professional agencies (the local authorities, the NHS, and the Third Sector) and not only demonstrate “best practice” but provide a model that can be applied across rural communities throughout the UK. The power of the approach is that it is local, it is familiar, and it is personal.

Caring by the Community – Caring for the Community

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Caring in the Community

The cost? The core costs for the first year, funded by a grant from the District Council, will be about £7,500. Years 2 and 3 will be about £9,000 pa – and much of this is for the ‘development’ of the project, as opposed to running costs. This represents less than £1.50 pa per head of the population (6,500) within the catchment area of The Debenham Project.

“A Vision of Caring”

So far, The Debenham Project has focused and concentrated on tackling the problems that dementia presents for Debenham and its surrounding villages: Dementia – Caring for the Carers. However, the project has taken up the challenge, set at that first meeting, of developing a vision for the future: A “Vision of Caring”.

A “Vision of Caring”, what does it mean? It means that no one should have to move away from their family, friends, and neighbours because they have become frail and need help. It means that the community that they have been part of doesn't want to lose them. It means that their family and grandchildren want to be able to “pop in” and see them whenever they want. It means that they are able to call in at the shops and cafe and remain valuable members

of the community. It means that the best social and health care should be available locally and emergency hospital admissions limited to only the most serious of conditions. It means that 7, 10, 14 miles is too far to access health and social care services.

The research and business modelling carried out by the project has established that this can all be achieved by integrating health and social care on a local basis. The savings to the NHS and the local authorities will more than outweigh the financial investment in the local community but, perhaps much more importantly, the approach will provide a step change in the quality of care provided to the elderly frail.

A “Model for Care” for 2015 and beyond

The project is aiming to develop an innovative community owned and led scheme – a “Social Enterprise” - which will draw together all aspects of care in a seamless and collaborative design. It will demonstrate the power of the NHS, Adult Care, the charities, local volunteers, etc. working together to meet the individual care needs of the elderly. Its philosophy owes much to “The Swedish Way” in being holistic and person-centred yet it differs in that it is firmly based and managed by and within the community.

“The local community is best placed to know the needs of its members for, after all, we know most of them personally”

The principle is that domiciliary, community-health, day, very-sheltered, intensive-residential, secure and nursing care will be integrated so that as someone becomes frailer the best facilities and services are available within the community. The same familiar people who care for them – family, volunteers, and professionals – will continue to care for them, no matter their needs. Each will be supported as an individual with individual needs – someone who is known as a friend, neighbour, and relative.

The cost? The development cost of the scheme will be approximately £10.1M and the annual operating costs in the region of £2.0M. The financial model shows that the scheme will provide significant savings in both local authority and NHS spending.

*The “community” or “catchment population” for the project is considered for planning purposes to be within 4 miles of the centre of Debenham and is estimated to be a total of 6,500 people.

** The Debenham Project fully acknowledges the remarkable involvement, support and encouragement that it has received from the County and District councils, The NHS, and the charities.