

The Debenham Project

(Dementia - Caring for the Carers)

Our project to support carers advances apace with continuing work to set up the initial services and activities that were mentioned in last month's newsletter and lots of contacts being developed throughout the Local Authority, the NHS, the Charitable Support agencies, and of course in and around Debenham. There seems to be so much goodwill and genuine support for the Project. Our group of potential volunteers has grown from just over 20 in May to almost 40. Not everyone can devote a lot of time but, on average, people are saying that they would like to help with a few hours weekly or fortnightly. With this amount of goodwill I can see us being really able to make a difference.

We have now agreed our mission statement i.e. what the project is all about:

To provide practical and emotional support to all those in and around Debenham who care for someone with Dementia. To provide a range of volunteer based services as well as enabling ready access to professional and charitable support, and quality information and advice.

This is important because it allows us to go ahead with setting up a trust and obtaining charitable status, vital for both securing our initial finances, secure our legal status, and be able to claim back tax on donations.

Our task leaders are "getting to grips" with getting our early services and activities "up and running". At this time of year it is difficult to get everyone together but we are confident that we will be able meet our September target. The process of collating all your responses to the Volunteer Questionnaire is under way, so that we can link you up to the task areas in which you think that you would like to be involved. It is not easy to balance all the responses with the requests from the task leaders, but bear with us, it is happening and you will be hearing from task leaders very shortly. Most of you have responded by completing your questionnaires - please could those who have yet to reply let me have it soon, even if you may not be able to offer help at this time but may be able to do so at some time in the future.

So far, for Stage 1, the following activities / services are being set up:

1. Telephone Support Line

Idrone Brittain

The confidential telephone support line providing an understanding and listening ear for carers who are finding it hard to cope with the practical and emotional difficulties of caring for someone with dementia. Also providing a "first port of call" to get information and to find out how to access support services. Staffed by trained volunteers.

2. Activities and Social Support Sessions

Peter Holme

A regular series of sessions to encourage both social and intellectual activity, and to give carers opportunities to meet and interact with other carers. They are designed to cater for a wide range of interests, and physical and mental capabilities and to assist in reducing isolation from the community as a whole . This is being developed jointly with CAMEO, St Mary's Church and Suffolk Libraries

3. Luncheon Club

Joy Walton

A luncheon club inclusive of all the elderly and their carers but with a clear remit to support the carers of those with Dementia, and an emphasis on maintaining social contact in the community. Catering for between four and eight persons it is an opportunity to develop and enjoy friendships in a 'family' environment. This is being developed jointly with Age Concern.

5. Information and Advice Centre

Lynden Jackson

Prominent and easy access to quality information and support including displays of up-to-date information leaflets, booklets and available activities/services, access through our website to extensive and accredited information, and a personal service to guide carers in their requests for information and in making contact with support agencies. This is being developed jointly with Suffolk Libraries.

6. Website Support and Content Management

Chris Bishop

The Project's website will be central to the success of the endeavour. It will not only give carers ready access to information, experience, advice, contacts, and available services and activities, but also to professional support from charitable, local authority and NHS agencies.

Other ideas are beginning to be thought about e.g. Carers Clinics, a Story Board and a Good Neighbour scheme But these will probably have to wait until we have successfully achieved Stage 1.

The one question that is asked whenever I talk to anyone "in the business" is "have you any funding?" My answer is that we are very fortunate that St. Mary's has granted us free use of Dove Cottage (within reason and we must not outstay our welcome!), Suffolk Libraries is backing us with resources and professional time, and we are most grateful for a most generous private donation. Together, these will enable us to set up and run our Stage 1 services and activities. However, we will need to raise funds in order to maintain our work and expand it as time goes on. Much of this, I hope, will come from local endeavour (to strengthen our "Caring for our Community" theme) but we will also be asking Suffolk County Council and other funding agencies for help. The omens are good but don't hold me to that as we know all too well about the current financial situation.

Which brings me nicely to our contacts with other organisations and especially those with whom the project would like to work in providing help and support to carers in Debenham. The Debenham Project is beginning to be known in a wide range of relevant organisations. We are developing good and cooperative relations with Suffolk Mental Health Trust, Age Concern, Suffolk Family Carers, The Alzheimer's Society, The British Legion, Sanctuary Housing, The Debenham Surgery, The Debenham Post Office, The Debenham Pharmacy and Suffolk County Council.

Regarding Suffolk CC, they are the major influence, together with the NHS, on the care and support that carers and those with Dementia can receive from the state - in terms of social, medical and nursing care. Their direct and indirect input and involvement in our project will have a massive effect on the level of support that we can give. So far, their interest in the Debenham Project has been very positive and we are developing a number of important contacts. Our hope is that the project will be adopted as a pilot project - an example of what can be achieved by a community led approach - and that the Council will help us to demonstrate that we can really meet our objectives.

From our research we can now estimate that the number of people with Dementia who are resident within a radius of 3 miles of Debenham is about 70 and this number is likely to increase to more than 150 in the next 25 years. We know that for the close relatives and friends who provide most of the care it is a constant, emotional and very stressful occupation. We want to make sure that whatever can be done to help and support them will be done, through our own voluntary efforts, by encouraging and drawing in services from charitable agencies, and by working with the County Council, social services and the NHS.

Advance Notice: There will be a Public Launch of The Debenham Project at the beginning of October when our initial services have been developed. Everyone will be welcome to come and hear all about it. For further information contact Lynden Jackson on 01728 860348 or l.jackson225@btinternet.com or Mary Morley on 01728860365 or marymorley@btinternet.com