



Newsletter - December 15th 2009

This will be the last newsletter of 2009 and I wanted to end the year on a high note. In fact, I could not have hoped for better. From some fairly casual remarks in a meeting in February **The Debenham Project** has taken wings and is flying. It seems incredible that from such an insignificant start we have managed to capture the imagination of Suffolk. Don't think that this is just me trying to encourage you - I get feedback from all over that "Debenham is trying to do something for CARERS", that "it is UNIQUE" and that "it has an IDEA" which might just change the way we care for those who may have the symptoms of dementia and, in the longer term, for all who are frail and need the community's support. I know that we can do it, but to do so we will need every drop of your support. At Christmas time what better pledge can we make but to "care for those who care".

Last month we heard that the Local Strategic Partnership had given the project a grant which was sufficient to cover all our core costs for our first year. Towards the end of the month the Director of Adult Care and Community Services told me that he strongly desired to financially support the project for at least a further 2 years beyond this. I am confident that we need not be concerned that we not be able to "pay our way" in what we are planning to do. However, we still need to raise funds. The Local Authorities are covering our core costs but we can add to this so that we can offer the extra support that so often makes the difference - carers trips, special events, emergency respite, discretionary support grants, etc - and we can prepare and plan for the longer term when we hope to be able to offer comprehensive social, day, very sheltered, secure and nursing care, all within our community - just because someone becomes frail is no reason why they should have to move away from the place and people they know. Amongst other ideas, we are intending have a Tea Dance (period costume optional but would be fun) in April.

The Carers Club and Info Café is a new venture which will be starting on the 6th of January. The Alzheimer's Society and Age Concern have come together, within The Debenham Project, to support carers and those they care for. On the 1st Wednesday of the month they will organise a club which will probably involve activities, talks, events, trips, etc - **but it is entirely up to what the members want**. On the 3rd Wednesday, the afternoon will be very informal - drop in and have a cup of tea or coffee, and if you want some advice or just a chat with a professional outreach worker that's fine - someone is there for you, no more than that.

The Food 'n' Friends lunch clubs are continuing to develop. One club is already well established, another at Coopersfield is planned to start early in the New Year, a third is hoped for in about March, and we are already considering a fourth to follow. Generally, each will provide a family atmosphere for 6 to 8 guests but some eg Coopersfield will also seek to cater for a larger number.

The Confidential Telephone Support Line has already trained its first group of volunteers and will be embarking on the training of the next "cohort" on January

13th. If there is anyone else who wishes to join this group please let me know.

Our referral system is being developed to make sure that we get to know of those carers and cared-for who might benefit from the services and activities being provided under the umbrella of The Debenham Project, and can respond as quickly and fairly as we can. It will be based and managed at the Debenham GP surgery. If you know of anyone who you think might like to either participate in one or more of our services, or just need further information please let Audrey Hart (01728 860248) know and she will make sure it is followed up. Again, please bear with her as setting up such a scheme involves a lot of effort, and it has to be done right to ensure all the essential aspects of confidentiality and data protection are covered.

I have been so touched by the number of you that have offered your practical support to the project. We have recently been trying to make sure that we know what are the sort of things / activities in which you would like to be involved. If you haven't yet responded to Mary's e-mail or letter please do so as soon as you can. Even if you can only help out on an occasional basis, it will help us to know that we can call you when we need to - and for those of you that may be able to devote more than that, we would like to link you to one or more of the services / activities that are being set up. Whatever your talents there is an opportunity to help, but please bear with us as it is not easy to quickly organise so much goodwill - just knowing you are there means that when we can see a need we know who to call.

As you can see from the preceding paragraphs new areas are being planned - also being considered is the "Story Board" area in which we hope to capture the experiences of Carers and those they care for (good, bad and sometimes hilarious) so that others may understand that they are not alone and that they might find ways of coping with the difficult periods as well as improving their overall quality of life. It is also an opportunity for those who are cared for to talk about their memories and for us to appreciate that they still have much to offer. This may be an opportunity for those with journalistic and/or literary skills.

We are also beginning to think about a number of other areas in which we may be able offer more local support to carers eg flexible respite, paid social care, etc. In addition the long term objective of developing integrated social, day, very-sheltered, residential/respite, nursing and secure care for Debenham and its surrounding villages is very much in our minds. The delivery of practical benefits for carers and those they care for must be the priority for the project at this critical stage in its development, but I believe that, in parallel, we must pursue a vision which means that nobody should have to leave the community no matter what their level of frailty may become.

Last July we held a very successful garden party for everyone involved in the project. We are now planning another get-together for volunteers, carers and cared-for in the early New Year. More details as soon as we have fixed a date.

Our presence in Dove Cottage on the Christmas Shopping Evening - I'm sorry that I couldn't be there all the time but Sinta Klaas (Saint Nicholas) had a prior engagement - was very successful as our first exercise in raising awareness of the project. Robert the Ram - "Fill my Tummy and help us Care for the Carers" - made his grand entrance at the Christmas shopping evening. I know his pithy comments will be the subject of much debate and amusement - a potential celebrity if ever I saw one!



Finally, a couple of things that I need to mention. Firstly, POVA which stands for Protection of Vulnerable Adults. I imagine that most of us have been aware of the debate regarding Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks for their work with children, and some of us will have had to undergo such a check at some time or other. Quite rightly, similar checks are required when we might be working with vulnerable adults and especially those who may be encountering mental difficulties. It is sad that these should be necessary but The Debenham Project has to make sure that it meets its legal responsibilities to those who we seek to help. It is not simply a matter of unnecessary beaurocracy - almost all of those who have offered their help to the project I have known personally for many years and I could vouch for them without reservation, the rest, who are so committed to caring, I am sure cannot be of any concern - however, there are very real reasons why we should be prepared to be CRB checked. Firstly, those carers to whom we are seeking to offer support need the reassurance that we have taken all steps to ensure their security, and secondly, whether we like or not, we are required to ensure that we meet all the requirements of the law as an essential part of our charitable status. In this respect, the policy of the project is that everyone who might have regular face to face contact with vulnerable adults, or who may be privy to sensitive personal information about a vulnerable adult, must be CRB checked. For volunteers who are in a background, project development, or supporting role (and those who are providing confidential telephone support) CRB checking will not be required. For those who do need a CRB check please bear with it - there is no suggestion of any concern, only that we must respond to the current legislation and be able to reassure those we support that they have no need to worry.

Secondly, if you have spent your own money on behalf of the project we want to reimburse you. It is important that all the costs of the project are properly accounted for. In addition, spending a few pounds might not be a lot for some, but for others it may be a lot - we don't want anyone to be "out of pocket" - you do more than enough in giving your time. If you wish to anonymously donate your expenses back to the project that would be great (and we would be able to claim an additional 30% in reclaimed tax). However, we do not want you to feel that you must. Now that we are getting our financial system in order a simple expenses claim form can be provided.

A big thank you to everyone and with best wishes for a very happy Christmas and New Year, Lynden

PS don't forget that you can access all our newsletters and much more on the website.

www.the-debenham-project.org.uk