



Newsletter – March 3rd 2012

Hello everyone,

At last the temperature has risen markedly, we have had a few wonderful sunny days, and the spring flowers are forcing their way through. It is a time to grow, and so we are continuing to look forward and help the project to evolve and that means not only getting on and doing things but also being prepared to change direction – to guide but not control – to let things develop naturally. Our aim is to provide the best possible support to our local family carers and those they care for.

“Sometimes things don’t quite work out as you hope”. A year ago we were working with the Suffolk Mental Health Trust to set up a local NHS specialist memory clinic so that patients and carers would not have to travel to Ipswich or Stowmarket to see the consultant. The clinic was also viewed as somewhere anyone could “drop in” to discuss their concerns and needs with a specialist nurse or professional support worker. Our experience over this last year has certainly shown that this sort of clinic is ideal in offering a friendly and welcoming atmosphere minimising stress and confusion in both patient and carer as well as offering immediate contacts for information, advice and support. Although, in its operation it has been a success, the numbers of referrals has been less than we expected whilst the “demand for diagnoses” in Ipswich and the other large towns has increased markedly. The result is that “our” consultant is having to devote all her time to her Ipswich clinics and will no longer be able to come to Debenham. However the Mental Health Trust is committed to the idea of local consulting clinics and will gladly reinstate the facility if referrals from our local GP practices increase. A bit of a disappointment but we have always said that we will try things, and if they don't work as we expect, try something else.

In the meantime we are offering a new approach which goes a long way towards meeting the original hopes. We have trained several volunteers who are happy to accompany carers / patients to their appointments as a “friend” who can help explain things and provide them with information, advice and useful contacts. In addition, carers will still be able to make an appointment to talk confidentially with the specialist nurse or support worker at either our Carers’ Club or Info café. And, by the way, don’t forget that should you happen to need the loan of a wheelchair for a short period of time, then the project can help – all you need to do is call us on 01728 862003.

Two issues that are always high on the agenda are a) the availability of top quality paid personal care in the home, and b) the provision of short-time (2hrs or so) emergency and respite cover. With regard to the former, we shall be seeing if we can set up a “Register of Local Professional Carers and other Domiciliary Help Services” so that when needed we can point families, etc to a number of known local people who can provide the support they are looking for.

As far as providing short-time cover, I was very pleased to be invited by Pam Bell to see what her team in Wickham Market have achieved. She leads yet another excellent example of how a community in Suffolk has come together to “make a difference”. They have fully trained a team of over a dozen volunteer carers who are able to respond to requests for someone to look after someone for a few hours in an emergency or to let their family carer have “a few hours off”. However, there is another great thing about the scheme - the training meets all the standards for the volunteers to become paid domiciliary carers in their own right if they wish to. So by seeking to help others Pam and her team have also significantly enhanced the “skills” in Wickham Market and opened up employment opportunities. I know there is a lesson there for us in Debenham and opportunities for us to share our experience - we will remain in close contact.

Voluntary projects such as ours will always be limited in the time and resources that they have available. So there has to be a balance between firstly maintaining and building on our current activities, secondly looking towards our aims of the "Vision of Caring", and finally outreach work. We believe that it would be great if there was not only a Debenham Project, but also a Halesworth Project, a Framlingham Project, an Eye Project, and so on across Suffolk. We are committed to encourage other communities to “go ahead and do something”. Most rural communities have something to build on – all we can say is “this is what we did – is it any help”? Each town and large village will develop its own way of helping its local community of family carers, and it has already happened in Wickham Market. If Debenham can help we will (but recognising that our priority is to support family carers in Debenham and our surrounding villages) and there are already a number of activities and events “penciled in” starting in Leiston in May.

Over the past couple of years The Debenham Project has not only gained recognition for its work in the field of community-based dementia support, but it is also becoming known for its [“Vision of Caring”](#) – an new approach to how health and care for the elderly frail might be provided. We hope that one day we will be able to make this possible for those who live in Debenham and its surrounding villages. To “make it happen” we need the support of all sorts of people – local and national. Last month Dan Poulter (our local member of parliament) hosted a meeting at the House of Commons at which we had the opportunity to talk with members of the Health Select Committee and other interested parties. We have also been invited as an observer to get involved in the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on dementia to which we have submitted evidence. Just a couple of things that might make a difference.

As a general rule we do not encourage people to ‘visit’ the project’s activities as they exist solely for the carers and those they care for. However we were very pleased that when Deborah Cadman (the new chief executive of Suffolk County Council) was in Debenham she wanted to meet some of those involved in the Debenham Project. It proved to be a very successful afternoon at the Carers’ Club - very full and very lively - exactly what supporting carers should be about - and she had the chance to talk to a range of people. I am sure she went away with quite a lot to think about, and also a big piece of cake!

Of course, the success of the project is due to the tremendous goodwill of many, many people in our community. They do not ask for anything in return other than knowing that they are making a difference. So, on behalf of all the carers, and those they care for, “Thank You”. This time I want especially to thank Pat and The Woolpack “Quizzers” for yet another generous donation and for an equally generous cheque from the Diageo Foundation (very kindly sought and arranged by a local resident).

Finally, once again, I would like to thank all those individuals and local organisations who have made generous donations to support the work of the project.

If you would like to know more about our work and services please see our display in the Post Office, ring 01728862003, call in at the Library Resource Centre, or visit our website at <http://www.the-debenham-project.org.uk/>.

With my very best wishes for the New Year,

Lynden