

2. The Debenham Project

The Project was initiated on April 23rd, 2009, at a meeting to discuss the impact of dementia on the Debenham and its surrounding villages, and particularly on how we could support our families, neighbours and local residents struggling to cope with the impact of the illness(s) on their lives. It was publicly launched at the beginning of the following October to an audience of over 150 local residents, carers, care professionals, county, district and parish council representatives, charities, etc. The presentations captured the essence of the Project as:

Focusing on supporting local Family Carers in their role of caring for their loved one.

Providing activities, services, information, and advice.

Coming alongside our friends and neighbours

An ambition to make a positive difference to the quality of life for those who are living with dementia, not only locally, but also across the Suffolk

Getting on and doing something

Evolving from the bottom up as needs and ideas present opportunities

And characterised by:

“Caring in the Community”, “Caring for the Community”, and “Caring by the Community”

We started with a Helpline, a Lunch Club, Leaflets and our Website offering straightforward information based upon lived experience. The Project rapidly expanded and evolved its support activities, and services. Today, the breadth of support, as a community-based charity, we offer, and is taken up, is certainly comparable with any throughout the County and nationally.

Currently the activities, groups and services we provide are: Carers Club and Info Café, Fit Club, Songs for Sharing, TLC (Talking, Listening, and Caring), Forms and Paperwork, Pre and Post Diagnosis Support, Signposting, and Annual Project Social Events.

For the future we hope to soon have: a Care Allotment and a Short-time Respite Support Service.

Currently the Debenham Project has a team of 55 regular volunteers and at least a further 13 who help on an occasionally or one-off basis.

The Debenham Project continues to evolve its already wide range of support for families living with dementia. From the very beginning we recognised that we must focus our efforts in a limited area surrounding Debenham – broadly this encompasses a population of between roughly 7,500 and 8,500 with an estimated 70 to 100 people ([appendix 5](#)) with significant symptoms of the illness(s). The catchment area stretches from Mendlesham

to the North, to Worlingworth to the east, to Grundisburgh to the South, and to Stonham Aspal to the West (roughly IP6 9, IP13 6, IP13 7, IP14 5, IP14 6, IP23 7). This primarily covers the area served by The Debenham GP practice, but also parts of the Mendlesham and Framlingham.

Currently, Surely, we work with smaller numbers than some other much larger charities – but that is the nature of a true community-based charity – personal and intimate and unconditional in our caring – And it succeeds!

The families we support develop strong and mutually supporting friendships and trust in each other and in all our volunteers – a Social Structure which we think of as “The Debenham Project Family”. When a cared-for eventually dies we continue to support the carer, and over the years many become regular volunteers with the Project, helping and passing on their experience.

Whilst the project will always be focused on supporting the family carer of someone with dementia it also seeks to be inclusive for all elderly members of the community who may benefit from the activities and services it offers e.g. Seated exercise, transport, and music.