

The Debenham Project

(Dementia - Caring for the Carers)

Mission:

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

Rationale:

Analysis of the current estimated prevalence of Dementia in the Debenham area [1] indicates that there are about 70 persons with Dementia. This figure is expected to grow rapidly to 110 within 15 years. The evidence is that the support that is available to carers and those that are cared for is very resource limited and always involves journeys of 7, 10, 14 miles each way. The nearest Local Authority and Private residential care homes with facilities for secure Dementia care are 7 miles distant. Access to information and services is difficult and confusing. If care and support can be provided within our community and by our community it will deliver the following benefits.

1. A high level of voluntary support coupled with familiarity with the carers and those with Dementia.
2. Easy access to services without disorientation and disruption of routine
3. An obvious local and informal "first port of call" for carers
4. A natural capability to assist the delivery of services to the end-users.
5. A coordinated approach based upon the local needs
6. An immediate capability to monitor the quality of service provision
7. A wider range of better focused activities and services than can currently be provided
8. A strong local 'ownership' of the problem and willingness to take action
9. Better encouragement for carers to seek help and to support each other
10. Those with Dementia remain within their familiar environment
11. Lower overall costs for the provision of health care and social support
12. Increased wellbeing of carers and reduced demands on the GP practice

History:

The general concern about Dementia was the subject of a public meeting at the end of April. It was led by the senior partner of the local GP practice, a consultant neurologist, and a mental health social worker [2]. It attracted a participating audience of 70, of whom over 20 offered voluntary support. The Project which was initiated now has 37 "on the books" with further help still being offered. Most have either professional or personal experience of Dementia. The Steering Group comprises the full range of essential professional experience [2] and steps are being taken to set up a charitable trust. A range of services are well into development [3] with planned delivery beginning in September. Cooperative / joint-working links have been / are being established with the local GP Practice, Suffolk Family Carers, Age Concern, Suffolk Mental Health Trust, Suffolk Libraries, Alzheimer's Society and Suffolk County Council. We are aiming to publicly launch the Project to coincide with the first delivery of services.

Stage 1 Services and Activities:

The following are currently in the planning or implementation phases [3]

1. Confidential Telephone Support Line
2. Activities and Social Support Sessions
3. Luncheon Club
4. Information and Advice Centre
5. Web-Site

Stage 2 Plans:

Once we have launched the initial services we intend to carefully expand. These items are just in the early days of consideration.

1. Story Board [3]
2. Good Neighbour Scheme

Long Term Aims:

Over the next 5 - 10 years we hope to expand and broaden the scope of The Debenham Project to encompass, firstly, a day care centre, secondly, a residential care facility with a secure unit, and finally a nursing care home. The estimated growth in the prevalence of Dementia coupled with the increasing care needs of our ageing population appear to more than justify these objectives.

Funding:

We are very fortunate to have sufficient, although limited, funding to develop our initial plans through the offer of accommodation by the local church, funding and staff time by Suffolk libraries, and a very generous private donation. Local fundraising is intended to cover general short-term costs but we will be seeking some form of maintenance grant once we have demonstrated success in setting up the Project. To maintain and develop the Project to its full long-term potential will require substantially more resources and, probably, include part-time or full-time employed staff. A major fundraising exercise is planned to realise the long-term objectives.

Conclusion:

The Debenham Project is, we believe, a new approach to assisting in the provision of health care and carer support to those with Dementia. It is categorised by a strong emphasis on our community taking a leading role in the definition and provision of services within our community. It aims to supply volunteer-based carer support activities and draw in external and professional support in cooperation with the NHS, the Local Authority, and Charitable Agencies. By working in partnership with the local GP Practice it is hoped that the presence and visibility of the Project will promote both early diagnosis by those with symptoms of Dementia, a much greater understanding and respect for them and their carers.

References:

1. Prevalence and Growth of Dementia in Debenham - July 2009, The Debenham Project, 2009
2. Membership of the Steering Group - July 2009, The Debenham Project, 2009
3. Project Tasks and Volunteer Involvement - July 2009, The Debenham Project, 2009