

The Debenham Project

(Dementia - Caring for the Carers)

May 2009

The hopes that were expressed so clearly at our meeting just three weeks ago are beginning to be realised. “**The Debenham Project**” has been launched with the objective of providing practical and emotional support to all those in and around Debenham who are caring for a relative or friend with Dementia. Not only that, we aim to show that “Care in the Community” is not just some political buzz-phrase but is a reality, perhaps expressed better as “Caring in our Community”.

Our public meeting on Thursday 23rd April proved successful well beyond expectations in furthering our understanding of the illness and it’s impact on carers and the community at large. The audience of 62+ proved that not only is this a subject that is of serious local concern, but also that there is a strong will to initiate activities to support people with Dementia and, especially, their carers. We were very grateful to have three experts in key aspects of the field.....

Dr John Gumpert	Consultant Neurologist (rtd)
Dr Paddy Fielder	Senior GP Practitioner
Sue Jackson	Mental Health Social Worker (rtd)

.....to inform and lead our discussions. Several excellent ideas emerged and many offers of involvement. We are looking forward to putting them into practice and “making a difference”.

Since then:

All the feedback from our meeting has been very positive. Thus far we have 24 confirmed offers of active involvement, 3 more positive expressions of interest and there are several other people who are likely to help out informally if asked. A small group, comprising Paddy Fielder, John Gumpert, Alison Gravatt, Peter Holme, Sue Jackson, Mary Morley, Joy Walton and myself, has been set up to progress and support the work. Three main activity areas have been suggested. These are already beginning to be fleshed out with likely leadership, funding and resourcing.

1. **A get-together and activities club** to cater for a broad spectrum of clients and their carers. We hope that this will be a joint venture together with Diana Barclay’s CAMEO Club and the library staff of the Debenham Resource Centre.

2. **A telephone support line** for carers, potentially leading on towards visiting, befriending and short-time respite* if required. This will involve volunteers being on hand to be a listening and understanding ear - someone who knows what carers are going through. Obviously this will require training for those involved and we are currently looking into how this might best be done and where.

3. **An information and advice centre** to help carers in understanding Dementia and in accessing support services and charitable assistance. Experience suggests that, especially in the early days, when symptoms become difficult to cope with, and when residential or full time professional care must be considered, carers need good and

accurate information and, often, someone who can put them in touch with the support agencies.

Other activities will be added as time goes by - there is a recognised need for a carers group where carers can socialise together and just have “their own time” - “ a bit of space” - etc. But this will very much depend upon them having short-time support who they can happily trust to look after their Mum/Dad/Husband/Wife/Partner/etc for an hour or so. We hope that one or more of our activities will develop relationships which will enable this to happen.

When it comes to funding, The Debenham Resource Centre already has funding for someone to help with the activities club, and we have an offer of sponsorship from a private individual. Patrick and St. Mary’s PCC have generously offered the use of Dove Cottage but care will be needed not to “out stay our welcome”. We have an offer of help in obtaining funding from another source and Mid-Suffolk DC are likely to prove an important supporter and sponsor.

We have been seeking a name for our project which is simple, memorable and can support a wide range of caring activities. **The Debenham Project** seems to capture the essence of its community support objectives without being so specific that it can’t encompass an exciting longer term vision. Within this project individual activities will have their own clear identities eg The Carers Circle Club

A number of organisations, people, have been identified who may be able to help with advice, cooperation, training, talks, etc. - formal contact has yet to be made.

When all of our initial activities have proved successful we aim to grow the project with long term aims which may include a day centre and, perhaps, even a residential care home so that visiting, care and support doesn’t involve journeys of 7, 10 or 15 miles but is right here in our community with all the benefits that would bring. Having such a vision is important but must be built on success in our beginnings.

Dates for your Diary:

We have organised a get-together of everyone who has offered the project their help on **June 3rd at 7.30 pm in Dove Cottage, High Street, Debenham**. This meeting will be an opportunity to hear all about the progress to date, to give us your ideas and feedback, and to express your interest in helping out with one or more of the activities.

We are also looking forward to a garden luncheon for all our volunteers and their partners/family on **25th July** - Location, Time and Details to be announced - and we are very grateful for this generous offer by Lyn and Mike Rouse.

For further information contact me (Lynden Jackson) on 01728 860348 or l.jackson225@btinternet.com Many, many thanks for all everyone has done so far and for all your promises of help in the future

*Short-time respite - a volunteer/befriender looking after the person with dementia for an hour or so while the carer has “some time for her/his self”.