



Hello everyone,

Over the past year or so important steps have been taken to increase the emphasis (and funding!) within the NHS on encouraging people who are experiencing difficulties with their short-term memories to approach their GP, and for GPs to become more pro-active in the diagnosis of dementia. The net result is that more people are being accurately diagnosed as having one form or another of the illness. It doesn't mean that dementia is more prevalent than we thought, only that a bigger percentage of the estimated numbers of families who are coping with the problems of living with dementia have been clinically identified. The problem is that when given a diagnosis, which for many is as life-changing as being told "you have cancer", where is the support to help you cope with it?

The Debenham Project has a good, but by no means perfect, record of providing some level of support to most of those in our community, ranging from offering a listening ear to participation in our activities, together with our ability to offer information and advice, transport, emergency help, etc. However, the situation across Suffolk is not so positive. At the last count there were about 11,000 people in Suffolk with symptoms of dementia – add to that the family, friends and neighbours who provide them with family and informal care and support and we get close to 20,000 people in our county who are living with the impact of dementia on their lives. On average, The Debenham project offers over 200 person sessions each month in its clubs, activities and services compared with a total across the county of a bit over 1,100. This latter figure very roughly equates to only an afternoon a year for each one of those 20,000, compared to an afternoon a fortnight for those in our community. Even allowing for the numbers of those with dementia being cared for in residential settings, and those families who feel able to manage without support, these figures mean that we have to double, triple, and then quadruple the existing level of community-based dementia support across our county. As you can imagine this is a massive challenge in which we have a significant role both as an example of what can be achieved, and in actively helping others to initiate their own community support projects. It will, of course take time but I hope that eventually every community in Suffolk will want to become involved in one way or another.

Finally, watch out for the arrival of New-Age Kurling in Debenham at the Community Centre – enjoy great fun with your friends which, combined with gentle exercise, can improve mobility, coordination and balance. We are working with ActivLives to offer this growing sport weekly beginning around the end of the month.

Best wishes,
Lynden

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