



Hello everyone,

As you can imagine, I am regularly asked to describe how The Debenham Project tries to help family carers who are living with the impact of dementia on their lives, and those who have the illness. As you might expect I generally tell them that we have a range of groups such as Carers Club, Info Café, Way Back When, Fit Club, Food 'n' Friends lunch clubs, etc. and a number of other services like Get You There Transport, One to One, Information and Advice, signposting, Personal Care and Domestic Help Register, Debenham on Call, etc. This certainly does paint a picture of the scope of the activities of the project, as a list of its departments might describe what Ipswich Hospital does, or a catalogue of paintings might describe an art exhibition. And it is measurable. **But does this picture really express what we actually do?** For this we must look at the Project from a different viewpoint and in a different way.

As you know, over the last 10 years a great many people in our area have made direct contact with, or been referred to, The Debenham Project. All of them have been individuals or families, each on their own journey and with individual concerns. Our role has been to support them in any way we can, to help them cope with that journey as best as possible, to smooth out the bumps in the road, and to be there for them when they have a crisis. The activities and services are only the "tools". When someone approaches us we always start by telling them that they are not on their own and inviting them to our Carers Club and Info Café where they will find others in a similar situation, past family carers, volunteers, and expert professional information and advice. The atmosphere is amazing – chatter, laughter, and the finest cakes in Suffolk! – not at all what you might expect. But this is just the beginning of a rather wonderful happening – I have seen it so many times – They find advice, acceptance, relaxation, something to look forward to, friendships, respite, and somehow, just by being part of the project and its activities, an informal network of care grows around them ready for when they are struggling or on the edge of breakdown. Sometimes, it is someone calling in, sometimes it is timely advice, sometimes just a bunch of flowers, but often it is much more.

In the words of a family carer: "..... but far more important is that we have been welcomed into a "family" that cares; to be able to look forward to enjoying a delightful afternoon tea and chat just like anyone else; and if we need some help it will be there without question. Without this support I know we would be in a far worse position and, for me particularly as a wife and carer, emotionally and mentally stressed to the limit."

And thank you for all your donations and support throughout the year. Please remember that we can receive donations via the Co-op (just ask for your dividend to be given to **609313**) and on-line using the button on the home page of our website (below). Also don't forget, we have wheelchairs for loan if you need one for a few days.

With all my best wishes, Lynden

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