



The Debenham Project

A Case Study in Community-Based Dementia Support

The Debenham Project was formally initiated in October 2009. Since then it has naturally evolved and grown in its community-led support for all those who are living with the impact of dementia on their lives in Debenham and the surrounding catchment area. It has also worked to advance the recognition of the critical importance of community-based dementia support at county, regional, and national levels.

It currently offers a wide range of local services, activities and events on a regular basis:

Information and Advice (as requested)	10 -15 conversations per month
Carers Club and Info Café (Fortnightly)	30 – 40 participants each session
Fit Club (weekly)	15 – 20 participants each session
Lunch Clubs (3) (monthly)	25 – 30 participants per month
Medically related transport	19 journeys per month
Social activities and events (Fortnightly)	15 – 20 participants each session
One to One support (as required)	4 – 6 family carers
Reminiscence therapy (Monthly)	10 - 12 participants each session
Signposting (as requested)	5 – 8 per month
Professional Liaison (as required)	1 – 2 referrals per month

A fuller description of what the Project is all about and its activities is given in the booklet “**The Debenham Project** Dementia – Caring for the Carers” which can also be accessed via the website <http://www.the-debenham-project.org.uk/>

Whilst the numbers of individuals participating in specific activities or services may seem relatively small compared with a population of, say, Ipswich they are substantial when measured against the estimated incidence of dementia in the Debenham GP catchment area (population circa 8,500). When focused on the needs of local families and individuals living with dementia the following

“numbers” express the broad achievements of the Project but, by no means, capture the real benefits.

Basic Statistics:

100+ Volunteers

100 (est.) “Families” living with Dementia

65% Contact Success

250 Person Sessions of Support per month

£8,500 pa Cost

(circa 2% of Normalised SCC Adult Care spend on Dementia Support in our community*)

*Suffolk 2018 expenditure: Crisis intervention, domiciliary care, residential care, etc. circa £40M pa, Dementia Together circa £250K pa, Dementia friendly Communities circa £50K** pa

Value for Money:

£1 pa per head of catchment population

(c.f. NHS £1,800 pa per head of population ; Social Care £750 pa per head of population)

£100 pa per family living with dementia

£3.50 per person session

See also: <http://www.the-debenham-project.org.uk/progress.shtml>

Benefits:

Improved Physical, Psychological, and Emotional Well-Being (Quality of Life) for 45 Current Carers, 25 Past Carers, 40 Cared-For and 40 Other Frail Elderly Persons leading to significantly reduced demand for professional, crisis, nursing and domiciliary care with potential savings of:

£650+ per person pw in Delayed or Avoided Residential Care Places

£2500+ per person pw in reduced Hospital Bed Blocking

£200+ per person pw in reduced Domiciliary Care

However, the true success of the project can only be measured by the actual impact that it has on the well-being of its participants – family carers, cared-for, and other at-risk elderly frail that we include in our support. For example Caroline’s Story:

“The Debenham Project has been supporting my husband and I since December 2016. I do not know how it happened, but almost immediately we found ourselves in a trusting relationship with the volunteers who know instinctively when we need a little (or sometimes a lot) more TLC. This meant so much when

we felt so very vulnerable. To know that we're not alone is immensely comforting; knowing that we are 'held' and looked out for. They are always there to answer questions but also to signpost if need be. In the early days, post diagnosis, when we were managing the paper work and adjusting to obvious change, the project was able to offer professional support and advice. It helps us to keep things in perspective rather than worrying about what is ahead of us.

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. It is all we feel about you all, and the impact of having you with us on this tricky road. I still worry about what will happen to my husband as his illness progresses but I believe that, with the help of the friends I have found in the Project, I will be able cope with what the future brings." - Caroline Manning, December 2018.

Caroline's story exemplifies what is the common experience of those we have sought to help over the life of the project, and argues that community-based, and led, dementia support really works.

Make it Local – Make it Simple – Make it Work

The Debenham Project is an example of what can be achieved by a single community. Other excellent examples exist in Suffolk which may be different in nature but follow the common ethos of "caring in the community, caring for the community, and caring by the community". They are characterised by individuals and groups simply wanting to "get on and do something".

However, if the statutory authorities desire to see such projects spreading throughout Suffolk, they must be prepared to support and engage with them in a true partnership. They must be willing to significantly invest in community-based dementia support **financially, practically and professionally** for the long term – "fine words butter no parsnips". They must value both fledgling and mature projects and trust them to employ scarce resources wisely, and they must do everything possible to ease and remove the bureaucracy, barriers and concerns that discourage their initiation and growth.