

August 2022



## **A New Horizon For The Debenham Project**

It's been thirteen years since The Debenham Project came into being at a public meeting in Dove Cottage one rainy evening at the end of April. It took just over 5 months to launch it at another much larger public meeting at the beginning of October. Then, it just seemed to develop and evolve naturally into what it is today. Over the years it has offered its help and support to so many families and individuals – I have completely lost count of how many – doing what might appear to be simple and small things but which can make a big difference. And the huge number of those volunteers who, along the way, have helped make that difference is also beyond reckoning. The Project has shown what a wonderful caring community like Debenham can achieve. And we want it to continue doing so for many years to come – Only Even Better!

The past 2 years of the pandemic has had a massive impact on all community-based charities including The Debenham Project. However, we have come through it in pretty good shape to recover, over the next months, towards providing a similar level of support that we did pre-Covid. Rebuilding the project will take a lot of effort (and enthusiasm). The obvious fact is that 19 of those families/individuals that we were actively in contact with and supporting are “no longer with us”, but the numbers of people in our community who are living with the impact of dementia hasn't materially changed. We have had some new active participants in the Project's groups/services but we are not “seeing” the larger and more recent numbers who have had diagnoses or are concerned.

As we are rebuilding the Project following Covid it is important that we take the opportunity to fully review all aspects its aims, activities, services, organisation and operation. It is also evident that, after 13 years, the Project not only remains a recognised exemplar of good dementia support, but also continues to fulfil its role into the future, it needs a program of updating, refreshment and revitalisation.

So, our trustees have initiated a programme to ensure that The Debenham Project not only survives well into the 30's but also responds to the challenges that the next 13 years will present. It will involve looking at every aspect of the Project – our groups, activities, events, and services – our volunteers and their recruitment, training, and support – our finances, funding and expenditure – our organization, its structure, and management – our resilience and ability to adapt - how we communicate – how we encourage referrals - those who we support – and so on. Especially, we want to ask as many people as possible, whether or not they are currently involved in the Project's activities, to give us their ideas and opinions. It is a big task and inevitably it can't be achieved

“overnight”, “at a stroke”, or even “come Christmas”. However, we hope to be able to complete the programme by early next year and share our vision of the future for The Debenham Project, and when we will be able to not only present, following Covid, a largely recovered Debenham Project but also a reinvigorated Project with a future of caring for those who are living with dementia for many years to come. And to set the scene:

**The Project’s Mission:**

1. To provide practical and emotional support for all those in our community who are struggling to live with the impact of dementia on their lives.
2. To offer a welcome to anyone else, who may be elderly, frail, or vulnerable who may benefit from participating in our activities and groups.

**The Project’s Aims:**

It is a very difficult decision for anyone, or their husband, wife, partner, parent, daughter, son, friend or neighbour who is worried about whether they have dementia to seek help. We need to encourage them to make contact, and if they do, to offer:

1. A listening and understanding ear
2. A warm and caring welcome
3. Immediate support and signposting
4. Information, advice, services, activities, social contact, respite, peer group, and practical advice
5. A commitment to continuing support no matter how long the journey may be
6. A holistic approach which supports carers and those they care for together, but also as having separate individual needs

**Where we are:**

We have an enviable record in offering practical and emotional support to local families and individuals living with the impact of dementia on their lives, as well as many others who may be elderly and/or frail. However, Covid has had a major impact and we need to rebuild the Project. It is also a moment when we can consider how we can refresh the Project to meet a continuing and increasing need.

**What we want to be:**

A welcoming, modern, well structured, and resilient project providing a wide range of support for families and individuals in Debenham and its surrounding villages.

**And especially:**

In the meantime, we will continue to do what we do best. We know that reaching out for help when struggling to cope is difficult but it can make such a difference. If you are concerned for yourself or someone you care for, please think about picking up the phone.