



## **Report for the Parish Council May 28th 2012**

I am delighted to report that The Debenham project has had another successful year - all due to the tremendous hard work and goodwill of so many people in Debenham, the surrounding, villages and beyond - volunteers and our professional partners. We do not measure success in terms of the numbers but in the pleasure of seeing how the project has made a real difference to the lives of individual carers. Nonetheless when it comes to getting the essential funding, and professional support, numbers are important. Suffice to say that when we set out on this project we estimated that there were between 70 and 100 people with dementia in our area - this estimate is proving to be remarkably accurate - and we have been able to connect with and provide some support - ranging from advice and information, a listening ear, and linking in to professionals, through to active involvement in one or more of our local activities, clubs and services - to more than 50 of their family carers, and they themselves. This is considered remarkable when, at the moment, 30% of carers/cared-for even seeking the advice of their GP is about average, let alone engaging with support services. It is this "local" achievement that has engendered the recognition for the project locally, countywide, and now nationally. It has not been without a great deal of effort and commitment from "all concerned" - thank you.

So to the highlights, and trawling through the newsletters (current and archived) will fill in the details:

1. It has been a year of awards at Parish Council, District Council, and County Council, including the project winning the annual Suffolk ACRE Probert Cup for the best community project in Suffolk, and the premier award of £10,000 from The Suffolk Foundation for innovative achievement in the field of "Proving and Improving" health and social care. We will be using this money to tackle some of the many problems that families find in getting the best possible paid care to look after their loved ones, and also in trying to provide emergency and short-time care on a voluntary basis.
2. We have continued to seek new ways to support our ageing population. This year we introduced our Chair-Based Fit Club that aims to help with all the aches and pains, posture and balance, coordination and flexibility, etc that come with growing a little older. It's not about "no pain without gain" - it's fun and, for carers, a great way to find a bit of space for yourself. You can imagine that it is "sold out" and we are debating whether to expand the service.
3. Many of you will have enjoyed "Harvest through the Ages" last October - a combined exhibition of one of our carer's fantastic models of agricultural carts and waggons and a flower festival in the church. Yes, it did raise over £600 by visitors "throwing a donation into the basket", but this was not its purpose. All we wanted to do was to celebrate Nic Cass's remarkable achievements and skills just one more time.
4. It is a key element of the project that everything we do is a joint enterprise with someone or some professional (or local) organisation. It works informally and without "contracts and bureaucracy" - a give and take to everyone's mutual benefit. So, for example, St Mary's very generously offered the project free use of this cottage for our activities and meetings and we, in turn, have been able to provide funds for the improvement of the facilities. If there are any groups in the village with ideas

of how they might help support our carers, and those they care for, please let me know - our motto is "let's get on and do something - if it doesn't work out, change it or try something else".

5. It is true for any charity that money will always be a scarce commodity and for this year it has been something of a nightmare. It has taken considerable effort but The Debenham Project has been very fortunate to secure its core funding for the next year or so, and to have been given grants/awards to enable us to conduct special projects and investments. I have already mentioned a project to tackle some of the difficulties associated with getting good paid personal care in our rural area, but in addition we shall be conducting a unique research project.

6 With most illnesses early diagnosis and support may make a huge difference to the treatment, outcome, quality of life, and prognosis. However, as was the case with cancer many years ago, most cases of dementia go undiagnosed until things reach a crisis. Because of the special nature of The Debenham Project, the Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust has asked us to explore, over the coming year, ways of achieving greater awareness of the illness and encouraging those who may have some concerns to seek advice and support much earlier. This research project will not only help us in and around Debenham, but also be of significant importance at regional and national levels.

7. I have reported thus far mostly on what we have been doing this past year but this could not have happened but for the efforts of all our volunteers and the uncompromising goodwill and support of the Parish council and many other organisations in and around Debenham. Also, we have received many unsolicited donations from private individuals and organisations. Yes, their monetary value is important but, be they large or small, for me and those in the project it is knowing that our efforts are valued that makes the real difference - again, thank you.

8. Finally, many of you will have read in the Parish Magazine that the project has been spotted by The Joseph Rowntree Foundation - probably second only to the Wellcome Trust for its reputation and influence in the field of health and social care. They asked if the project might be used as one of only 6 national case studies into how a community can come together to tackle the problems our ageing population presents. It seems that we are the only one of our kind, and they wish to encourage other communities across the UK to set up similar projects. Just over a week ago we hosted a very successful 2 day study visit which will lead to our inclusion in a major national report for government.

If you would like to know more about the project please see our display in the Post Office, ring 01728 862003, call in at the Library Resource Centre, or visit our website at [www.the-debenham-project.org.uk](http://www.the-debenham-project.org.uk).

Lynden Jackson  
(Chairman)