

REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE ALZHEIMER'S SOCIETY, WEST ESSEX

Introduction

People with dementia are some of the principle users of health and social care services and the financial costs of dementia in the UK is estimated to grow to over £27 billion by 2018. Using resources effectively, such as focusing on early diagnosis and intervention, can save money for public services by reducing or preventing admission to hospital or care homes at the same time as delivering better quality care for people with dementia.

Background

It was estimated there are currently 3507 people with dementia living in West Essex (Office of National Statistics 2011) of which 803 are known to our offices. The estimated number of people diagnosed with the condition will increase by a further 400 by 2013. Dementia rarely affects the person diagnosed with the condition alone. Therefore approximately 3500 carers, many of whom are frail and elderly, also feel the impact of the condition on a daily basis.

The services we provide

The Alzheimer's Society offices in Epping Forest, Harlow and Uttlesford provide unique and specialised services, which enable people to remain in their homes for as long as possible. Without the support services listed below, there would be a need for much more crisis intervention and fewer people with dementia would be able to remain in the community.

Memory Clinic Support Service

On 1st June 2010 we launched our new Support Service, based at the local hospitals and CMHTs, which provides support to people from the day they are diagnosed with their condition. This service replicated the support which has been available for over 20 years in cancer care. We are now confident that everyone who has been diagnosed will have the opportunity to adjust to their diagnoses with the help they deserve. They will have increased information and support, which may help them to enjoy a quality of life as close as possible to their normal lifestyle. This service offers intense intervention for around 3 to 4 months, and when the family is ready, they are referred to our community based Dementia Support Service. The availability of this service will have a dramatic effect on the number of people that we will be supporting in the years ahead, as people will no longer need to face this illness alone.

Community based Dementia Support Service

This service is available from the three offices. Our Dementia Support team work sensitively with people with dementia and their carers in their own homes, providing invaluable information, strategies and encourage forward planning to access services to prevent a crisis. This preventative approach is fundamental to our work because early intervention reduces social care needs at a later point and allows people with dementia to remain at home for longer. Between April 2010 and December 2010, 754 home visits have been made to **803 people with dementia and 807 carers**. Our Dementia Support Teams can work with families for around 10 or more years, as the illness progresses.

There is inevitably going to be an increased demand for this service in the years ahead as newly diagnosed people require continued support, following the early intervention offered at the Memory Clinics.

Leisure and Well Being Service

This service was launched in 2009. The service enables people with dementia to continue with their interests and hobbies. Our Leisure and Well-Being workers meet with the person with dementia on a weekly or fortnightly basis. The workers encourage the person with dementia to build upon their retained skills and interests, which enables them to maintain their confidence and encourages social interaction to ensure that people do not withdraw and become isolated. Extra funding is needed urgently to accommodate the demand for this service across the West Essex area. We currently have 50 hours available to local families, but we need to at least double the number of hours to keep pace with the estimated increase in the number of people diagnosed with the condition over the next five years. The waiting list for this service is around 5 months.

Specialist support services for younger people with dementia

We offer two specialised services to people who are diagnosed with dementia who are under 65 years old. Firstly, we offer evening support groups, one in Harlow for Harlow and Epping residents and one in Stansted, for people with young onset dementia and their carers, where people have an opportunity to off-load their concerns and support each other. In addition we provide a special activity day for people under the age of 65. Each Friday people participate in enjoyable pursuits that are related to their age group rather than attending day centres offering that are aimed at a generation older than themselves. This service has a waiting list of around 5-6 months. To keep pace with demand we need to increase the number of hours available from 16 per week to 32 hours per week.

Peer Support

We hold 11 different groups providing peer support. Some groups meet on a weekly basis, others fortnightly and 3 take place once a month. At these groups people with dementia and carers draw significant benefits from being able to exchange practical advice and emotional support from other people in the same situation. Due to the projected increase in the number of people with dementia in the years ahead, we are looking to develop peer support as an effective and economical model of support in the difficult financial times that lie ahead.

Day Support Services

We have re-launched our twice weekly day support service, held at the Quakers Meeting House in Epping. This service has struggled for a number of months because of the long term sickness of one of our colleagues, who sadly passed away in July. However, it is a valued service because there is currently so little statutory day care offered. The service provides up to 28 respite breaks a week. It also helps to reduce isolation, stress and anxiety and depression for the person with dementia and their carer. There is a similar service in Harlow called the Rest a While service. Again, this operates on two days and offers 44 respite breaks each week. There is a waiting list for both services.

Memory Cafes

Memory Cafes are a new and highly successful approach that was pioneered in the Netherlands, and is promoted in the National Dementia Strategy as an essential support mechanism for both people with dementia and their carers. A Memory Café has run in Harlow for 16 months and is highly successful. We are opening a new café in Saffron Walden and have just received funding to open a café in Waltham Abbey, an area with a high percentage of retired people, but few of whom have requested the support of the Society. This informal, welcoming and non-medical community setting brings people together for the purposes of increased education, emotional support and social interaction and we would like to increase the number of cafes from 3 to 6 over the next 18 months, as they are low cost and effective services to enable people to remain informed and in control of their long term, complex and unpredictable condition

We hope that this gives you an indication of our drive to significantly increase the level of post-diagnostic support available in West Essex. We are aiming to develop dementia-aware communities and ensure that people with dementia and their carers are supported to remain healthy, active and involved in their community for as long as possible. Our major challenge is to keep pace with the demand for our services.

Marion Howell
Support Services Manager
West Essex

Kay Ellis
Member of the Dementia T&F Group