

In Memoriam

Sheila Stephen 22nd June 1950 - 26th December 2010

Carer's Week in Basildon and Brentwood



On Tuesday 15th June 2010 Sheila Stephen, Karen Hatch and Sian Brewster set out the Crossroads stall in the Basildon Centre amongst other care services and found plenty to do. With help from Angela Farrington they promoted Crossroads Care to visitors to the Centre and in the town.



This proved a great opportunity for Crossroads Care to make themselves known to the people of Basildon and Brentwood explaining to them what we have to offer carers. Although Crossroads Care is new in the Basildon area it is already finding demand for the services it uniquely offers.

Also on that day Lorraine Cook, Valerie Long, Pat Davison and George Froom held a stall in the Bay Tree centre, Brentwood with help from Ruth Abbott and Dominic Doige. At both venues care packs were given out, including balloons, leaflets, newsletters, vouchers and energy saving light bulbs. Money was collected from passing members of the public, but more importantly people were made aware of what Crossroads Care aim to provide.

In acknowledging the sad loss of Sheila above, the Brentwood Basildon & Districts Scheme would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication Sheila gave to Crossroads throughout the 10 years she was employed. Sheila was a great asset to Crossroads and will be sadly missed by everyone whose lives she touched.

Ingatstone Hall Garden Event



Our Garden Event was held at Ingatstone Hall on Sunday 9th May 2010. The gardens held a selection of activities which varied to appeal to every age. A bouncy castle, ice-cream van, selection of stalls including jewellery, books and cakes plus the barbeque providing hot dogs and burgers were extremely popular. Brentwood Brewing Company provided us with both soft and alcoholic beverages situated undercover with chairs for people to sit and socialise. Our raffle also proved extremely profitable. Essex Police provided us with a surprise visit allowing children who attended the event to sit inside the police car and hear the siren as well as being given some free magnets, stickers and key chains promoting the Essex Police service.

The British Legion Band provided us with a fantastic performance which was extremely enjoyed by all who were in attendance. Brentwood Mayor Tony Sleep also provided us with a magical firework display which was certainly one of the highlights of the evening. Both children and adults watched in awe at the display which rounded off a fantastically successful day.

In December 2009, we had a visit from Karen Hatch, to assess what one of her Carer Support Workers would need to do while I am out of the house and having some 'me-time.' Karen is another person who is worth her weight in gold! During her visit she was polite, friendly, approachable, efficient, professional while still remaining aware that we were still feeling a bit snowballed by events of the last 9 months. Above all, Karen left me feeling that things were looking up, and soon, I would be able to have a little free time without worrying so much about how long I was leaving my husband on his own for.

In January, Karen contacted us by phone and arranged a time to come and see us again, and introduce us to a Carer Support Worker. Our Carer Support Worker arrived in the shape of Esther, who, it turned out, used to go to school with my husbands' sister! For Mike, it was like a trip down memory lane, and I watched them chatting about various teachers from school and the other families that had lived in the area, and where they were now. From Esther's first visit, she instantly provided the relief that I so desperately needed and, now, continues to provide the support that I want to return to working life, and for Mike to continue his rehabilitation. Esther, now, on her weekly visits, takes Mike to a local dog rescue centre where he volunteers as a dog walker, and trains the rescue dogs in preparation for rehoming. He wanted to be a police dog handler in his younger years and, unfortunately, missed out on the opportunity. However, he is very much enjoying this latest turn of events which, might have turned out differently had it not been for Esther's input.

On one visit, Esther handed me a leaflet about the 'Who Cares?' project and I got myself onto the Carers Register. This was a major step and has put me in contact with the 'Who Cares?' project team and other connected SEPT events. Most recently, I have completed the 'Looking After Me' course which I found very helpful, and I would seriously recommend this course for volunteer and professional carers alike. The course also served to open my eyes to the variety of different conditions that volunteer carers are struggling with on a daily basis. My husband is recovering from a relatively long-term health issue but there are several others struggling much more than I am. There was one person whose spouse was suffering from Parkinson's Disease, another whose partner had just been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, others who were dealing with family members with learning difficulties, and yet more with age related conditions! It was a very interactive group of carers and we all learnt something from each other.

As a result of my experiences with my husband (and grandmother, who lives in Southend) it made me think about my work prospects, and returning to work as my husband continues to improve. It was a very logical progression for me to approach Karen at Crossroads and have a chat about where my life was heading next. I was pleased and excited that she willingly gave me an interview as it warmed my heart that there are some employers who are willing to consider applicants based on 'life experiences', further an applicant that has no formal training and is considering a fairly drastic career change! Following my interview, Karen offered me the job and I am excited to be taking a very new turn in my working life, working with Crossroads Care. I am confident that I will be given all the training that I need, and more, to provide the practical and emotional support that every volunteer carer needs, even if they don't know it, whatever their circumstances!

Support for volunteer carers must continue! They are worth their weight in gold and are saving NHS a staggering £87 billion a year! I am very proud to be a volunteer carer and to be connected to the 'Who Cares?' project. It is a resource that is invaluable to carers and goes a long way to putting them in touch with a wide variety of support services, including Crossroads Care. One of my biggest gripes is that Carers Allowance pays a measly £54 a week to volunteer carers that provided 24/7 care, without any time off! It is not a realistic benefit payment for the job that carers do. I was proud to sign a petition, set up by Carers UK, to challenge the government to improve this benefit. Because the current benefit is so small, this is one of the many reasons why Crossroads is so valuable, and instrumental in providing the relief that is so desperately needed by so many!

I am proud to be a part of the Crossroads success story and to call myself a winner! I sincerely hope there will be many more that follow me.