

# Charity issues appeal a helping hand and a

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It was 25 years ago when successful self-employed plasterer and tiler Malcolm Mellor was told his wife Rita had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS).

The cause of MS is not yet fully understood, but it is thought to be a combination of environmental and genetic factors.

Both of Rita's parents died from MS at an early age, so Malcolm always had the thought in the back of his mind that it could be hereditary – and had kept an eye out for early signs.

The emotional effect on both of them was immense – Rita had an insight into the effects of MS as she had watched her parents slowly deteriorate.

Malcolm said: "All sorts of thoughts go through your mind when you're told the person you love has got such a disease.

"I was in the dark – and learnt about the disease and its effects, as we went along. I've gained a lot of experience over the years, and I'm still learning even now."

Close family were equally shocked as Rita was only 40 years old, but they rallied together to help support the couple.

Malcolm accepted that Rita would have problems and in his own words "simply rolled his sleeves up and got on with the job – it's business as normal, we simply take what comes on the chin and get on with our lives".

Although as a 24/7 carer, Malcolm said if he listed all the things he did throughout the day it would be a very long list indeed.

The caring husband first discovered Ripley-based Derbyshire Carers Association (DCA) from an article in the local press, and phoned for more information, which was followed up with a trip into the office to meet with an area co-ordinator.

With help from a care manager, Malcolm gained a few hours respite per week, allowing him time to grab a game of snooker with fellow enthusiasts.

He added: "It's good that organisations like DCA exist – their assistance has been excellent. Teamwork is what it's all about. Remember your glass is half full, not half empty."



A group of carers, friends and family take some time out during a trip to the Devonshire Dome in Buxton.

"And everyone needs a little time to themselves to unwind and relax from their caring roles – which is what DCA helps to provide."

Malcolm is not alone. He is one of seven million carers throughout the UK – around 120,000 of those in Derbyshire. And a rapidly ageing population, coupled with rising life expectancies for those with illness or disability, means care is a huge and growing issue for society as a whole.

DCA staff make it their job to care for carers. The association helps equip carers with sufficient knowledge, information and resources to aid their everyday life as a carer and ensure they know their rights. These include a right to an assessment, a right to request flexible working and a right to not be discriminated

## DCA show support for annual campaign to highlight carers

National Carers Week – from June 6 to 12 – is an annual campaign to raise awareness of caring, highlight the challenges that carers face and recognise the contribution they make to families and communities throughout the UK.

Derbyshire Carers Association (DCA) has been supporting carers for more than 28 years and is marking this year's carers week by organising a host of exciting events all across the county, including a large-scale carers service at Derby City Cathedral on June 8, from 12pm to 1pm; a pamper and relaxation day in South Noranton on June 6, from 10am to 3.30pm; and a tea party on June 10, from 11am to 1pm, at

Derby County Cricket Club.

The campaign aims to be the greatest-ever drive to reach out and improve the lives of carers and the people they look after by recognising the contribution they make.

It will also highlight the challenges of caring and campaign for sustainable support nationally. A DCA spokesperson said: "We are highlighting the role of carers and reaching out to all carers via our local offices, website and Carers Week events.

"They deserve recognition, advice, understanding and support to help them continue in their roles."

For more information, visit [www.derbyshirecarers.co.uk](http://www.derbyshirecarers.co.uk).

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DCA will be there for any carer that needs support, advice, guidance or just to talk.

Dedicated staff, often carers themselves, are committed to helping other carers – from planning for emergencies to attending hospital meetings and supporting carers groups. Carers are never alone once they make contact with the charity, which was founded in 1988 by Gerry Fryer, after he found himself in a carer position.

Once he realised how little support there was for carers, Gerry aimed for and met his aspiration for carer support

provision.

With help and hard work, Derbyshire Carers Association gained its first paid employee in 1989. This has since grown to more than 30 dedicated and passionate employees, as well as a large number of volunteers.

DCA development worker Richard Colgrave is one of those. He said: "DCA can offer suitable support and information to assist carers in their caring role.

"Our principles and core work include partnership working, offering advice, guidance and a wide range of confidential and independent



Richard Colgrave, of Derbyshire Carers Association.