

Royal thanks for those who 'care for carers'

The nation's largest 'caring for carers' association, right here in Derbyshire, gained 'huge thanks' from a royal visitor last month, as *Barrie Farnsworth* reports.

THERE was a heartfelt royal thank-you last month to the Derbyshire workers and volunteers who provide the country's largest 'caring for carers' service.

The Princess Royal visited the latest home of the Derbyshire Carers' Association (DCA), which provides vital support for around 20,000 carers right across the county, and talked to both staff, volunteers and carers young and old.

The Princess said the association, founded in Ripley 30 years ago, had developed into an organisation that provided a "well joined up" service – one that both Derbyshire County Council and Derby City Council fully supported.

Before unveiling a plaque at the Park Street, Ripley, office to mark her visit and the association's 30th anniversary, the Princess said: "A huge thank-you to you all for your sterling efforts."

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The charity was founded by lone carer Gerry Fryer – who was looking after his son who was badly injured in a road accident – who felt that carers needed a voice and help to meet their needs.

The DCA has maintained Gerry's vision and continued to develop more services and reach more carers.

But it wants to reach even more – with Derbyshire now having an estimated 150,000 people who care for a member of their family. "We know from experience that even a little support can make a huge difference to carers," said chief executive Narinder Sharma, "but we

Above: Lovely to meet you! All smiles from the Princess Royal as she met staff, carers and volunteers at the DCA headquarters.

Left: The excitement grows as these youngsters await the arrival of the Princess Royal in Ripley.

want to offer help and hope to so many more."

Derbyshire Carers Association provides emergency planning, one-to-one support, events and respite opportunities and is a lifeline for many of the county's most vulnerable people. Indeed, it has a Young Carers team who help people as young as six.. and there are plenty of youngsters looking after a parent or a sibling. Their figures show that, in Chesterfield alone last month, they provided support for 41 carers aged under 18.

Two young carers were invited to meet the Princess on her visit last month. One was 12-year-old Alex Walker, of Killamarsh, who told the royal visitor he helped to look after his severely arthritic mum Bev and his autistic elder brother James... and how he loved to get together with other young carers at events organised by the association.



Right: Narinder Sharma, chief executive officer of the Derbyshire Carers' Association.



Abi Nicholls, a 13-year-old carer, meets Princess Anne, with 12-year-old carer Alex Walker looking on.

The other, 13-year-old Abi Nicholls of Ripley, said she helped look after her dad Peter, who suffers from panic attacks and severe anxiety states, while her mum Lisa helped her younger brother Joe, who has learning difficulties. "I really appreciate the one-to-one support I get, and the activities the DCA arranges for us young carers," she said, which last summer even included an

'out-in-the-woods experience' (lighting fires, cooking bread and toasting marshmallows).

The association, the largest of its type in the country, has 48 staff and around 150 volunteers. As well as the head office in Ripley, it has other offices in Derby, Chesterfield and New Mills.

As well as the support it provides, the DCA can provide financial support for



Narinder Sharma explains to the Princess that the plaque she has just unveiled is made of stone from a Middleton by Wirksworth quarry, and will be attached to the exterior wall of the association's new headquarters.

carers, to pay for certain crucial items, through its 'Personal budgets' scheme. For example, it funded a new fridge for one carer who could not afford to replace a broken appliance, yet needed an urgent replacement in order to keep medication cool for the person they were caring for.

It is also introducing a 'Befriending service' – and needs more volunteers in order to befriend more carers across the county; and last year launched a Carers In Employment project, to try and get more businesses to support employees who are trying to both work and carry out a caring role at home. "We find it can make all the difference if employers can be a little bit more flexible, perhaps by agreeing to a more

part-time role for a carer who wants to continue to work as well," Narinder Sharma explained.

One of the first carers helped by the association in the 1980s was Janice Handley, of Creswell, whose son Paul had a brain tumour which left him

blind and deaf. "I was so grateful for the help, which I desperately needed, that it led me to help the association as a volunteer in the Bolsover area. I now work for them three days a week in this office, doing carer assessments." Sadly, her son Paul died last July, aged 50, but Janice recalled that they had both met the Princess Royal at a Riding for the Disabled event when Paul was only six.

Also at the royal event was Coun Alex Dale of Dronfield, who is Derbyshire County Council's Cabinet member for Young People. He confirmed that the County Council gave a £160,000 grant to the association each year to be its 'lead provider' of carer services, primarily to offer one-to-one support to as many carers as possible and to develop more links with schools to raise awareness and, hopefully, identify the needs of more young carers.

And the final word on a very special day for a very special charity went to its Director of Operations, Deborah Gough, who said: "Carers are the backbone of community care, providing all the fundamental assistance with everyday tasks so that loved ones can continue to live safely in their own home.



Above: The Princess Royal says farewell after her visit to the DCA headquarters in Park Street, Ripley.

Left: One of the first carers helped by the association in the 1980s was Janice Handley, of Creswell, who now works part time for the DCA.

"Sadly, they don't get enough recognition. This Royal visit is an excellent way of putting the spotlight on carers within our county and the brilliant work that they do."

Editor's Note: If you are a carer who needs help, or you would like to donate or volunteer your services, call 01773 833833 or email info@derbyshirecarers.co.uk



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