

ME Derbyshire Review of the Year - 2013

ME Derbyshire achieved its 25th anniversary in 2013. Several events were arranged to mark this milestone, including a complimentary celebration buffet for members at the start of the year, making a donation of £2500 (representing £100 for each year) to the National ME/CFS Biobank, and a special meeting later in the year with cakes, prizes and free gifts. Members were also able to express what MED had meant to them over the years.

Enjoyment of our 25th celebrations was tempered in June by news of the death of Deric Longden, MED's long serving President. There were various features about Deric in the magazines of the national ME charities, to which several MED members had contributed. Later in the year we were delighted to learn that the ME Association was teaming up with the renowned Swanwick Writers' Summer School in 2014 to launch a humorous writing competition for unpaid carers in memory of Deric.

It was another challenging year for the Management Team, who kept things progressing despite the downturn in health of several members. Anne Zokas re-joined the team at the AGM and her experience has been most welcome. 8 Management Team meetings were held during the year. Alex Smith, a student at the University of Derby also volunteered to help with contacting local media about MED's activities.

Five members' meetings were held at Mickleover during the year: The New Year Fuddle & Dutch Auction; our AGM in May (heavy snow caused the postponement of our AGM in March); a fun meeting to celebrate our 25th anniversary; an update on the work of the Southern Derbyshire CFS/ME Service by Boz Smith; and a Mindfulness taster session with Dr Karen Neil.

Two afternoon social events were enjoyed at Derby Garden Centre in the spring and Denby Pottery Visitor Centre in the summer, a particular attraction of the latter being the Pottery Beach. Horsley Lodge also proved a very successful venue for our Christmas lunch. Elizabeth Spencer was the inspiration behind this choice and her introduction of a splendid raffle also added considerably to our enjoyment of the occasion.

Reports of the above events and many other items of interest were featured in our quarterly newsletters (**Informed**). Newsletters continue to be appreciated, based on random feedback we receive from members during the year. The short survey of members' views carried out during the year about MED future priorities clearly confirmed the newsletter as the most strongly supported priority. Newsletters can be time-consuming to produce and although we received some very interesting and original contributions from members (as an example, the two-part article from Elizabeth Breedon had a marked impact on many readers), more content from members is always particularly welcome to help reduce the creative effort needed to produce the newsletters. Philip and Mary Whitt continued to circulate interesting email update bulletins throughout the year (amongst many of their important behind-the-scenes contributions) to those members wishing to receive them.

Philip Whitt kept the MED website regularly updated throughout the year and, not surprisingly in this digital age, it has become the main source that external enquirers turn to when seeking information. During 2014 we plan to introduce a special section on the website exclusively for members.

We supported ME Awareness Month activities in May by again having our display panels, information leaflets and newsletters in a prominent position in Derby Central Library for two weeks, followed by a

further week in the new library in Chaddesden. Library staff at both places reported a good level of interest.

in them. During November the new library in Ashbourne also hosted our display. Other local ME Awareness initiatives included a letter in the Derby Telegraph, short ME-themed prayers for intercessions at local places of worship, including Derby Cathedral and providing information to the ME Association to ensure that its updated "Purple Book" on ME was sent to various Derbyshire GP surgeries.

MED finances remain in a healthy position and were enhanced by takings from the Dutch Auction, regular raffles, refreshments, Marie Kirk's hand crafted greetings cards, donations from the Derbyshire Building Society, the Ashbourne branch of WH Smith (over 250 books for us to sell on for our funds) and several generous contributions from individual members. We thank everyone who has helped us financially during the year. Elizabeth Spencer has been particularly active in encouraging businesses in the Ashbourne area to consider supporting MED in a variety of ways. However, interest rates on financial savings generally have remained at a low level and so our income from this source is considerably less than it was in more buoyant financial times. Pat and Bill Gadsby again deserve special thanks for their guidance and their prudence with the Group's finances in difficult circumstances.

We maintained informal contact with the Southern Derbyshire CFS/ME Service, albeit more sporadically than in previous years, due mainly to the heavy demands on the staff's time arising from the continuing NHS reforms.

We made progress with the project to update our publicity materials, in conjunction with students in the Graphic Design Department at the University of Derby, and further work will continue during 2014 to complete it. This design project is being carried out at no cost to MED and we have some local funding to cover the final production costs,

2013 was another full and challenging year for many reasons, but especially for all the planning and organisation necessary to ensure that members enjoyed and felt part of MED's 25th anniversary celebrations. Great credit again has to go to all our Management Team members, who have had to adapt to unexpected problems at various times during the year. They managed, despite their variable health, limited energies, and in some cases difficult personal circumstances, to keep things running.

Special thanks must go to our Secretary and Vice Chair, John Smith who worked constantly to get everything together in every aspect of the group's activities. Many thanks are also due to those MED members, friends and supporters who were able to help us from time to time on particular tasks, especially at members' meetings. Keeping a support group like MED going relies very much on generous people who are prepared to give their time and experience to help others.

In our 25th year we tried to balance looking back with looking forward. We still have one or two things to finish off from our celebration year but our main aim will again be to try to respond to the needs identified by our members. Their interests will remain at the core of the support we provide. Last year gave us some valuable insights into the support that was felt to be important in the future. We will do our best with the resources that we have available. For a small group, MED has been described as "often punching above its weight." That may or may not be the case, but we face some important decisions in 2014 about what we can realistically achieve in future.