

# What FRIENDS are *FOR*

Chrysalis Club Tynedale offer social activities and support for people living with dementia and their families. Living North find out more about their work and how we can support the team

Chair Rosie Robson has personal experience with dementia and a change of career led her to setting up Chrysalis Club Tynedale in 2009. 'I worked for Alzheimer's Society and a regional organisation called Dementia Care Partnership (now Dementia Matters),' she says. 'I was supporting some younger people with dementia, who are a very marginalised group, and they were also attending an art class run by an occupational therapist (OT) in Hexham. They were really enjoying this but the OT couldn't continue with it. They'd made nice, strong friendships and were supporting each other and really wanted it to continue. I hauled in a couple of ex-colleagues and we started from nothing (no money, no constitution, no premises) – we just thought "let's go for it!" That was in 2009 and we've grown organically from there.'

Rosie says Chrysalis is unique in that it supports the whole family. The group provide a range of tutored activities (often suggested by members) each week as well as group support for families. 'There's a sort of public conception that people with dementia can't learn something new and we'd like to challenge that,' says Rosie. 'We have professional tutors who are given training and we have volunteers who are recruited and trained and they support the member one-to-one in their activity. The person with dementia has a buddy that they feel safe with and they also have someone who can keep them orientated on an activity if that's what they want to do. If they don't want to do that, they can talk about their grandchildren, what they did in the war or anything that they'd like.'

'I think for them it's quite a special time because the family and carers at home are often struggling with tasks and having to learn new skills so they can often struggle to give their partner or loved one 100 percent attention, but for two hours they come to us and if they've told the same story 35 times it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if they've lost their thread or forgotten someone's name. They can all contribute a lot to Chrysalis. The idea is that they come in and (for the first session certainly) their carer (or someone who they're totally comfortable with) will stay but they'll also have a volunteer assigned to them. They'll do an activity for about an hour and a quarter then there's a social time where they can simply chat, play dominoes, do a jigsaw or take part in a quiz.'

'For that two hours that member has got someone who can give them their full and undivided attention. They feel safe with us and start to have fun again and stop worrying about what people think. We have maximum of 10 members per session so it's not too busy or disorientating for them and they start to really come out of their shell.'

Chrysalis also arranges group trips for the members such as to the theatre or to see local exhibitions and to attend race days. 'We also run an intergenerational project where we work with local schools and children are buddied with a member to work on something together,' Rosie adds. 'It's a joy to see young and old working together.'

Once the members are settled, Chrysalis can support their carers and families. 'We have a monthly support group for them and we offer a six-week carer's information course where we have professionals come along, such as psychiatrists talking about diagnosis, a GP talking about what their role is, a solicitor talking about Powers of Attorney, wills and trusts, and organisations in the community who may be of help to them (such as Tynedale Hospice at Home and Carers Northumberland). We also have a dedicated carer support worker who offers telephone support.' The After-Carers Group is for family members who no longer attend Chrysalis regularly, but who want to stay in touch.

To help support Chrysalis Club Tynedale you can volunteer, donate and fundraise. 'Volunteering is a really good way of supporting us,' says Rosie. Whilst Chrysalis acquired its own premises in Hexham in 2021, which has helped the team build their presence, it's a leased premises and Rosie believes they'll have to move within the next five years or so. Their dream is to own their very own purpose-built premises. 'At the moment we run sessions at Hexham and at Wylam and we'd like to increase that,' Rosie says. 'We'd also like to have some green space and somewhere where it is secure for our members without it looking as though it's fenced in. We already do gardening activities but it has to be indoors at the moment. There is evidence that green space is very beneficial for people with dementia. A garden where people could go out to work on raised beds, plant things they've grown from seed or simply sit in the sun – that would be fantastic!'

*To help support Chrysalis Club Tynedale and their vital work in our community, visit [chrysalisclub.org.uk](http://chrysalisclub.org.uk). Living North designer Ellie is running the Great North Run this year in aid of Chrysalis Club Tynedale, to donate search for 'Ellie and Maddey Chrysalis Club Tynedale' at [justgiving.com](http://justgiving.com).*