

Help is at hand for ataxia sufferers

STANMORE: Support group for those with the neurological disease

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EVERY two months Deanna Kaye works hard to organise meetings aimed at helping those suffering from a rare neurological condition.

And the 61-year-old knows only too well the need for such

a support group, because as a teenager the mother-of-one from Drummond Drive, Stanmore, struggled to come to terms with ataxia, a problem that psychiatrists told her was 'all in her mind'.

Deanna developed the condition, which affects walking, speech and co-ordination, aged just eight, as a side effect of

measles. And soon it was affecting all aspects of her life.

She said: "I was made fun of at school because I was a little bit different, slower than the rest, my speech was a bit slurred and I couldn't write properly.

"I felt like a social pariah.

"When I finished school I was refused a sales job because

the firm's doctor did not know enough about my condition, I had large periods of unemployment due to my physical limitations and in one job I was ignored for two years by the girls I worked with because they thought I was lazy."

Ataxia has meant Deanna has struggled with balance and co-ordination throughout her life and has to concentrate fully on where she is putting her feet and hands at all times.

She added: "Ataxia means that I am that much slower than 'normal people', I have to concentrate all the time on putting my feet and hands where I want them to go. Even then I sometimes get it wrong. Tripping, falling and getting my feet caught in my path are hazards I have to contend with every waking moment."

On top of everything, Deanna also battled breast cancer several years ago, and says that this and her ataxia has driven her to help others.

She recently set up the North West London Support Group for national charity Ataxia UK and also volunteers at one of the Ataxia centres.

She said: "It is so important



■ **LONG-TERM SUFFERER:** Deanna Kaye

Contributed

to be able to have someone providing advice and a sympathetic ear if you have just been diagnosed with this dreadful condition.

"Just talking to a volunteer can help a patient relax when they see we have common problems.

"I guess it's just important to try to come to terms with the condition because the more you

worry about the future, the less assured that future becomes. So you just have to accept it."

The group's next meeting is on September 5 at the Traveller's Rest in Kenton Road, Harrow.

● For more information on how to join the group visit the national website www.ataxia.org.uk.

FROM HARROW OBSERVER
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