

It is that time of year again where we focus our attention to a very special set of people who so often go under the radar. The 9th – 15th June marks Carers Week 2014. This year I have signed up to support the Carers Week Quest, launched in February, a hugely ambitious campaign to reach out to thousands of carers in the UK still missing out on support and services.

As many as 1 in 8 of my constituents will be caring for an ill, frail or disabled family member or friend. Many of which will be older people, maybe with dementia, and this number is only set to increase with our aging population. The Valuing Carers Research Report 2011 records that Kent has a total of 143,331 carers, which saves the public purse £2.48 billion each year, but research carried out in 2012 found that 47 per cent of unpaid carers said they were made ill by money worries.

This is why I am always so impressed when I visit support services in the local community, of which there are some absolutely brilliant initiatives. However, it is vitally important that we ensure these services are utilised. So often I have attended incredible local services that are a lifeline to the people who attend, but only to learn that they could cater to a bigger capacity than they do.

I support Carers Week every year because thousands of people in Chatham & Aylesford sacrifice not only their time, but also their money and their health in order to care for a loved one. Together they save this country an incredible £119 billion every year. It's vital that carers are offered regular breaks from caring and health checks so that they can be supported and while I am thrilled that the new Care Bill will for the first time include rights for carers, we must do more.