

## Knitting Care into Every Stitch: The Mother-Daughter Duo Creating Comfort for People with Dementia

In a quiet corner of Hampshire, a beautiful act of creativity and compassion is unfolding - one stitch at a time. Mary and her daughter Penelope have turned a shared love of crafting into a heartfelt mission: creating handmade *Fidget blankets* for people living with dementia.



But what exactly is a Fidget blanket?

“These blankets are more than just warm and colourful,” explains Penelope. “They’re designed to calm and engage people with dementia, who often experience restlessness or a need to fidget.” Each blanket is a sensory piece of handmade art - knitted, crocheted, embroidered and stitched with care. They feature zips, buttons, pockets (always with a little note inside) and a variety of textures and colours

Mary, 93, finds joy and purpose in the work. "I love knitting whilst listening to music - especially the music my late husband loved. He played the piano and organ and I feel close to him when I knit," she says. "I used to do all the gardening, but now I make these blankets. It keeps my fingers nimble and gives me something to do"

The idea began when Penelope made a Fidget blanket for a relative with severe dementia. "I'd heard of them but didn't know much about them so I researched and made one. Mum was already knitting, so we teamed up," she says. What started as a personal project soon grew into something much bigger.

With the support of Mike from Home Instead Southampton, a family friend, the blankets find homes with clients who truly benefit from them. "It's become a lovely project," Penelope says. "Mum takes such care choosing colours and textures. She'll ask visitors, 'What do you think - this colour or that one?' It brings her so much joy."

The fabric in the blankets is generally recycled: denim from old jeans, buttons from worn-out coats, ribbons, and even glitzy fabrics from friends. "People donate all sorts," says Penelope. "We've had fabric from linen cupboards, old clothes, even sparkly dresses. It's all reused with love."

The impact is far-reaching. Families who receive the blankets usually make donations to the Alzheimer's Society, creating a beautiful cycle of giving. "It's a win-win," says Penelope. "Mum stays active and happy, people with dementia get comfort, and the donations support future dementia research."

Penelope also creates bespoke Fidget blankets on request - personalised with meaningful symbols like musical notes, family names and football club emblems. "They take more time, but they're so special and it resonates with the families and brings back shared memories," she says.

Their story has even reached local art lovers. During an Open Studios event on the Isle of Wight, Penelope displayed her blankets and shared their story. "People loved it," she says. "One lady donated a wide variety of buttons left over from her haberdashery business!"

As Mary and Penelope continue their work, they said their it would be wonderful if every person with dementia could own a Fidget blanket of their own and Mary says with a smile. "We're just doing our bit and happy to be making a difference."



### **Calling all knitters, crafters and crocheters – groups or individuals!**

Home Instead Southampton is excited to launch the **Mary's Blanket Challenge**, running from **1st October to 30th November!** We're inviting groups and individuals from Southampton city and the surrounding areas, who love knitting, crocheting, embroidery, crafting or quilting, to each create a unique Fidget blanket. We will be asking for blankets that reflect *where you or your group is from or what you love* - this could be the sea, countryside, fitness, food, books, football, or anything in between! These sensory blankets bring comfort and joy to people living with dementia, and we can't wait to see your creativity shine.

The winning blanket will be chosen by Penelope and a panel of judges and will be given out at Christmas presents, by Home Instead Southampton, to people living with dementia in the Southampton area. Email: [sam.tanner@homeinstead.co.uk](mailto:sam.tanner@homeinstead.co.uk) to find out more and register your interest.

**Join the challenge and make a difference - one stitch at a time!**



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