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## Norfolk Millennium Trust for Carers

The Norfolk Millennium Trust for Carers offers unpaid carers a better quality of life by giving grants for practical things like washing machines and tumble driers, laptops, leisure activities and short breaks, and power packs for wheelchairs.

It began life after research showed the increasing number of unpaid carers in Norfolk, young and old, from pensioners looking after a disabled spouse to children juggling schoolwork and the needs of a poorly parent.

Today the Trust fund stands at £1.175million - and rising.

And every penny raised goes to helping the 100,000-plus unpaid carers in Norfolk.

With more and more people living longer and cuts in public funding for care services, the Trust's work is more important than ever.

It is estimated that nationally unpaid carers now annually save the state more than £132billion - an average of some £20,000 a year each.

The Appeal to raise a "Million for the Millennium" was launched in October 1998 through the Eastern Daily Press after it was shown that as many as one in seven adults in Norfolk and 5,500 children or young people under 24 were unpaid carers.

The aim was simple - to establish an enduring charitable trust giving financial and practical help to unpaid carers in their often difficult and undervalued roles.

Backed by health and social care chiefs, church and business leaders and senior figures in Norfolk including the then Lord Lieutenant Sir Timothy Colman and his wife, Lady Mary, the Appeal quickly caught the imagination. And the Trust - a charity unique across the country - was soon able to start helping carers.

To date, it has been able to help no fewer than 3,119 carers and 52 groups in its 20-year existence, with the total amount of money paid out topping £943,000\*.

In 2003 it won an important legal victory overturning an anomaly in national lottery funding laws which had prevented permanent endowment funds like We Care from receiving lottery money. Now it has received two grants worth £199,712 in Lottery funds to be spent on white goods.

At Christmas 2009 the Trust announced that the Appeal had hit its ambitious £1m target - thanks to donations large and small, from businesses and charitable foundations to the hundreds of individual fundraisers who put on events, rattled collection tins and handed over their winter fuel allowance.

All the money raised by the Trust is invested to provide an income for grants to men, women and children around Norfolk caring for sick, infirm, elderly and disabled relatives and friends. It also supports carers' organisations around the county.

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Today it is administered by Norfolk Community Foundation but the grants are approved monthly by an experienced panel of volunteers chaired by Paddy Seligman who said: “The Trust fills gaps in state provision, helping some of the most deserving and often most neglected people in our community.

“All our money is targeted at providing relief and support for carers, removing financial worry by paying for necessary equipment, providing respite through a weekend break perhaps, or giving access to the wider world through a laptop and the internet.

“Support and relief for carers has one vital result. It sustains and restores their ability to care and this is the ultimate benefit to those being cared for.”

The Trust gives grants of up to £250 for white goods like washing machines and fridges, laptops to help people study or keep in touch with their families and the outside world, holidays and short breaks, and leisure activities.

It is the only source of power packs in Norfolk for wheelchairs for those who cannot afford to pay for what is an expensive piece of equipment. The Sobell Foundation has been particularly supportive in funding these.

A recent national report for CarersUK highlighted the strains on carers whose numbers are likely to grow by no fewer than 10 million in the next few years. It pinpointed increasing concerns among unpaid carers about financial hardship, the detrimental impact of caring on their own health and wellbeing, increased loneliness and the impact on maintaining a relationship or staying in work.

Mrs Seligman added: “To be involved with this charity since the very beginning when it was decided that the Millennium in Norfolk would be marked by the creation of an enduring trust to benefit unpaid carers in the county has been a great privilege.

“The idea came from Joanna Hannam, the late John Alston and Peter Franzen - and what a brilliant idea it has proved to be.

“Raising money for this admirable cause has at times been an uphill struggle because many people still don't understand how difficult life can be for some of Norfolk's unpaid carers. That hidden group of people who dedicate their lives to caring for the sick, elderly or incapacitated by injury don't always want to be considered as needy in any way.

“The needs of children who have to act as carers represent a growing, and often heartbreakingly acute, problem.

“What we provide may seem small to you and me who may accept our lifestyle as typical of most but this one liner from a carer perhaps says it all - “Thank you for all that your organisation does to help people like us.”

*\*Figures as at Jan 2020*