

Impact report

2022-23

A message from our Chair and Chief Executive

Carers continue to face enormous challenges, with the ongoing cost of living crisis having a disproportionate impact on those in a caring role.

At this crucial time, we want to thank everyone who has supported us for the vital part you have played. Your help has meant that our dedicated and incredible team have been able to reach more carers than ever this

year - over 274,000, exceeding our 2024 Strategy target of reaching 250,000 carers a year early.

Thanks to you, our award-winning Lighten the Load campaign is making a material difference in the lives of over 1,000 carers right now as they are accessing increased financial assistance.

It has never been more important to raise awareness of what it means to be a carer, to share information and to provide a trusted source of practical, tailored support. 92% of carers in our surveys tell us our support helped them feel more resilient, and 90% feel more informed and confident in their caring role.

Your support is also key to the success of our new magazine Putting Carers First. It has made it into the hands of thousands of people, and actor Colin McFarlane was the voice of our first radio advert that successfully reached thousands more listeners in our local communities.

We are also celebrating the continuing development of essential new services in collaboration with carers and our flourishing partnerships in local communities.

This is all made possible because of your choice to support the people facing the challenge of being an unpaid carer.

Looking forward, there is still much to do, and we appreciate your continuing support. It means that people like Lorraine and Mike, whose stories you will read here, are able to find a balance between caring for someone while also feeling able to thrive and enjoy their own life to its fullest.

Thank you.



Alison Taylor
Chief Executive

About Carers First

Carers First works directly with and for unpaid carers to provide personalised information and advice; making it easier for those caring for someone else to continue living their lives to the fullest.

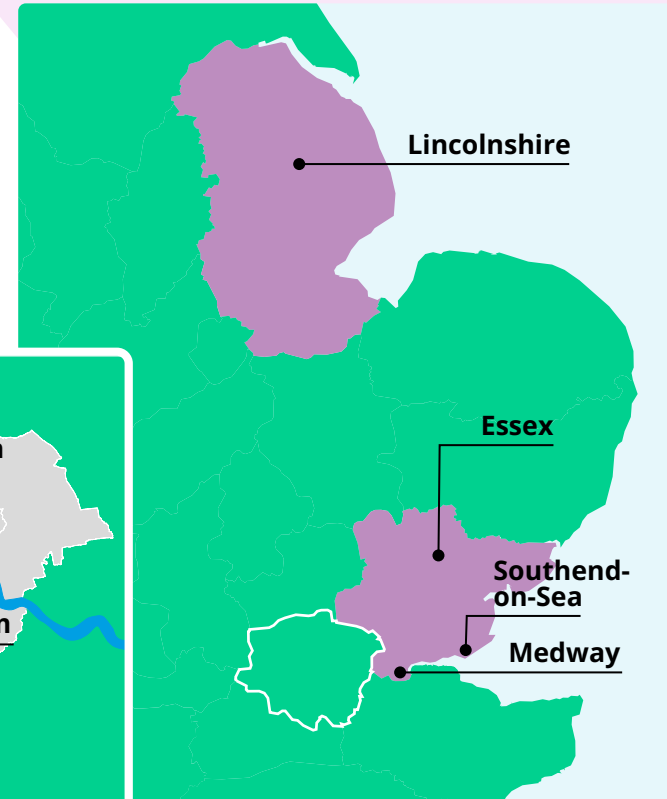


Peter Davis
Chair of Trustees

Carers First at a glance

Caring for someone can be challenging, but getting the support you need, shouldn't be. We work directly with unpaid carers to provide a trusted source of practical, tailored information, advice and support. We do this through personalised contact, face-to-face, by phone, and online and via online resources and through our partnerships within the communities we serve.

Our wide range of services includes emotional and wellbeing programmes, information and guidance on finances as well as direct financial help, advocacy services and bespoke practical assistance. Our regular activities and events also provide important opportunities for carers to connect and support one another.



274,000

carers reached exceeding our 2024 Strategy target of reaching 250,000 carers a year.

92%

of carers in our surveys tell us our support helped them feel more resilient.

232,000

people accessed our information and resources for carers on our website.

Strategic objectives



Strategic objective 1

Reaching more carers at the earliest opportunity

Specifically targeted campaigns

Reaching more carers, earlier, is one of our strategic goals, and the key to this is to raise awareness about what it means to be a carer. Lorraine's story illustrates how many people are facing the challenge of caring for someone and yet do not identify as a carer themselves. Our specifically targeted campaigns are tackling this issue head-on.

Lightening the Load

Our cost of living survey in August 2022 revealed a troubling picture, with nine out of every ten carers reporting that they were losing



sleep due to worrying about how to make ends meet. More than half of the carers who responded shared that they were already in debt, or would be soon, due to their caring responsibilities. A third were going without food on a regular basis.

Our *Lighten the Load* campaign, launched in October 2022, directly responded to this, sharing information with carers about financial support.

Our campaign received nationwide interest, with the Carers First team invited to speak on the Channel 4 show *Steph's Packed Lunch*, and was supported by Kate Garraway, Jennie Bond and Colin McFarlane.

Our Lighten the Load campaign, launched in October 2022, directly responded to this, sharing information with carers about financial support.

Most importantly, our campaign means that over a thousand carers have received financial support through benefits, grants and discounts, as well as assistance with household bills.

We are delighted to have received the award for Best Charity/Not-For-Profit Campaign at the 2023 UK Digital Excellence Awards in recognition of the very real impact this campaign is having in the lives of carers.

The right tools

As Mike's story makes only too clear, many carers feel unprepared for the reality of looking after someone who is discharged from hospital into their care. Not only does this put the health of the patient at risk, but it also threatens the wellbeing of the carer themselves.



Strategic objective 1 (Continued)



The Carers and Hospital Discharge Toolkit, to which we were delighted to contribute, continues to be essential for professionals supporting carers. Ten London NHS Trusts have already embedded the Hospital Discharge Toolkit into their discharge process, with other Trusts across the UK now interested in doing the same.

New carers are identified every month and are now getting the support they deserve. The impact of this is enormous, with more carers receiving vital information, helpful resources and advice, and essential emotional support at this difficult time.

Strong connections

Our online presence continues to grow, and the number of carers we reach by phone and face-to-face in the community constantly increases, again exceeding our targets this year.

In the last two years, we have reached 274,560 carers, exceeding our target by 65%.

The successful publication of Putting Carers First means our new magazine has already reached thousands of carers, and actor and Carers First supporter

Colin McFarlane lent his voice to our first radio advert, helping us to spread the word across our local communities and reach over 300,000 listeners.

Over the last year 232,000 people accessed our information and resources for carers on our website, exceeding our target.



87%

of carers maintained or improved their Carers Star Assessment score/outcome.

90%

of carers feel more confident and informed in their caring role.

94%

of carers feel they are listened to and that their own needs are considered.

Mike's Story

Caring for a loved one before their death takes a huge toll on anyone, and no one should ever feel that they are going through this experience alone. Unfortunately, this isn't always the case, and too often people can feel isolated and unsupported.

Mike, 78, was the sole carer for his wife Lynn towards the end of her life. Lynn had breast cancer, and Mike cared for her for 18 months until her death.

It was a tough time. Mike was by Lynn's side, keeping her spirits up during radiotherapy, but her health deteriorated and Mike, who has his own health issues, could not lift her. He called the emergency services, but the experience left him feeling disempowered and unseen.

Mike was at breaking point. He had not been asked by anyone how he was coping but, thankfully, a nurse told him about Carers First – and we were able to immediately recognise the seriousness of the situation and support Mike.

"Carers First listened to me. They took away the pressure of dealing with medical professionals as I wasn't in a place mentally where I could do this."

Working with his own personal Carer Support Adviser, Mike was able to access emotional and wellbeing support services, as well as receive practical financial help.

It was clear Mike desperately needed respite, and we contacted St Barnabas on his behalf to arrange hospice care for Lynn.

"As Lynn was placed in the hospice, it allowed me the last few days to be her husband rather than her carer. This would not have happened if it was not for Carers First advocating on my behalf."

Our support continues after Lynn's death. Mike has been introduced to the Carers First Men Do project, generously funded by the Freemasons Charity, which offers social activities for men over 50 who are carers or former carers.

Mike's health is improving, and due to the practical guidance and support he was able to access, he now receives the benefits he is entitled to.

Mike's story highlights the importance of improved early

identification of carers and the continued need to raise awareness about the many impacts caring can have on someone's life.

"I don't want other carers to suffer alone like I did. So many carers pass through hospitals and GPs, and they need to be told about the support available."

"I felt so alone. As Lynn's husband and carer, I was living her illness too."



Strategic objective 2

Making a real difference in carers' lives

It's personal

While some of the challenges carers face can be similar, each one of the 45,000 carers who have registered with us is on their own unique journey. Our offer to them is always centred on the personalised support they need.

When someone calls our helpline, they are recognised as an individual and their specific needs are understood. Our Carer Support Advisers understand their local areas and the communities they serve.

"As soon as I was in contact with Carers First the ball started rolling. Emma (the Carer Support Adviser) has been brilliant. We talked about my caring role and the support I needed, and everything just started to happen." Peter, 68, was referred to Carers First whilst caring for his wife, Susan, who had been diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's.

We listen to carers' requests, learn from their experiences and lived expertise and have coproduced our Programmes of Support with them. These are bespoke materials, support groups, person-centred conversations and learning

for specific caring situations. Our successful bid for funding from the National Lottery means more of these new Programmes of Support will be available to carers over the next three years.

And despite the cost of living crisis and challenges in social care, 78% of carers feel there has been an improvement in their lives due to the support they receive from Carers First.

Financial support

Unpaid carers face very real financial pressures, and being informed of financial assistance available is critical to improving the day-to-day experience of carers.

This year we increased our capacity to provide benefit checks, maximise carers' income, provide money guidance and help with completing welfare benefit forms.



Rob became a full-time carer overnight when his wife Josie suffered multiple strokes during complications with her second pregnancy. Through support from Carers First, the family has received benefits advice and financial support that has paid for a new stairlift and washing machine.

This high-quality, bespoke support means that:

92%

of carers feel more resilient in their caring role.

94%

of carers would recommend Carers First to other carers.

£5m+

was successfully secured as benefits for carers in Lincolnshire and London in the last four years.

Strategic objective 2 (Continued)

Growing in confidence

Through tailored coaching, we have successfully supported carers to feel ready for employment and to maintain work. Volunteering has also been important for carers who have gained confidence and skills that they are able to use in all aspects of their lives.

Volunteering has also been important for carers who have gained confidence as well as valuable new skills through their experience.

Time to relax

Many carers need to be reminded of the importance of taking time out to relax, connect with others and focus on their own wellbeing. Our respite activities address this

“I started off feeling guilty taking time out for myself, but afterwards it makes me realise that I do need to care for me. It reduces tension in my body and shows me that if I can reduce the stress in my brain and body, I have more room to deal with stuff going on around me.”

Breathworks participant

“I have felt included, listened to, and welcomed into this group and found new friends, which I didn’t expect.”

Participant from the Men Do project that offers groups and activities for male carers.

directly. Our online activities are tailored for those carers who are unable to leave the house due to their caring responsibilities, and our thriving Facebook community has grown to over 1,000 members, continuing to provide a safe, nonjudgmental place for carers to connect and share with others.

Thanks to our funders and volunteers, regular trips, activities and events are always on offer in the community. Groups that meet monthly throughout the year offer something for every carer, from exercise and wellbeing groups, to peer support for specific carers in particular caring situations, including those from seldom heard groups.

For carers within the Turkish and Kurdish communities in London, there are events and support groups in their own languages, and male carers have enjoyed monthly events.

Family empowerment

95% of the young carers we support in Medway look after a family member with a mental health condition. Carers First helped deliver family empowerment workshops to support families to learn practical coping strategies and to reconnect over fun, informal activities. All participants reported feeling more confident and resilient following the workshops.

“The course was really useful. I have learnt new strategies and feel confident using the techniques.”

Workshop participant



Damien has been caring for his wife, Tracy, full-time since 2013. Damien began his volunteer journey by helping to set up a carers group in his local community. He then trained with us to become a Digital Champion, supporting other carers on the phone and drawing on his experience with computers.

Building up the courage to speak on the phone as a volunteer has led to Damien feeling confident enough to fulfil a childhood dream, and he is now broadcasting live on his local radio station.

“Thanks to Carers First I have gained the strength to go on air and have even commentated on Boston United football matches.”



Lorraine's Story

There are over 5.7 million unpaid carers in the UK, and research suggests this number may be almost twice as high. Many believe, like Lorraine, that caring for a family member is something you simply just have to get on with.

"I really wasn't aware I was a carer. I thought I was just looking after my mum."

"With the support of Carers First, I now realise that as well as being a daughter, I'm a carer too."

Lorraine's mum Sylvia is 86, a determined woman who wants to stay as active as possible. Lorraine and her siblings make sure Sylvia attends her beloved art classes, as well as keeping up with her regular appointments. Sylvia has several health issues, including diabetes, cataracts and early-onset vascular dementia. She recently accepted the support of a wheelchair after her hip replacement.

Lorraine admits that life feels hard sometimes. As someone who suffers from health problems herself and is having treatment for lung cancer, to realise that she isn't alone has meant a great deal to Lorraine.

"I know that someone is at the end of the phone to help me, and that makes me feel so supported."

We were able to offer Lorraine much-needed practical and emotional support in the form of mindfulness and breathwork programmes, art classes and art materials, online support groups and financial support when times were tough.

Lorraine came to recognise that caring for herself first was vitally important. She hadn't realised this before, and it is something that has had a real impact on her quality of life.

"I speak from the heart when I say that Carers First has helped me appreciate me, and that is so important as a carer. To be able to care for others, we need to be okay too, and the team at Carers First have really helped me do that."



Working in partnership

Our thriving partnerships are key to carers receiving the support they deserve and to the successful impact of our work. We are continuing to build rich relationships with complementary organisations in health and social care and with schools, employers and commercial organisations.

“Combining the expertise and experience of North Kent Mind and Carers First enables us to provide and deliver a first-class programme while also learning from each other.”

Jacqui Leek, co-facilitator,
North Kent Mind

Supporting carers is vital to tackling social care challenges and addressing the health inequalities they face.

This year we have been actively engaging on a local level with Integrated Care Systems, and our collaborations with GP surgeries mean that more carers than ever this year have been

identified and added to the GPs Practice Carers Register.

Young Carers

Our work to highlight the experience of young carers, and to support them in achieving their fullest potential, is well illustrated by our partnership with 25 schools in Medway. It means that young carers now have access to lunch and after-school clubs, and their teachers are more aware of their unique situations.

Working Carers

With one in seven people recognised as working carers, our work with private and public sector organisations is continuing to raise awareness of what this really means for their employees. Our collaboration with the Ministry of Justice means that its

“My confidence has massively improved, and I feel more comfortable talking to new people now. I believe in myself more and feel empowered to share more about what it’s like to be a young carer. This is a result of being involved with Carers First and their activities.”

Michelle, 16, cares for her mum Julie, who has epilepsy



Recognition and Raising the Profile of Carers First

Finalist: Care Charity of the Year, Kent Charity Awards 2022

Finalist: Helpline of the Year, Helpline Awards 2022

Winner: Best Charity/Not-For-Profit Campaign at the 2023 UK Digital Excellence Awards



Strategic objective 4

Supporting staff and volunteers

A vibrant and high-performing team

We continue to invest in staff wellbeing, learning and development, our culture and values and our staff benefits package. Almost half our staff are carers. We have Carers Passports, have launched a new Carers Network, appointed new Staff Carer Champions, and refreshed our Carers' Policy which includes five days of paid carers' leave.

The vital role of volunteers

Volunteers are an invaluable part of the Carers First team, bringing incredible skills and expertise and enriching our work with carers.

We provide all volunteers with training and ongoing support and are proud to hold the Investing in Volunteers accreditation in recognition. Over the last year we have increased the range of our volunteer opportunities available.

Volunteering has also proved a pathway to employment for some. Katie came to Carers First on a volunteer placement as part of her Health and Social Care degree and has since joined us as a Carer Support Adviser.

The beneficial effects of volunteering are well-documented, and Rahul, who came to us through our partnership with Legal & General, explains how it has enhanced his life:

"I never would have thought of doing a job like this if I had not been involved through volunteering. I was wowed by my placement and knew I wanted to be involved in the charity more. I want to do a job where I make a difference and that is rewarding."

Katie



"Volunteering gives me a sense of purpose. Helping another human feel heard is one of life's most underrated gifts. Volunteering has really helped me understand compassion, kindness and listening to someone who isn't in your bubble of friends, family or colleagues."

Rahul, Claims Relationships Manager at Legal and General, and telephone befriending volunteer

201

people volunteered with us, a 21% increase from last year.

98%

of volunteers said they felt valued by Carers First in our 2023 survey.

1,500

carers were supported by volunteers, a 50% increase from last year.

Strategic objective 5

Financially sustainable and effective charity

Securing funding

We have successfully resecured the contract to deliver the Carer Support Service in Lincolnshire for up to five years, as well as securing extensions to our contracts in both Essex and Haringey.

We are delighted to have won significant new grants from the National Lottery, Independent Age and Mercers Philanthropy during this time, created new partnerships

with Smart Energy GB and Cripps Law firm and further developed our partnerships with Legal & General and Anglian Water. Thank you to all our funders.

For every £1 we spent on fundraising, we raised £6

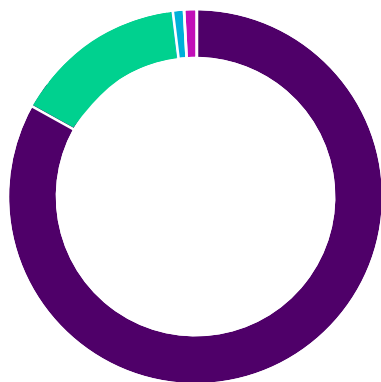
How your funds support carers

How we raised our funds

Contracts	81%	£3,805,383
Grants	17%	£785,122
Donations & legacies	1%	£70,029
Investments	1%	£34,088

Income

£4,694,622

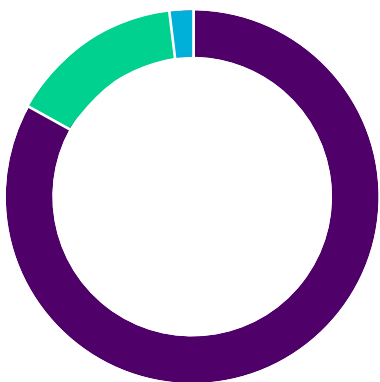


How we used our funds

Services to support carers	83%	£4,026,186
Support to enable services to carers	16%	£765,294
Raising funds to support more carers	2%	£81,837

Expenditure

£4,873,317



Does not total 100% due to rounding

We utilised some reserves to strategically enhance our work during the cost of living crisis to extend our capacity to reach more carers this year.

*Full accounts available on request.

Looking Forward

We are in the second year of our three-year strategy which has seen the charity take significant steps forward. The strategy for the next three years is in development and our commitment to continued growth and improvement remains strong, and our goals will be ambitious in every area.

Find out more how you
can support carers:

Visit carersfirst.org.uk/get-involved

Email partners@carersfirst.org.uk

Thank you

Thank you to all the following statutory agencies who commission our services:

- Essex County Council
- Hackney Council
- Haringey Council
- Lincolnshire County Council
- Medway Council
- NHS Kent and Medway ICB
- Southend-on-Sea Council
- Waltham Forest Council

We would like to thank all our supporters and funders who have helped to make a vital difference in carers' lives. Below are some of the organisations who have provided funding:

- BBC Children in Need
- Carers Trust
- Colchester Catalyst
- Colyer Fergusson Charitable Trust
- Garfield Weston Foundation
- Harlow Health Centres Trust
- Independent Age
- John Swire 1989 Charitable Trust
- Margaret Emmens
- Masonic Charitable Foundation
- Mercers - Charity of Sir Richard Whittington
- National Grid Electricity Distribution
- The National Lottery
- Young Londoners Fund

Ways to support

1

Volunteer with us

5

Partner with us via
your company

2

Make either a one-off
or regular donation

6

Choose Carers First
as your Charity
of the Year

3

Support a project
through your Trust
or Foundation

7

Leave a living
legacy through a
gift in your will

4

Group together with
friends or colleagues
and set yourself a
fundraising challenge

Getting in touch

Helpline: 0300 303 1555

If you're a carer, you can email **hello@carersfirst.org.uk**

If you're interested in our work, you can email
partners@carersfirst.org.uk



Carers First

We are registered as a charity in England and Wales (1085430). Carers First is also a Company Limited by Guarantee, registered at Companies House (04144820).

Registered office: Unit 4, Michael Gill Building, Tolgate Lane, Rochester, Kent, England, ME2 4TG

