

# HGSRA respond to Royal Free Charity Covid-19 Emergency Fund Appeal

Many, many thanks to our wonderful residents who so generously supported the HGS Residents Association's appeal to support workers at our local hospital and to help them to cope with the huge challenges of caring for Covid-19 patients. Some of you may have seen the two-part BBC2 documentary on the Royal Free

Hospital staff which showed graphically the massive logistical and personal challenges staff faced in caring for patients throughout the pandemic. We were constantly thanked for our financial support and the difference it was making on the ground. The volunteers who give their time to the RA were staggered by the generosity

and spirit in wanting to help the workers: we had a massive response to the appeal and, together with the RA's match funding of £25,000 and gift aid on many donations, we are delighted to say that we raised around £65,000.

So, again, many thanks to all those involved

EMMA HOWARD (CHAIR HGS RA)

The following has been written by the Head of Community Fundraising at the Royal Free Charity:

The Royal Free Charity supports staff and patients of the Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust which incorporates Barnet, Chase Farm and the Royal Free Hospitals.

Thanks to the generous support of HGSRA supporting the Emergency Fund Appeal in response to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, the Charity has been able to embrace the huge challenge faced by The Royal Free NHS Heroes and to help provide the support they said they needed.

Working under extreme pressure in the most challenging of circumstances, nurses and doctors on the wards and intensive care units, as well as porters, cleaners and admin staff all played vital roles in the fight against this deadly virus. To have the greatest impact, the Appeal focused on the areas of greatest immediate need: physical, emotional and psychological support for NHS staff to enable them to cope and care in extreme conditions wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).



Many doctors and nurses were isolated from their loved ones as they have vulnerable family members and so couldn't go home at the end of their shifts. Donations from the HGSRA have enabled them to have respite areas with internet access so that they could see and speak to their family. With the creation of 16 REST (Resilience and Emotional Support) areas along with 'wobble' rooms, staff were able to get one-to-one emotional support. During the peak of Covid, 1,370 free hot meals were provided every day helping staff to keep up their energy levels and ensuring that they ate and rested during long and intensive shifts caring for Covid patients.

For those who could go home the Royal Free recreation club was transformed into a free

supermarket for staff. This was filled with donated and bought necessities and treats which saw 48,062 staff visits in the first seven weeks of operation.

The impact of all this support was summed up by one nurse:

*"It makes me feel very special. We can't tell you how much we appreciate it. It feels like we are being supported by the community."*

The Charity and Royal Free NHS staff would like to extend a huge "Thank you!" to all from HGSRA who donated so generously and supported Royal Free NHS in their hours of need. For the NHS the journey continues as they face an uncertain future with this life-threatening disease and the psychological effects which will be with many for years to come.

DIANE RYAN



## 'You Donate, We Deliver' Suburb Hub

Did your exercise walks during the Big Lockdown take you along Northway? If so, you will surely have spotted a small white marquee in front of one of the houses. This was the operations hub of a truly remarkable volunteer effort which ran throughout the spring days of the Covid 19 crisis into the first week of June – the HGS branch of 'You Donate, We Deliver'.

Debra Goodman, the dynamic force behind the HGS initiative, had never volunteered before, let alone taken a key leadership role in a major voluntary project. Indeed, her original intentions were fairly modest: she just wanted to do something to help in the crisis. As the pandemic was developing in March and NHS staff were coming under intense pressure, Debra heard that some friends of hers were cooking and baking for their own family members who are hospital staff. Debra promptly 'volunteered' the help of her daughter-in-law Christina who is a Cordon Bleu chef. On a single day, 130 muffins were made by Christina, collected from Debra's home and distributed to hospitals for hard-pressed staff on Covid wards.

As the crisis increased, more and more hospitals were asking for help to feed staff who did not

have time to cook for themselves, to eat properly during shift breaks or even to get food from their hospital canteens. These staff needed full meals, not just cakes and biscuits. Christina and Debra started making and packing meals but demand was overwhelming and Debra started looking for help from other local volunteers. She recruited friends of friends and people who responded to an appeal on the Nextdoor site. She was overwhelmed by the positive response. 'Everybody was frightened and everybody wanted to help', she says. The marquee in her front garden was donated by a local couple who came round with it (and erected it) within half an hour of Debra appealing for a gazebo to store donations.

Soon Debra found herself engaged as a full time volunteer seven days a week; drawing up and managing cooking rotas and ensuring donated or bought ingredients were available for the volunteer cooks.

Debra also ensured that the cooks had guidance about appropriate kitchen hygiene, portion sizes and the intricacies of cooking in large quantities. Once prepared and packaged, about 600 vegetarian meals a day were delivered to the Northway hub, from where

they were labelled and delivered by volunteer drivers to hospitals throughout London. As the weeks passed, local people became aware of the project and the needs not only of hospital staff but also of homeless people. So the hub accepted donations of toiletries as well as food and Debra liaised with other local organisations such as food banks to ensure that nothing was wasted.

Debra pays tribute to her family who tolerated the daily comings and goings in front of their home as well as the accumulation of food stuffs, pallets and packaging.

She also pays tribute to the broader 'You Donate, We Deliver' volunteering network which was established at speed in March. At the height of the crisis the network had an army of amateur and professional chefs, ten community hubs (HGS was one) and 17 delivery drivers, and was delivering over 2,000 meals a day to front-line hospital staff.

Debra is thinking now about how the good-will and expertise of her team of volunteers might be used in the future. 'People love doing this and being part of a team' she says with justifiable pride.

MARGARET HARRIS

## Making an IMPACT from home

With care homes closing their doors and events being cancelled due to Covid, Project ImpACT, an organisation set up to provide meaningful youth volunteering opportunities to teenagers, had to adapt fast if it was to continue engaging young people to volunteer and support those around them who needed help during these difficult times.

As everyone was encouraged to stay home, Project ImpACT's slogan became 'Making an ImpACT from home' as staff thought creatively about keeping young people inspired.



ImpACT volunteers wrote vast amounts of letters to residents in care homes and isolated people, with some writers even receiving replies to their letters. A homework support club was set up which matched volunteers with primary school children who appreciated the focused attention on Zoom. They also got involved in numerous virtual bake-a-thons which were particularly popular; the delicious baked goodies were delivered to either NHS staff in hospitals or workers in care homes.

More recently volunteers have been entertaining disabled residents with online bingo and playing music for care homes.

There were also interactive sessions for each year group with different speakers, whether it be on mental health for teens during Covid or hearing from doctors about the work they are doing.

It's clearly been a busy few months at Project ImpACT and hopefully the volunteers will soon be able to get back to doing what they do best – volunteering in person.

SHELLEY-ANNE SALISBURY

## Combat Stress update

Local fundraising activities for armed services veterans' mental health charity Combat Stress are still on hold for the time being, but that doesn't stop plans being made by Ruth Smith and the Suburb's Combat Stress Committee for next year to relieve you of your spare cash. Ideas in the pipeline for 2021 are a clothes and book sale, catering for the 2021 HGS Art Fair, a screening of 'The Military Wives Choir' film and an open garden. In the meantime, PTSD doesn't stop and the isolation

brought on by the coronavirus outbreak is making life even harder for the veterans. So, if you would like to contribute to Combat Stress now (and they really do need all the funding they can get asap to keep their outreach programmes going), go to [combatstress.org.uk/emergency](http://combatstress.org.uk/emergency) or call 01372 587151. Thank you.

Caroline and David Broome had planned an actual opening of their award-winning garden in Finchley in aid of Combat Stress on Sunday 2nd August. This will not now be possible

till next year, but you can enjoy a virtual tour of the garden now by going to [youtu.be/7iblsqf3\\_98](https://youtu.be/7iblsqf3_98), [youtu.be/XJ2whXqJlJl](https://youtu.be/XJ2whXqJlJl) and also [youtu.be/Dl-0Q8rMGGA](https://youtu.be/Dl-0Q8rMGGA).

We have received some wonderful clothes already, thank you, but if you are clearing out your cupboards and would like to give away your spare nearly-new clothes for Combat Stress, contact Ruth at [ruthafsmith@hotmail.com](mailto:ruthafsmith@hotmail.com).

MARJORIE HARRIS

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