



## Annual General Meeting 05 July 2023: Chair's report

Ainsley Creedy, Chair

Good evening. I am delighted to see you here this evening for this, our second AGM at the end of what has been another positive and productive year for Cary Cares.

At the start of the year, we set ourselves two main objectives. These were to ensure that we continued to raise awareness of our charity within the community, in particular the availability of our grants and signposting support, and also to raise awareness of the Community Food Bank and Larder to optimise its use.

I am very pleased to say that, together with the support of our amazing team of volunteers and local community, we have made good progress with both of these objectives.

- **Raising Awareness of the Charity:** In terms of raising general awareness of our charity in the community, we extended our on-line offering with the launch of a website this year. This has proved to be very popular and effective. It not only means that anyone with access to the internet can easily find out all about us and what we are doing but it has also meant we can now accept both grant applications and donations on-line. We would like to specifically thank Chris Ringrow for his significant support and expertise with this project. He not only gives freely of his time but he has a seemingly endless supply of patience and we consider ourselves very fortunate that he reached out to us to offer his services.

In a bid to 'get the word out' in addition to the website, we have also established a series of 'drop-ins' this year, so that anyone in the community can come and chat to us in person to either enquire about our grants or services or, indeed, to offer their services as volunteers or trustees. Additionally, with many thanks to David Knight, we run an active Facebook page and have produced an information leaflet. This is freely available at many locations throughout the town and has been delivered to all the houses on the new housing estates along Station Road.

- **Grant Program:** We continue to offer financial support through our grant programme and this year we paid out just over £3000 which included 9 grants to local organisations and 7 grants to individuals and families within our town. The grants have been used to support a wide variety of need including the warm space

initiative in the scout hut, a well-being initiative being run by Carymoor Environmental Trust and provision of essential sports kit to ensure inclusion for a number of young individuals in some of the local sports clubs. In addition, we have also made several payments to assist with fuel poverty, helping families most in need to off-set the huge increases in energy costs.

- **‘Community Food Bank & Larder’**: With the support of a team of 16 amazing volunteers, we have continued to successfully run the ‘Community Food Bank and Larder’ this year. In total, we now have 75 registered local families and individuals (equating to about 225 residents) who use this service on a regular basis. On average, we see 50 visitors per week and around 165kg of food and essentials are distributed. In addition to individual donations, we have strengthened our relationships with local supermarkets and the Gillingham Food Bank, regularly collecting surplus food to re-distribute. Cary Cares has formalised its agreement with Castle Cary Town Council this year, and they have very generously agreed to continue providing and maintaining the Millbrook Hub building that houses this service free of charge. In addition, we have been very fortunate to have received several grants this year to assist with equipment & the running costs of this service. Especial thanks to Mark Hutton, Richard Needle, Suzi McKenzie and Philippa Biddlecombe for not only overseeing the day to day running of this service but also in helping to ensure its long term viability with their impressively successful grant applications!
- **‘Emergency Food & Essentials’ & ‘Sign-posting Service’**: In terms of helping individuals and families most in need, our ‘Emergency Food and Essentials service’ continues to be well used. This year we provided 135 emergency food and essential boxes, which equates to about 420 days of food support in our community. We have continued to run our Community Cupboard in Ansford Academy for our younger residents and are in the process of establishing a similar amenity in the local primary school. Huge thanks to Jules Rostrup for overseeing and coordinating this initiative. Through all of these initiatives, we inevitably come into contact with some of the individuals and families within our community who are in most need of support. We pride ourselves on not only being able to respond to the initial request/need but also on following up with the recipients to assess whether we can assist them in other ways. Especial thanks go to Suzi McKenzie and Mark Hutton who have worked tirelessly to ensure the success of this service together with Geoff Woolston who promptly checks, records and pays all invoices and Julian Shave & his team for their continued support.
- **‘Christmas Appeal’**: Importantly, Cary Cares does not just seek to assist those in financial need, we are also keen to help boost mental well-being within our community. One of the ways we do this is through the coordination of a Christmas Appeal, whereby we collect donations of small gifts and Christmas goodies, which our volunteers then re-package into Christmas Gift boxes. These are then distributed, together with flowers and a festive quiz, throughout the community to those that live alone. This year we distributed over 100 gift parcels which were very warmly received. The volume of donations received also enabled us to deliver over

80 bags of festive food goodies to families in receipt of free school meals in the run up to Christmas.

None of our work would be possible without funding. In addition to successful funding/ grant applications, we are very fortunate to reside in a very generous community. We regularly receive cash donations from local residents and to make things even easier now accept payments via PayPal on our website. In particular, the trustees would like to once again thank Karin Hurd for initiating and overseeing the creation, production and sales of the beautiful Community Cook Book. In the past year this has provided a further £4,200 income to Cary Cares, bringing the total to date in excess of an amazing £18,000. Our heartfelt thanks to Karin for this vital contribution which has enabled Cary Cares to continue with all of its services once again this year.

Of course, even with all the money in the world we would not have been able to carry out our work this year without the day to day help from our volunteers and trustees. I would like to thank everyone involved for all their hard work. In addition to the people already mentioned, we are very fortunate to have a lovely, dedicated team assisting with the day to day administration, social media, policies, rotas, figures and accounts. This fantastic support ensures that we respond quickly to queries, pay all our invoices, and generally run the charity as effectively as possible, without, hopefully, it being too onerous on any one individual. As one household in crisis recently commented – “We truly don’t know what we would have done without you – please thank all the wonderful people”