





care for the carers

East Sussex

2025 - 2026 Annual Review

A welcome from the Chair and Chief Executive

We will almost all give or receive care during our lifetimes, but experiences of care differ hugely. In the UK, caring is close to our hearts and for many, it's one of the most important and rewarding achievements of our lives. But it can also take its toll on our finances, our health, our wellbeing and ability to work. And the responsibilities of caring can be tough to manage alongside our working lives, family commitments and education.

Care for the Carers is here for anyone in East Sussex who looks after somebody who couldn't manage without their help. Our specialist team helps carers navigate the health and social care system, provides support, advice and guidance, peer support groups, counselling, and activities that enable carers to take time for themselves.

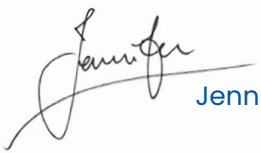
In 2025–26, almost 12,000 carers accessed our services, some 3,000 for the first time. Support is tailored to individual needs and planned with local carers' insight and expertise. We work hard to reach people early in their caring journey, when we can best help to prevent their caring role from becoming overwhelming.

We are proud to increase the support provided locally each year, but with an estimated 70,000 carers in the county there is much more to do, and the charity needs support and backing to achieve all we need to. As a membership charity, being part of Care for the Carers means joining a wider community of East Sussex carers, supporters and groups with a shared commitment to ensure that no-one has to care alone.

The dedication of our community of local carers, partners, volunteers, staff, funders and supporters makes our work possible. Together, we thank you wholeheartedly for your support and for all you have achieved for local carers in 2025–26.



Dr Neil Churchill, OBE - Chair of the Board of Trustees



Jennifer Twist - Chief Executive




KIPLING GARDENS
HOOK NORTON

Support, advice and guidance

We supported over 11,700 carers - children, young people and adults who look after someone who could not manage without their help - with information, practical and emotional support. Over 2,900 were new to their caring role or had not received support before.

The **Carers Hub** is our single point of contact for carers, accessible by phone, email or online. Our Carer Support staff responded to enquiries from 4,677 carers, providing direct support, onward signposting and referrals to services across the county.

"You do so many good things and particularly when we were struggling with my mother's care in hospital and at the care home. This help was invaluable."

1,094 carers benefited from personalised one-to-one support, providing time to talk, explore concerns and identify solutions via Coaching and Directions appointments.

The **Carers Star™** helps us measure the impact of the one-to-one support we provide to carers and helps identify where support is needed. It tracks progress across **seven key areas of wellbeing**:

- ✓ Health
- ✓ Caring Role
- ✓ Time for Yourself
- ✓ Finances
- ✓ Emotional Wellbeing
- ✓ Managing at Home
- ✓ Work

Carers reported feeling better able to manage their caring role.

Improvements reported:

88% **Improved in 1 area**

81% **Improved in 2 areas**

66% **Improved in 3 areas**

Positive impact on health:

34% **of carers reported that their health had improved**

Our **Intensive Support Project**, adapted from the previous Hastings and Havens Primary Care Project, enables us to provide more in-depth support to carers in crisis across the whole county. The project provided one to one specialist support to 456 carers with more complex needs.

Impact on health and wellbeing

Many carers tell us that their caring role has a significant impact on their health and wellbeing. They are more likely to experience poor physical and mental health, social isolation, and financial pressures.

Our tailored support helps carers improve their wellbeing, build resilience, and reduce the risk of reaching crisis point or experiencing carer breakdown.

Carers managing their own health needs

Many carers are balancing their caring responsibilities while managing their own health conditions:

- **35.6%** of carers we support live with a long-term illness or disability.
- Among carers with higher support needs, this increases to **62%**



The **Mental Health Project** supported 275 adults in East Sussex who care for a friend, family member or neighbour living with severe and enduring mental ill health. We provided a range of interventions, information and support designed to improve carers' health and wellbeing, promote community engagement and ensure carers' voices and experiences were recognised. We worked in partnership with health, social care and community services to ensure carers could access appropriate support.

520 carers were supported by our **Carers Reviews Project**. Working in partnership with East Sussex County Council, we provided carers with annual reviews of their Carers Assessments and access to Carers Personal Budgets.

Time to Talk, our counselling service, allows the carer time away from their caring role to focus on their mental wellbeing which in turn helps to prevent carer breakdown.

Time to Talk in 2025-26

149 carers
1396 hours of free counselling
19 volunteer counsellors including
17 volunteers

The difference counselling makes

73% of carers felt happier
46% coped better with caring challenges
50% felt less isolated and more connected

"Counselling has helped me immeasurably to manage my anxiety and has made a positive difference to my caring role."

Carers in Touch provided invaluable support to carers via regular phone calls from a team of volunteers. Calls help to alleviate loneliness and help carers feel valued and connected.

Carers in Touch

194 carers
received **1546** calls
from **7** volunteers

"The calls are a lifeline for isolated carers. You provided practical & hands on help. I valued and appreciated the support. This was invaluable to me during an extremely difficult time."

"It's been hugely beneficial. I think it's a fantastic service. They've been so supportive. It means an awful lot."

Carer Money Matters supported 1,054 carers, 245 through individual casework.
The intervention brought an estimated £365,056 of financial benefits to East Sussex carers. We provided 341 different services and referrals for carers across a range of services (an average of five per carer).

Young Carers

This year there were 486 Young Carers registered with us. We have continued to support local young carers through our regular monthly clubs in Eastbourne, Bexhill and Uckfield and fun holiday and family activities with 107 different children and young people taking part across the year.



Holiday capers have included the Foragers Feast at Wild Weald, where young carers learnt how to make flatbread in a clay oven and did lots of nature-based activities, a trip to the Eastbourne Miniature Steam Railway in July for a group of younger carers and plenty of 'Spooky Fun' in October half-term at Bushey Wood. A highlight for many was the August trip to Thorpe Park, hugely enjoyed by 32 young carers.

Parent's feedback on the difference we are making:

"It makes a big difference it gives the children a chance to be children and have fun away from their parents and caring duties."

"It makes a huge difference to the girls - they love spending time with young carers and others who share their situation. The team are always so lovely to them. We are also able to access much needed respite."

"The ability to get out with other children who understand them and just escape from the daily life."



Thank you

Special thanks this year go to:
Willingdon Trees Community Centre, Pebsham Community Hub, Sussex Support Service, Culture Shift, Eastbourne Theatres, all individual donors who kindly supported our Young Carers Summer Breaks Appeal, Eastbourne Miniature Steam Railway, The Scouts and Community Chef.



Groups and activities

We run regular monthly groups across the county enabling carers to come together, support each other and access information and advice whilst taking a break from their caring role.

230 carers attended one of our 14 groups last year. Carers tell us that they value the opportunity to meet other carers and learn more about their caring role through discussion with specialist Carer Support Workers and visiting speakers.

We also offer Mental Health carers' groups for carers of people with a severe mental illness and Young Adult Carer groups and activities for carers aged 17-25 years.

The Activities Programme for adult carers is funded through the kind support of the local community via donations and grants and enables carers to take a hugely valued short break from their caring role. 343 carers benefited from taking a break and attending one of 84 wellbeing or social activities.

Our programme for carers included spa breaks, hand massage, mindfulness, creative courses, art sessions, heritage crafts, walks, days out and Christmas activities.

Our local Carers Centres in Uckfield and Hastings continued serving local carers. Approximately 200 carers accessed support, peer support, activities and a break via the centres. This year we introduced a physical activity class in Hastings for carers and those they support, responding to the need expressed by local carers.

"Joining the class has enabled me to meet new people. I didn't have a social life or get out before. Always feel better after going."



"Groups are invaluable for both personal support and access to information which helps me navigate the minefield of NHS systems."

We are grateful to 3H Foundation for our ongoing partnership, allowing us to support carers with spa days. We are also grateful for the time and kindness of the volunteers at 'A Touch of Gentleness' who provide hand massages to carers at the Hastings Local Centre, at events and group meetings.

Group support makes a difference: 85% of carers said attending a group improved their ability to cope with their caring role.

"Meeting other carers who understand has made me feel less isolated. It gives me a much-needed boost to my self-esteem and ability to cope."







Awareness, Information and Communication

Raising awareness of carers' needs helps identify carers early, empowering them to access support before circumstances may become more difficult. We achieve this through our communications and media work, Carer Friendly Community programme and provision of Think Carer training to employers and health, social care and community service providers.

In 2025, the Carer Friendly Award was achieved by Victoria Medical Centre, the largest GP surgery in Eastbourne supporting approximately 30,000 patients. The Joint Community Rehabilitation Teams (NHS and Adult Social Care teams) were also awarded, along with Wealden District Council, the first council to secure the Carer Friendly Award.

Think Carer training was delivered to 572 health professionals, plus 63 completing NHS Hospital Think Carer E-learning.

The quality of the training was recognised nationally, allowing our charity to secure a contract to develop carer awareness training provision in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, developing our expertise in face to face and e-learning provision.

We recruited 63 new Carer Champions to help us raise awareness and identify more carers in their workplaces, patient and resident facing services and local communities.

Careline Magazine was sent by email to 8,700 carers and professionals working directly with carers and around 1,000 carers received the magazine by post. Our bi-monthly e-newsletter reached on average 9,600 carers and professionals.

Our website is a trusted first stop for carers and professionals to find out more about support available. It received 43,000 unique visitors last year.

"It was a nicely paced and affecting training, giving perspective and allowing thought and nuance about the carer role. It also allowed me to reflect on my own situation and to look back with a bit more kindness at myself when I was caring."



Engagement and representation





Carers who are part of the Carers Voices Network contribute to consultations, focus groups and campaigns. We keep the Network informed via e-newsletter and regular invites. This helps our charity to keep Carers Voices at the heart of everything we do and to advocate for local carers within health, social care and voluntary sector strategic planning.

Annual Carers Voices Conference (June 2025) was attended by a record 141 carers and professionals, remaining the biggest carers event in the county, bringing together carers with decision makers shaping local services. We supported carers with information and advice with 4 workshops and a marketplace with 21 organisations. Volunteers from A Touch of Gentleness offered a relaxing hand massage to carers. The focus this year remained on how health and social care can work better for carers. We are grateful to speakers who joined the discussion: local carer Agi Angiolini; young carer Oliver Davis; Sussex Partnership Foundation Trust Chief Operating Officer, John Child; NHS Sussex Director, Ashley Scarff; Head of Strategic Commissioning at Adult Social Care, Sam Tearle, and national journalist and commentator, David Brindle.

We captured a lot of views from carers, experiences of caring and of the services carers interact with. This fed into the delivery of East Sussex Carers Partnership Plan and formed the basis of our formal response to the NHS: The 10 Year Health Plan public engagement.



298 CARERS
are part of the
Carers Voices Network

114 CARERS
took part in our
Annual Carers Survey

We also supported several carers to take part in the CQC inspection of Adult Social Care services in East Sussex.

This year we have made concerted efforts to make sure that our services are accessible to carers within the trans community through developing relationships with partner organisations, including Bourne Out, the Queer Roots art group and Translucent. It is estimated that there are around 6,000 trans people in the county and through work with Translucent we have looked at ways to help trans people to overcome barriers to accessing carer support. This has included taking part in Trans Visibility Day, Community Engagement team members attending 'Open Conversation' awareness raising sessions and Translucent providing a Learning Lunch session to Care for the Carers front line staff to raise awareness of trans inclusion and carer support.

We took part in 40 public events, attended by approx. 11,491 people and attended 48 networking events, reaching 296 professionals and members of the community. This allowed us to engage with many carers, including 112 carers new to our services.



Tools and resources

Care for the Carers offers a range of tools and resources aimed at helping carers in their caring role.

The East Sussex Carers Card is an ever-popular resource available to all carers, including young carers and parent carers of children. The card entitles carers to discounts from businesses and importantly, can help identify carers in an emergency. Adult carers of another adult can link their Carers Card to a backup emergency care plan through East Sussex County Council's Carers Respite Emergency Support Scheme.



We are grateful to all local businesses that have offered to be part of the Carers Card scheme.

Healthcare Appointments Respite Grant (HARG) are administered by us on behalf of East Sussex County Council. This year, 9 carers received grants that enabled them to attend healthcare appointments, training courses or engagement opportunities, by funding replacement care for the person they support.

We supported a further 172 carers to access other grants including Carers Trust grants, to access a break, essential equipment or financial support.

"Thank you so very much for helping me to get this grant. I really appreciate it"

The 'Small Grants for Carers Groups' helped to seed fund community peer support groups for carers.

2,109
carers signed up for the Carers Card during the year

172
grants for carers

£54,934
in grant payments to carers

Carers Story: Waheeda

Waheeda lives in Wealden and cared for her husband who lived with advanced dementia and was recovering from cancer. Waheeda received support and advice from Care for the Carers and was invited to join the Arts in Nature programme of wellbeing activities.

"I have a great deal of respect and gratitude for Care for the Carers. The groups made me feel very welcomed and provided a warm and friendly environment in which I have felt very comfortable and relaxed.

"I joined Arts in Nature to meet people who could also understand the trials and tribulations of life as a carer. As this group was primarily for carers, I had planned for my husband to stay at home with a carer so that I could attend. To my surprise, I was told I could bring him and I was so taken aback by her [Alison, facilitator] kindness and generosity of spirit. It made me so happy and much more relaxed about attending the sessions.



"I have always had a fondness for arts and crafts, so I have really enjoyed learning some new skills. The greatest thing about this group is being in an environment where there is no judgement, where there is only warmth and understanding, where you can relax, laugh and forge new friendships. It has been incredibly special to be able to share this with my husband, as there are not many activities we could have enjoyed together like we used to.

"Meeting people who are going through similar experiences and sharing our stories is very comforting and helps in knowing that you are not alone. Being a full-time carer can feel very isolating at times, and it can be very easy to lose yourself in the role. I am so grateful to the group and the incredible facilitator for taking away some of that feeling for me and for providing me with peace and ultimately invaluable moments of joy for me and my husband."

Spotlight on Arts in Nature

The third project of Care for the Carers' Artist in Residence Programme: Arts in Nature welcomed over 80 carers to workshops exploring the beautiful High Weald landscape and open spaces around Eastbourne.

Carers immersed themselves in art forms such as basket weaving, charcoal making, ceramics, print making and floristry. Many carers were new to these techniques, some rediscovered a creative passion they had before their caring journey. All told us that these sessions gave them respite in their lives at a time when they needed it the most.

Our sincere thanks go to Alison Cotton, the lead practitioner who facilitated this project with so much skill, sensitivity and understanding.

Alison talks about the project…"Unpaid carers face complex circumstances that make it harder to take time out for themselves, and spending time in nature might be daunting.



"During this project we worked to provide a safe, supportive and enjoyable way for carers to try some new experiences, such as learning to make a basket out of bramble stems or using acrylics to paint the sea. Crucially, we wanted to create time and space to take a break from caring.

"I have been able to see and feel the transformation taking place in those around me, over a few hours spent in the woods, for example, whilst absorbed in making something with one's hands. At best this can amount to a system re-set, allowing a person to forget all about their responsibilities for a while, then return to them replenished."

Arts in Nature was made possible thanks to the generous support of High Weald National Landscape and John Jackson Charitable Trust.

Partnerships

Partnership working with other charities is an important way that we collaborate to identify carers early and support carers in the most comprehensive way.

We support East Sussex Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Carers Network. We commission 13 local organisations, funding grassroot or specialist activities for carers. This includes support and training for carers of people with dementia and MND, support for parent carers, wellbeing training, support for carers of people receiving hospice care, replica care, creative respite sessions, cookery workshops and groups for carers from ethnically diverse communities and women only groups.

Our local carers centres are co-sited with Sussex Support Service at Victoria Pavilion in Uckfield and Age UK East Sussex at the Isabel Blackman Centre in Hastings, offering carers support, groups, wellbeing activities and events with over 15 different local organisations.



We influence commissioning and decision making through East Sussex Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Alliance - the VCSE sector coming together to speak as one voice in support of the communities we serve.

As the Carers Centre, Care for the Carers acts as Strategic Partner to the East Sussex County Council and NHS Sussex, putting us in a unique position to influence statutory support for carers.





Carers Story: Chris

Chris cares for his wife and has received support from Care for the Carers and partners Coastal Wellbeing.

“My first contact with Care for the Carers was through a local group. That’s where I discovered that others were in equally difficult situations. I didn’t even know that I was a carer. I just thought I was in this situation and that was it. Care for the Carers helped me understand that the feelings I had were a normal reaction to a difficult situation.

“When it was necessary for me to remain close to home, I joined Care for the Carers online carers group. There was such a wealth of information shared there.”

In December 2025, Chris attended a WRAP course offered by Coastal Wellbeing. “The weekly sessions allowed everyone time and space in a non-pressurised environment. We were able to share ideas and talk so openly. We discovered how to best cope with the ups and downs of life as a carer, with a strong focus on self-awareness and what to do when life does become overwhelming. I valued it immensely. Molly and Lucy were exceptional. I couldn’t imagine two more compassionate and understanding people to lead. It was really wonderful.

“We all came away with tailored ways to help keep our heads above water, when life seems to become that little bit too much to handle. They’re tools for life.

“If you’re a carer and you have the opportunity to join a WRAP course, I would jump at the chance. That warm feeling and the smiles of that last meeting are something that stays with me to this day.”

Creating lasting value for carers

£2.25
social value generated for every £1 invested through the Carer Money Matters Project

£407,132
generated in income gains and savings for 1,183 carers

£221,276
secured in grants and personal budgets

10,057 volunteer hours contributed by 426 volunteers, worth
£181,026

1,546 wellbeing calls made by volunteers, worth
£10,717

1,396 hours of free counselling delivered, valued at
£83,760



Our year at a glance

2,109
carers signed up to Carers Card

11,792
carers accessed our services

149
carers accessed Time to Talk

230
carers attended regular groups

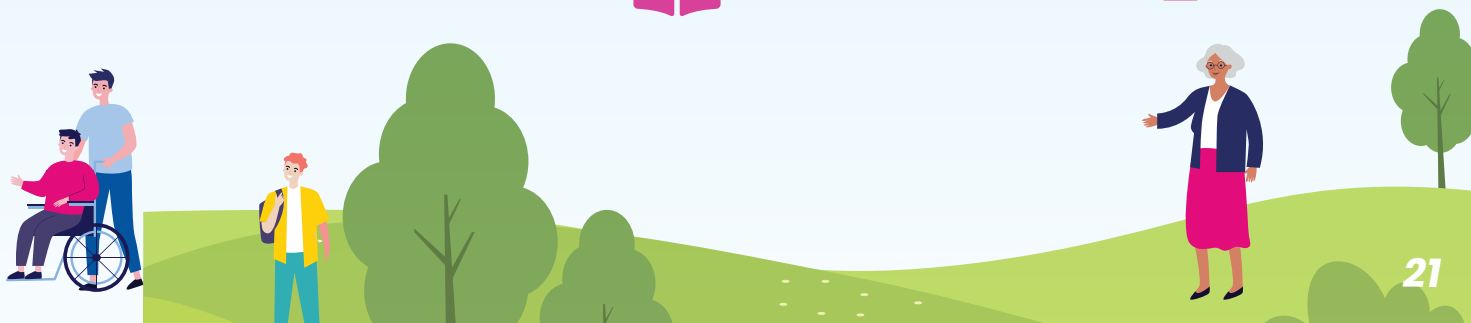
84
wellbeing activities delivered for carers

298
are part of the Carers Voices Network

572
professionals attended Think Carer training

13,100
People receive our Careline magazine or e-newsletter

426
volunteers supported our work



Fundraising

All the money we raise thanks to generous donors goes to ensuring that no one is left to care alone.

Donations directly fund some of our essential services for carers which receive no statutory funding, including young carers and adult carers activities programmes. They provide a break to carers, helping them connect with others in a similar role, develop peer support, take care of their wellbeing or physical health, and recharge to be able to keep on caring. This support for carers would not be possible without the donations and grants.

We have received wonderful support from the local community over the past year, this included two successful individual giving appeals. In June people helped us fund young carers clubs and in November we raised money for a Winter Warmer campaign with match funding from Aviva Community Fund. We also held our first Christmas Fair in Lewes.

Donations from the appeal enabled young carers to have a break and enjoy fun sessions. A parent of local young carers talks about the difference these make:

"Tommy enjoys being social and letting off steam; this is something which is difficult for him to do at home as his sibling is autistic and doesn't like noise and prefers a quiet environment. Due to Tommy's brother and Covid, Tommy has missed out on a lot of socialising, outings and holidays. The Young Carers project provides him with the opportunity to go to places he may not have been able to go to due to our family dynamics."





We had a fantastic time working with students and teachers at East Sussex College during their Charity Esports fundraiser, which raised £679.

On the night of the fundraiser there were prizes, fun forfeits for players, a Cosplay competition, DJ, live music and fun activities for all spectators. The tournament was streamed live on Twitch and included live donations to Care for the Carers via JustGiving. Special guest Michael 'ODEE' O'Dell, GB Olympics Esports Team Manager, helped with prize giving. Thanks go to the students and staff from East Sussex College for choosing to support Care for the Carers.







Volunteering

This year we welcomed five new Trustees, two Carers in Touch volunteers, 5 new events volunteers and 3 Young Carers volunteers. We said goodbye to two valued Carers in Touch volunteers who stepped down due to their own caring commitments.

9 Trustees

24 volunteer Counsellors

10 Young Carers volunteers

7 Carers in Touch volunteers

7 events and fundraising volunteers

3 Wellbeing Carers Group Hosts

1 Mental Health Group volunteer

365 Carer Champions

Our vision for the next five years is to ensure our positive volunteering culture is embedded in our work, providing a high-quality service for carers and a highly rewarding experience for volunteers.

We provided volunteers with opportunities to meet and access specialist training for their role, which volunteers said was of high quality and relevance to volunteer roles.

In the annual volunteers' survey, helping us understand the impact of volunteering, all respondents reported being 'very satisfied' and rated the quality of the support received in relation to their role as 'very good'; 90% said they feel their volunteer role makes a difference to the lives of carers' and that this was increasingly felt.



Our Counselling Service delivered by volunteer Counsellors is widely acknowledged as providing an excellent service having a positive impact on caring roles by providing a place of safe reflection.

"The counsellor was very good at getting me to talk - something I'm not good at. It has made me understand my own feelings. I'm now going to take some time to myself as I can now see it's needed. I got a lot from it and am feeling better about going forward."

Governance and management

The charity's Board of Trustees is comprised of local volunteers who set the overall strategic direction for the charity and are accountable to its membership. The majority of our Trustees, including the Chair, have lived experience of caring, as well as bringing a wide range of professional skills and expertise from their careers and voluntary work.



Officers of the Board 2025-2026

Chair:
Dr Neil Churchill

Chair of Finance Sub-Committee:
Richard Pearson

We recognise the importance of ensuring the charity is guided by diverse representation and experiences, and are particularly proud to have a strong voice for Young Adult Carers on our Board, in Natasha Burrows. This year, we were delighted to welcome new Trustees Susan Massey, Jessica Kaye, Ahmed El Barkouki and Gemma Nesbit to the Board.

Day to day running of the charity is delegated to a Chief Executive, Jennifer Twist, and senior management team comprised of Stephanie Blake (Head of Resources), Sarah Pickard (Head of Services) and Miriam Wilkinson (Head of Communities).

Care for the Carers' current Strategic Plan concentrates on the following four priority areas:

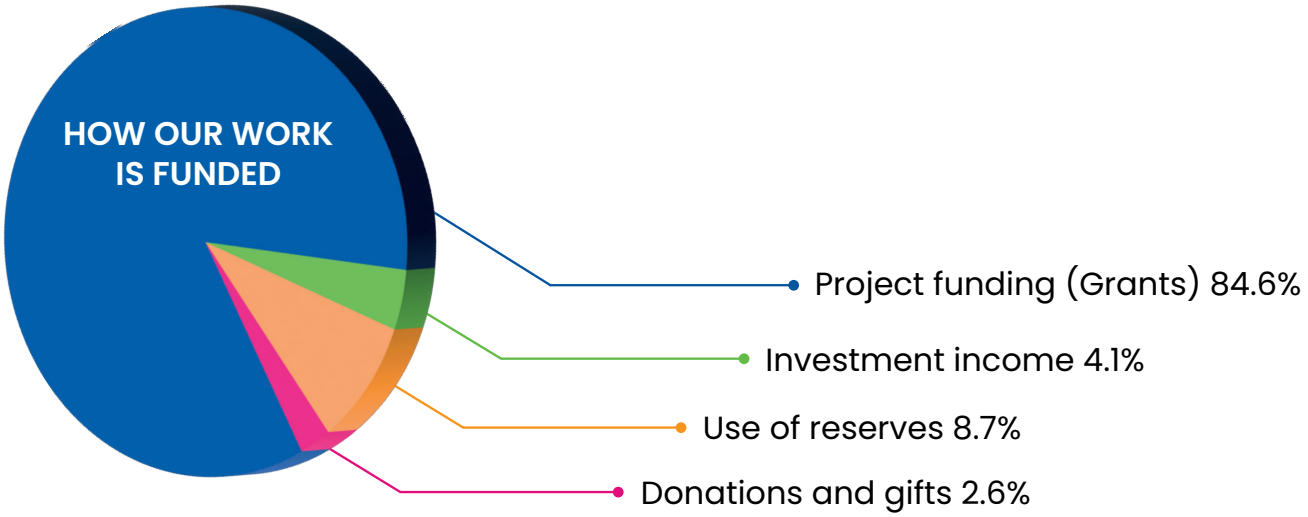
- ✓ Supporting carers – including more carers from less heard groups and those requiring more specialist support
- ✓ Creating a Carer Friendly East Sussex – supporting professionals to identify carers earlier
- ✓ Developing our charity to innovate and be impactful
- ✓ Speaking up with and for carers to improve services and shape decision making

Our finances at a glance

INCOME	(£)
Donations and gifts	54,977
Project funding (Grants)	1,792,979
Investment (and other income)	87,161
TOTAL	**1,935,117**

CHARITY RESERVES	(£)
Reserves used to fund projects for carers	184,017
TOTAL	**2,119,134**

EXPENDITURE	(£)
Support and advice	950,228
Groups and activities	187,177
Involvement (engagement & representation)	252,292
Carer awareness	238,957
Information and communication	54,122
Tools and resources	351,443
Raising funds	71,342
Development	61,396
TOTAL	**2,166,957**



We spent over £2m supporting carers in East Sussex in 2025-26. This work is funded through a combination of project funding (grants), donations, investment income and use of the charity's reserves.

Project funding increased to £1,792,979 this year – we are hugely grateful to our funders whose generous support enables us to provide comprehensive support to carers through a range of services. Our largest contract is to deliver the Carers Centre for East Sussex, jointly funded by East Sussex County Council and NHS Surrey & Sussex. This contract has been extended until 2028, with a recommissioning process expected in 2027. In addition, other projects, such as our programme of wellbeing activities for adults and our Young Carers project, are supported by donors, trusts and foundations.



1 in 2

of our services are funded through donations

Our fundraising strategy has achieved a more diverse set of income streams despite the challenging financial climate. We are indebted to the donors who enable our work, and thank them for their generous support.

While we hold reserves of £1,714,423, we are putting them to good use to:

- provide projects supporting local carers' wellbeing, providing peer support and tackling isolation (including seed funding a series of specialist, community and young carers' services)
- improve our digital offer to carers, and our internal systems to deliver services better
- train and support staff and volunteers

In 2025-26, we used £184,017 of designated reserves, and looking forward, we plan to continue using our reserves over several years to develop much needed support and services to carers, to maximise the impact of our funders' investment in the charity.

care for the carers

East Sussex

Phone: 01323 738390 **Text:** 07507 240793 **Email:** info@cftc.org.uk **Web:** www.cftc.org.uk

Faraday House, 1 Faraday Close, Eastbourne, BN22 9BH

Registered Company No. 3677361 Charity No. 1074906