

Autumn 2025
Issue 9

FURTHER, FASTER, FOR ALL.



abseil stories • a dog's tale • sickle cell support

News and updates from the Royal Free Charity

MESSAGES THAT MADE A DIFFERENCE

Earlier this year, supporters from across the community responded to the Royal Free Charity's Big Spring Thank You, sending messages of appreciation and donations to NHS staff at Barnet, Chase Farm, North Mid and the Royal Free hospitals.

Messages poured in, recognising the compassion, professionalism and tireless dedication shown by teams in those hospitals every day.



OUR 
BIG 
SPRING 
THANK YOU!





These photos capture just a few of the moments when staff paused to read the notes of thanks, a powerful reminder that their work is valued and appreciated by the people they care for.

You are so amazing, so dedicated, so unselfish ~ and so appreciated. I hope my small gift can go towards giving you at least some special "you time". Thank you for everything.

A small token of appreciation and a big thank you to all the wonderful nurses I met during a recent short stay.

Simply thank you for being there, and the very best of wishes to all the staff: words are not enough!

Immensely grateful for your help and expertise this winter.

DOUBLE THUMBS UP FOR CHARITY SERVICES

The Royal Free Charity has hit a gold standard twice, earning national seals of approval that prove they're delivering top-quality care and support when it matters most.

The charity's support hub, based at the Royal Free Hospital, has been accredited with the Advice Quality Standard (AQS), the UK's official quality mark for social welfare advice services.



▲ Cornelia Valensise, one of the charity's 490 volunteers, pictured with Collins Boadi, acute assessment unit ward manager

From housing issues to financial concerns, the hub's advisers give patients accurate, independent guidance on problems that can affect recovery so they can focus on getting well. The team helps to prevent avoidable homelessness and reduces the risk of readmission to the hospital. Liz Fowler, support hub lead, said: "This accreditation means our clients can trust that they're receiving high-quality advice from a service that's professional, accountable and completely focused on their needs."

For NHS staff, the AQS offers reassurance that the advice service enhances patient care, particularly for those facing complex or stressful situations. And for supporters, it's proof that donations are funding services that meet nationally recognised standards and deliver real value at a critical point in people's lives.



▲ Charity staff who achieved the prestigious hallmark of quality.

The volunteer team has also retained its Investing in Volunteers accreditation - the UK's quality benchmark for volunteer management - for the second time.

The achievement reflects the charity's commitment to supporting, training and valuing volunteers so they can make a real difference every day. From offering a listening ear to bringing comfort and warmth to hospital wards, volunteers are part of the fabric of the NHS.

Supreetha Skanda Moorthy, volunteer manager for Barnet Hospital, said: "This accreditation is a team effort. We work incredibly hard each day alongside our volunteers to support patients and staff. Reaching this milestone together is something we can all feel proud of."

Jon Spiers, the charity's chief executive, said: "Together, these accreditations demonstrate that the Royal Free Charity is delivering services to the highest national standards, going beyond medicine to provide the emotional, practical and social support patients need to recover and thrive."



▲ Priti (right), a support hub volunteer who leads the team's drop-in coffee mornings, pictured with visitor Ismail

SPECIAL DELIVERY: SNACKS ON WHEELS

For patients at the Royal Free Hospital who are unable to leave their beds, something as simple as buying a snack can seem out of reach. Now, thanks to a new service funded by the Royal Free Charity, that small luxury is being delivered right to their bedside.

Every day charity volunteers wheel a freshly-stocked trolley through the wards, offering everything from healthy snacks to indulgent sweet treats. Whether it's a comforting chocolate bar or a refreshing drink, the service helps restore a sense of normality and independence during a hospital stay.

Ashish Shinde, staff nurse at the Royal Free Hospital said "The shop trolley is beneficial for our patients, especially when they are bedbound or have recently had surgery when mobility can be affected. A selection of newspapers, magazines and snacks helps with their recovery and reduces boredom. These small things make the time pass."

The charity worked with the hospital's catering team to create a trolley that's both appealing and nutritionally balanced. For patients who can't leave their beds, it's become a much-anticipated part of the day.



▲ Volunteers Pietro (left) and Christopher pictured with Ashish Shinde, staff nurse

A DOG'S TALE: HUGO THE HERO



▲ Catrina and Hugo

Each week, Catrina arrives at Chase Farm Hospital with Hugo, her cockapoo, to bring comfort to patients and staff. But their visits are more than just a friendly encounter: they're a tribute to Catrina's late husband, Fraser.

Fraser spent five weeks as a patient at the Royal Free Hospital, where visits from a therapy dog named Stanley brought him moments of comfort during a difficult time. Missing his own dog, Hugo, Fraser found hope in those visits and decided: once he was better, he would return with Hugo to offer the same comfort to others.

Catrina said: "These visits meant a lot to him as he was really missing our dog, Hugo. Stanley's owner told us all about the Royal Free Charity and how beneficial the interaction with dogs is to patients."

A few months later, Fraser died and was unable to fulfil his wish. Now, Catrina is determined to continue her late husband's legacy.

She explained: "I wanted to carry out this wish on his behalf with Hugo especially knowing how much Fraser got out of Stanley's visits."

Hugo is one of 26 therapy dogs who help patients and staff across Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust hospitals.

Catrina said: "I find it rewarding watching Hugo interact with people. He's a popular character and well-known in the hospital now. Hugo is a very friendly placid dog who loves being made a fuss of, so volunteering at Chase Farm Hospital suits him too!"

All RFC therapy dogs are registered with the national charity Pets as Therapy and undergo an assessment to make sure they are suited to the role. Their owners apply to become charity volunteers and undertake a training programme.

MEET THE ABSEILERS SUPPORTING THE NHS

Harnesses clipped and nerves steeled, more than 100 daring fundraisers stepped backwards off the roof of the Pears Building in Hampstead, taking part in the first ever charity abseil on the Royal Free Hospital campus.



▲ Jon Spiers

Cheered on from below, they descended 70 feet to raise over £50,000 for the Royal Free Charity, supporting NHS staff and the patients they care for across north London.

Among the 116 who took the plunge were Royal Free London staff, patients, supportive friends and even a few spontaneous passers-by, all raising vital funds for their local NHS.

Jon Spiers, RFC chief executive, was first over the edge:

“The Pears Building is a beacon of hope, home to brilliant scientists who are working tirelessly to transform the future of human health. It was a huge honour – and quite a thrill – to be the first person to abseil down this iconic building. Taking part in this event is not just about the challenge but about supporting the groundbreaking work taking place inside these walls.”





FACES OF COURAGE

The Pears Building is home to the UCL Institute of Immunity and Transplantation (IIT), one of the few research centres in the world focused on the human immune system.

Professor Hans Stauss, IIT director, faced his fears to take part: "My motivation was to build on the amazing collaboration between the charity and the IIT and to promote what's going on the Pears Building. Getting over the edge was the hardest part but I focussed on the instructions I was given, and it was great."



▲ Hans Stauss

The architects

Among the abseilers were architects who helped design the Pears Building.

Keith Davies, project manager, said: "I spent around seven years designing the Pears Building. I've seen the amazing view from the top so many times but I've never come down this way!"

The Royal Marines

Lieutenant Colonel Gary Veacock, whose wife received life-saving treatment at the Royal Free Hospital, led the event with a team of elite Royal Marines: "The care my family received has been nothing short of extraordinary. The teamwork and dedication of the staff remind me so much of my time in the Marines; it's never about the individual but the whole team."



▲ Keith Davies, project manager

The hospital

Group chief nurse Julie Hamilton is more accustomed to traversing hospital corridors than scaling high-rise buildings:

“I was scared, but it reminded me that the few seconds of fear I faced are nothing compared to the courage I see every day in our hospitals. I thought of a close friend who has been undergoing cancer treatment for the last 18 months; her strength inspired me to push through the nerves.”



▲ Julie Hamilton

At 20, Laura Nelson received a life-saving kidney transplant. Since then, she's volunteered for the charity and eagerly signed up for the abseil. “I wanted to do this because of everything the charity does for the hospitals and because they have helped me so much. I also love that doing this shows people that patients with kidney failure can do things like this. It challenges people's perceptions of transplant patients.”



▲ Laura Nelson

The sponsors

The abseil was sponsored by TK International, a Hampstead-based residential estate agent and property consultant.

Ready to brave
new heights?

The
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Free
Charity
abseil
returns



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COMMUNITY IN ACTION

From festive Christmas parties to graduation ceremonies marking the move from paediatric services to adult care, the Haringey Sickle Cell and Thalassaemia Project has spent 25 years supporting patients and families affected by these rare blood conditions.

Working with the Royal Free Charity and North Middlesex University Hospital (North Mid), the community-led initiative raises awareness, reduces stigma and helps improve the experience of care for people living with sickle cell disease and thalassaemia.

Founded in 2000 by the late May Richards MBE, the project started as a one-off gospel festival at Broadwater Farm. It quickly evolved into an annual community celebration, with its core mission unchanged: to support patients and raise funds for red cell services at North Mid.

Over the years, donations have helped fund new equipment, improvements to patient areas and activities that bring comfort to families during treatment.

Olu Wilkey, paediatric consultant said, "Without the project, patients and their families would have missed out on important pleasures that make having a long-term illness slightly more bearable".



▲ Tityana, a young patient, pictured with team members Diana (left) and Albin.
Photo credit: Harriet Armstrong

North Mid serves one of the most ethnically diverse populations in the country, ranking third nationally. This makes the hospital a key provider of specialist care for sickle cell patients across Haringey and Enfield, where these inherited conditions have a significant impact on local communities.

Sekayi Tangayi, consultant nurse at North Mid said: “The team’s commitment to our sickle cell patients extends beyond clinical excellence: they are advocates for health equity; educators to future generations of healthcare professionals; and active participants in national research and policy development.”

Their work is deeply rooted in the communities they serve, ensuring that care remains culturally sensitive, accessible and patient-focused.

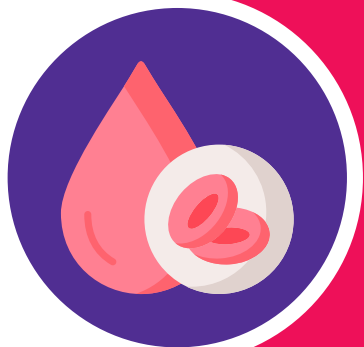
The Mayor of Enfield, Councillor Margaret Greer, has selected the red cell fund as one of her chosen charities for the year.



▲ Mayor of Enfield, Councillor Margaret Greer

“The theme for my charities this year is faith, community health and well-being, and young people,” said Councillor Greer.

“Enfield is home to people of all faiths and backgrounds. Through our shared values of compassion, understanding, service and unity, we can build a stronger borough.”



Sickle cell disease is a lifelong condition that affects red blood cells. Instead of being round and flexible, the cells become rigid and crescent-shaped, which can block blood flow and cause episodes of severe pain, organ damage and other complications. It primarily affects people of African, Caribbean, Middle Eastern and South Asian heritage.

BANKING ON THE COMMUNITY

Fearless fundraisers take on a year of challenges

An international bank with a local community spirit is proving just how powerful workplace fundraising can be.

Staff at the Hampstead branch of Handelsbanken have chosen the Royal Free Charity as their charity of the year, tackling a year of adrenaline-fueled challenges to support NHS staff, patients and researchers.

Ian Baker is the latest to take on a physical feat to raise money to support NHS staff who saved his life.

In July, Ian leapt from a plane in a charity skydive as a way of thanking the staff at the Royal Free Hospital who treated him for a stroke six years ago. After experiencing symptoms, Ian walked himself to A&E - on the advice of his wife, a former nurse - where he received expert care.



▲ Ian Baker after his skydive

He explained: "The team at the Royal Free Hospital were fantastic. It feels great to have the chance to give something back. With my wife having worked as a nurse for over 30 years, and my son now with the local ambulance service, we've always been huge advocates for the NHS. The staff do a fabulous job."

Now fully recovered, Ian is determined to make a difference for others going through difficult times by raising money for the charity that supports north London patients, staff and researchers.

He said: "Fundraising for the Royal Free Charity will also help a lot of people who are in a similar or even worse position than I was. That was a real driving force and motivation for me."

Ian is not the only member of staff at Handelsbanken to take on an adrenalin-fuelled fundraising challenge.

Earlier, colleagues Georgia Ayre and Katherine Larcombe abseiled down the 70-foot Pears Building as part of the charity's inaugural event.



Georgia took the plunge to thank the RFH team who cared for her best friend.

She said: "At Handelsbanken we have a really good relationship with the Royal Free Charity and I wanted to give something back after taking my friend to A&E." Similarly, Katherine has first-hand experience of the RFH's care.

She explained: "When I lived in west Hampstead I used the hospital's services, and I saw that they make a real difference to the local community. The charity's work makes such a local impact." Staff at Handelsbanken have raised over £2,000 - but they're not stopping there.

In a further show of support, the branch has become an official sponsor of the Royal Free London's annual staff awards, fondly known as the 'Oscars.' The event honours the outstanding contributions of staff.

Ian said: "I've worked in Hampstead for 13 years and seen the work of the hospital and the charity. I'm so glad we can support their work this year."



▲ Georgia abseiled to say thanks for her friend's care

PEDALLING WITH PURPOSE

A clinical nurse specialist has cycled the length of Britain to raise money for NHS staff and patients across the Royal Free London.

Kevin Raeburn, who has worked at the Royal Free Hospital for 15 years as an alcohol liaison nurse, completed the 874-mile ride from Land's End to John o' Groats in just 14 days.



Kevin took on the challenge to show his appreciation for the colleagues he works alongside every day.

Kevin explained: "This personal challenge was not just about cycling; it was about making a meaningful impact through the Royal Free Charity."

The journey saw Kevin push through tough climbs and unpredictable weather with the breathtaking landscapes providing motivation.

"There were so many highlights: the rugged Cornish countryside; Dartmoor; north Wales and rural Lancashire when we reached the halfway mark," he said.

"It was a pleasure to cycle through the north of Scotland on the penultimate day, in rare sunshine for that area. We reached John o' Groats on the last day; it was challenging with a bit of a headwind, but a great feeling."

Kevin has raised £2,340 to help support his colleagues, researchers and patients across the Royal Free London's hospitals.

He added: "I'm delighted that any money raised can make a difference to staff and patients - it makes the journey so worthwhile."

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**ROYAL FREE
CHARITY**

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