



BT

# BENEVOLENT FUND



Positive action where it's most needed

## APPLICATIONS TO THE FUND INCREASE

**Rob Pearce, the BT Benevolent Fund General Manager** says "after a couple of unusually quieter years in terms of grant applications, 2023 saw case numbers start to increase as a result of the continuing cost of living crisis. Grant applications haven't reached pre-pandemic levels but we expect numbers to continue climbing throughout 2024 and we will do all we can to help those who apply to us."



Rob Pearce

### Grants in 2023

High energy prices, increased interest rates and a general increase in living costs saw many people fall into financial difficulty for the first time in 2023. Many of those that approached the Fund for help told us that they never thought that they would be in a position that meant they needed to approach a charity for help. Fortunately the Fund was able to assist most grant applicants, many of whom suffered erosion of their savings, loss of a job and ill health. A lot of our cases stemmed from relationship breakdowns, increasing disability or unforeseen household expense, meaning even those who prudently managed their day-to-day spending found themselves in serious difficulties.

In 2023 the Fund helped over 500 individuals, couples and families. Our help was wide ranging, dealing with requests such as the provision of stairlifts, walk in showers, downstairs toilets, funeral bills, heating repairs and mobility aids. We also assisted people in general financial difficulty who were struggling with debt and arrears such as rent, council tax and

mortgage bills. Not only was the Fund able to help financially, but also through the care and support shown by the case managers who always provide a caring approach and friendly ear.

Unfortunately, we continue to deal with some extremely sad cases involving death or serious illness where we always aim to lift some of the burden for those that are suffering most. As ever we found even modest grants made a huge difference and in tough economic times we saw an increase in the need

to help with household basics such as food, clothes, heating and minor repairs. Helping with these basic items makes a real difference when people are going through a tough time. The Fund continues to assist everyone with a connection to BT, including current employees, former employees, BT pensioners and their dependents. Current BT employees now account for around 43% of our cases and some of these can be complex, with significant debt and risk of the loss of housing, so we try to do all we can, especially where, as is often the case, young children are involved.

As well as current BT employees we help BT pensioners, some of whom are on extremely low incomes and at the end of the year we were paying weekly grants to 125 of them. In addition to this they received an annual Christmas payment of £100 and an increased winter fuel payment of £200 in 2023, funded in part from the grant we received from the

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### 2024 BTBF Christmas Cards

Our 2024 Christmas cards are now on sale. To order please use the enclosed form or you can order online on our website at [www.benevolent.bt.com/christmas-cards](http://www.benevolent.bt.com/christmas-cards). Cards will be sent out from June onwards.

We made over £28,000 on the sale of cards in 2023. It's an extremely important source of income for us, so your continued support would be much appreciated and it would really help us!



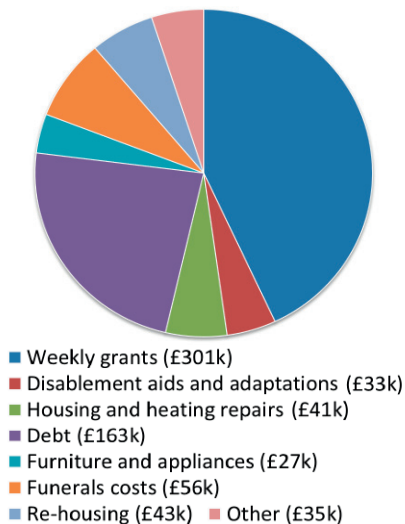


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Civil Service Insurance Society Charity Fund. We know how important these payments are and what a difference they make to people’s lives as we receive numerous letters, emails and phone calls thanking us for the payment. Many told us the payment meant they could keep the heating on as well as buying food over the Christmas period and not have to make a choice regarding one or the other. Others told us that they could at least buy a small gift for their grandchildren without compromising their own comfort. So, this is a hugely worthwhile payment and hopefully something the Fund will be able to do for many years to come.

### Grants Analysis 2023

In 2023 we awarded a total of £699,033 in grants to people suffering financial hardship. This was a lifeline for so many and the grant awards were broken down as follows:



### Donations

Recruiting and retaining regular donors remains an issue and we continued to struggle in 2023. We saw a continuing decline in the total number of people who donate to the Fund, which now stands at 16,466. We did manage to recruit new donors

in 2023, but we lost more than we gained. New donors tend to give more and some existing donors increased their donations so donor income remained fairly flat.

### Income

In 2023 our income exceeded £1 million for the 10th year in a row thanks in part to extremely generous donations from the Civil Service Insurance Society Charity Fund, the Post Office Fellowship of Remembrance and Openreach, for which we are most grateful. Investment returns, Gift Aid claims, legacies and Christmas card sales made up the rest of our income. During the current climate your kind donations are more important to us than ever so please accept our heartfelt thanks.

### Our Impact

This is what some of those we helped in 2023 said to us:

“Thank you so, so much. I really can’t believe this, it is above and beyond anything I was hoping for and you have made such a huge difference to me and my children. I really can’t thank you all enough!”

“I am completely overwhelmed, I am in tears. Thank you so much for this I can’t tell you how grateful I am. God bless you and thank you for your kindness and help.”

“You have been incredible and made me feel safe and not judged. I am so deeply grateful that I feel emotional. You are incredible and deserve to be recognised for making such a difference.”

“Thank you all for the grant. With your help my dreadful situation has been transformed. It was quite difficult to open up and be honest and describe my circumstances, but you were so understanding and

compassionate that I didn’t feel embarrassed.”

“Thank you so much. Honestly you’ve helped me to get through such a rough stage of my life. Massively grateful.”

### And finally, a really heartfelt letter that sums up what many people are going through and how they feel to receive help:

“I am writing to thank you for all the support you have given me over the years. I have been struggling financially for a long time and the increase in the cost of living has made things even harder. I’m not sure you know how much of an impact you have made in my life. It can be difficult to ask for help, but your kind and non-judgmental approach has taken the shame out of it. I am truly grateful to you all. Please continue to do the good work you do. Continue to treat people with kindness and compassion. You are making a real difference to the lives of so many and I want you to know how much you are appreciated.

Thanks to you I am no longer living with a dangerous cooker and carbon monoxide fumes. Who knows what could have happened to me if you had not helped to replace my cooker. I really can’t thank you enough. May God bless you all.

I wish you all the very best in all that you do.”

### Our Facebook page

Our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/btbenevolentfund/> continues to grow in popularity. If you have a Facebook account please could you like, follow and share our page with as many of your BT Facebook friends as possible. Visiting our Facebook page is a great way of keeping up to date with Fund activities!





## New Face at the Fund

The BT Benevolent Fund team would like to welcome Ciara Burke who joins as one of our Honorary Solicitors and currently works as a Senior Lawyer in BT. Ciara replaces Lauren Nesbitt who is stepping down after a year at the Fund. We would like to thank Lauren for all her hard work, advice and guidance.

Ciara brings a wealth of experience and a fresh perspective and will be a great addition to the team.



Ciara Burke

## Life as a Trustee

by Jane Shipway

I became a trustee of the BT Benevolent Fund 20 years ago following the death of my line manager who served as a trustee for many years. I was nervous about filling his shoes, but with the help and guidance of the then fund manager and other trustees I now know what I'm doing!

I had a long career in BT, joining the Post Office Telephone Accounts Group in 1973 and moving through a variety of jobs including debt collection, training, facilitation, HR, and internal audit from where I retired 8 years ago. The trustee board is made up of serving managers from BT, retired employees, and one independent trustee with no connection to BT. All the trustees are volunteers and have many responsibilities including keeping accounting records, safeguarding assets, reviewing grant applications and setting the overall strategy and mission of the Fund.

My own role as a Trustee, has three main elements.

**Approval of cases** - each week I receive a list of cases to review and approve. These cases have already been reviewed by the case managers, grants manager and the general manager and most of the time I agree with their recommendations. Sometimes I ask for further information and discuss the case with the general manager. On average we deal with 10 cases a week, some cases are urgent and cannot wait for the weekly cycle, so we do our best to process these quickly turning them round in a matter of hours. Some of our poorest pensioners receive a weekly grant from us which I'm also responsible for authorising.

**Investments** - I am a member of the Fund's investment subcommittee (ISC) who are responsible for liaising with



Jane Shipway

Cazenove Capital Management who manage our investment portfolio. The ISC is responsible for reviewing our portfolio and the performance of our investments which we regularly discuss with Cazenove to ensure the portfolio is performing as required. The ISC feeds back to the trustee board on the portfolio performance at our trustee meetings.

**Trustee meetings** - the trustee board meets quarterly and makes decisions regarding the Fund's activities. We discuss a variety of issues such as grant aid criteria, donation income, demand for grants and various operational issues. The appointed trustees take their responsibilities very seriously and want to do their very best for the Fund and its beneficiaries and I feel very privileged and proud to be a trustee of such a worthwhile fund which makes a real difference to the lives of so many.

### Board of Trustees

Mark Murphy	Chair
Kevin Charlesworth	
John Holme	
Rob Jones	
Vivien Lantree	
Matt Rogers	
Clive Selley	
Jane Shipway	Vice Chair

### Officers

Rachel Blackwell	Hon Solicitor
Ciara Burke	Hon Solicitor
Lesley Norris	Treasurer
Mike Pearce	Accountant

### Secretariat

Rob Pearce	Fund Manager
Steve Melhuish	Grants Manager
Chris Bennett	Case Secretary
Pippa Jones	Case Secretary
Jules Poole	Case Secretary
Jackie Standing	Case Secretary
Marcus Pascal	Administrator

### Office

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Registered Charity No. 212565

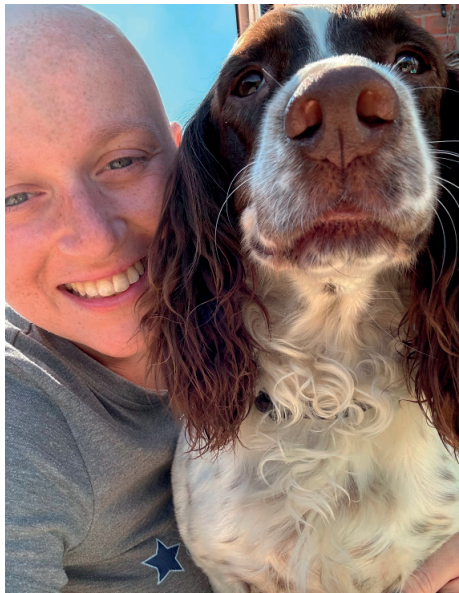
## Privacy notice

The BT Benevolent Fund is a registered charity. We are sending you this newsletter because you have said it is ok to do so. You can ask us to stop sending our newsletter by contacting us by phone on 0800 756 5555, by email at [benevolent@bt.com](mailto:benevolent@bt.com) or by post at: Room 4210, Bristol Central Telephone Exchange, Marsh Street, Bristol BS1 4AY. For more information about how we process your personal information, please read our privacy notice on our website [www.benevolent.bt.com](http://www.benevolent.bt.com).

# Case studies

In 2023 the Fund dealt with almost 400 individual cases as well as paying regular weekly grants to 125 elderly people on very low incomes. We can only do this because of the generosity of our individual donors, Openreach, the CSIS CF and the POFR. We hope these short summaries show just how much difference your support makes and demonstrates what our help can mean for those we assist. Naturally names and some other details have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

## Sarah's story



Sarah with her dog

Sarah, who works for Openreach, was diagnosed with a rare form of bone cancer. This devastating diagnosis has been life changing, because it led to Sarah's leg being amputated. Sarah's decreased mobility meant it was harder to get around the home she shares with her partner, who also works for Openreach. Sarah approached the BT Benevolent Fund for help with the cost of a wet room and new driveway and we were delighted that we could help with a grant of £5,000.

Sarah said "I am so grateful for the help towards adapting our house, it meant that I could live a little more comfortably after

the massive change to my life. It all happened so suddenly and I just wasn't prepared, but this was just the help I needed. It gave me hope and confidence knowing that I could do things in my own house again. I can now get in and out of the shower on my own, get in and out of the car and get myself out of the house safely."

Sarah certainly hasn't let her diagnosis slow her down though and completed a "Race for Life" in her wheelchair, raising £1000 for a cancer charity. A friend was so impressed with her can-do attitude and positivity that she set up a GoFundMe account for Sarah which raised another £3400 towards the home adaptations Sarah needs.

## Fleeing abuse

Mary had to flee an abusive marriage with just a suitcase containing some clothes for herself and her two children. She suffered emotional and physical abuse for many years and her partner ran up huge debts in her name, which she is now liable for. She had invested so much in the family home, but lost it all. After a few nights at a refuge, we were able to pay for a deposit and first month's rent on a new home for her and her family and also helped with some basic furnishings.

## Help to find a new home

A young Openreach employee suffered a "no fault eviction" with little notice and ended up sofa surfing for a few weeks and was at risk of losing his job. He didn't have enough money for a deposit for a new rental property and had almost given up hope until a colleague told him about the BT Benevolent Fund. He approached us for help and we were happy to award him a grant for a deposit and first month's rent.

## Family's cost of living crisis

Like so many others Mark and his family were just about managing to stay on top of their finances until the cost of living crisis struck. Their mortgage payments doubled after their fixed rate ended, their energy bill quadrupled and with two

young children to support the cost of their weekly shopping started to go up week after week. Even with all this they were still just about managing to keep their heads above water until Mark's partner lost her job. Quite quickly they found themselves in arrears and they were at risk of having their house repossessed. Mark's partner found a new job after four months, but by then they were crippled with debt. We were able to step in to help avoid the house repossession by awarding a grant for some of the mortgage arrears and with help to buy some food and basic essentials as by this time they had no money in the bank.

## Boiler on the blink

Janet, who is one of our weekly grant recipients, is 89 and lives alone. After recovering from a serious illness she needed to keep her flat warm so the last thing she needed was for her boiler to break down. Wisely Janet had boiler breakdown cover, but unfortunately after an inspection from the gas engineer she was told that the boiler was beyond repair and a replacement would cost around £3000. Janet just didn't have that sort of money available, so she turned to us for help. We were happy to provide a grant to cover the purchase and installation of a new boiler, so that Janet could keep her home warm through the winter.

## Free wills

We've partnered with [FreeWills.co.uk](https://www.freewills.co.uk) to provide all our supporters with the opportunity to make their own fully comprehensive Will free of charge. You can make your personalised Will online in three simple steps from the comfort of your own home and with live support from their Will specialists. Find out more at [www.benevolent.bt.com/donate/leave-a-legacy](https://www.benevolent.bt.com/donate/leave-a-legacy).

## 2024 BTBF AGM

Notice is hereby given that the 42nd Annual General Meeting of the BT Benevolent Fund will be held at 1.30pm on 6th August 2024 at BT, 1 Braham Street, London E1 8EE.