

Three eight hour shifts a day – you can't even go in the shower

A RETIRED psychotherapist who cared for her late partner through dementia wore a picture of him pinned around her neck as she spoke during Camden's carers debate.

Kate White said it was important to realise how exhausting it was for people just trying to do their best.

Her husband John Southgate died in 2021 after 12 years of living with Alzheimer's. They had lived together in Nassington Road, Hampstead, for 33 years.

She told councillors: "We are in a relationship with somebody that needs our support, who may be very frightened, young or old. We have exhaustion from disturbed sleep. We also feel frightened because we don't know how things are going to turn out."

Kate White addresses the council with a picture of her late husband, John around her neck



Ms White added: "We can't get a shower or make a phone call because we've got to be with the person 24/7. And I have to say, there are three eight-hour shifts a day when you're a carer, whether you're there or not, you have to organise three eight-hour shifts."

Mr Southgate was a talented jazz pianist and Ms White spoke at an event at Swiss Cottage Library last

year in which she talked about how music could help lift the mood of people with dementia.

In one poignant story, she recalled an evening when things might have otherwise become strained.

"He got a bit fed up being persuaded to get in the bath," she said.

"We had one of those hoist things. So I put Ella Fitzgerald on at full volume and that got us through it. We just

sang away while having a bath."

On Monday, she praised the council for its work on a new action plan to support carers, which she helped advise on.

"The financial cost leads to a lot of planning and a lot of organising and I think this action plan is going to really help give access to the ways in which people can get the help they need.

"Fragmentation was the thing I met, and that is the thing that I think this action plan begins to address."

"So finding your way around the system is going to be hopefully easier, both for those who are looking after and those being looked after."

Ms White also praised the Camden Carers charity.

"They are life saving and I had counselling when I was at my wits end and not able to continue. They are doing a fantastic job."

# The problem ... until now?

## Carers don't want to be called unsung heroes – they want us to listen

by RICHARD OSLEY

THOUSANDS of people are working as full-time unpaid carers without even realising it, the Town Hall heard on Monday – as the reality and the strain of turning your life upside down to look after a loved one was laid bare.

In a debate which revealed what it's like behind closed doors for people who are relied upon every day, there were calls for more support and understanding, and some respite too for those running out of steam amid the cost-of-living crisis. Calling them "unsung heroes", it was made clear, is certainly not enough.

Councillors heard from a series of speakers in the council chamber as Camden launched a new action plan to provide new levels of support.

With an ageing population needing more care but with many families not having the resources to pay for professional help, more people are devoting their own lives to do it themselves.

Allegra Lynch, the CEO at the Camden



ALLEGRA LYNCH, CEO AT CAMDEN CARERS CHARITY

"Camden wants all its residents to start well, live well and age well, but carers have many barriers to achieving this.

"Carers' own health is often negatively impacted by the caring role, and unpaid carers are more than twice as likely to experience poor health compared with people who don't have a caring role.

"Carers tell us they want to be treated with respect and listened to."

"They are experts in the person they care for – so they want to be consulted and involved in decisions about the person they care for."

"They want services to work in a joined up way, and they don't want to have to keep repeating their stories for appointments to work, and for it to be easy to book for regular breaks that work for them as individuals. The launch of the action plan is a step towards making this happen."

"Camden and its partners want to make sure that children, these families and their families have the support that they need to thrive."

Carers charity, which offers help and a support helpline, told the all-



BECCA DOVE, HEAD OF CHILDREN CAMDEN COUNCIL

"Young carers are an extraordinary group of children who care deeply for their family and their loved ones."

"Census data from 2021 tells us that there are around 395 of these incredible children living in Camden, although the true number is likely to be significantly higher."

"Around 70 per cent of young carers in Camden care for 19 hours or less per week."

"At the other end of that scale, 11 per cent of young carers under the age of 18 report caring for more than 50 hours per week."

"Being a young carer has been associated with an increased risk of emotional and mental health needs compared to their non-caring peers."

"Camden and its partners want to make sure that children, these families and their families have the support that they need to thrive."

member meeting: "One in five of us will be a carer at some point in our lives. Many of you in this room are already carers, and a good proportion of you will not have identified to such."

"The 2021 census said that there are 14,603 unpaid carers in Camden. Of these 5,200 care for 35 hours or more a week. Unpaid. That's working full time for Camden on no pay, with no breaks, no holiday pay, no workers' rights. So if they were paid the London Living wage, which is currently £13.50 an hour, how much do you think that would save?"

"You'd have to pay at Camden, you may be surprised to know, £2.4million a week. There we are.

their careers on hold and put their finances on hold."

The speakers each explained the demands and difficulties that they and others faced when finding themselves in a caring role, often unexpectedly.

While there was no large multi-million pound figures mentioned by council chiefs about what might be invested, social services chief Councillor Anna Wright said £30,000 would be given to a board of carers overseeing the implementation of a new action plan, and money was being made available to hire three support workers for the project.

Camden's action plan includes improving information about where carers can get financial help and discount schemes, counselling and advice, and in some cases a break.

Cllr Wright said: "My message, the introduces the document. I say that carers are unsung heroes of our communities. "Carers are all individuals and they

# that nobody wanted to talk about Who cares for these selfless carers?



JESSICA HURST, A CARER FROM THE AGE OF 16

"Two weeks after my 16th birthday, we had a bombshell dropped on us. My father was diagnosed with a rare form of blood cancer."

"Everything for me went out of the window. My career, my education, everything. This was not a choice that I had. I was told that I had to care for someone who I loved and respected."

"I then did the same last year for my grandfather, who sadly is no longer with us."

"He had throat cancer and terminal prostate cancer for three years, and I gave up that time to then take care of him."

"Is it right, I ask you, that young carers go unnoticed? Is it right that we go unpaid?"

"I have lived with Camden for almost now, 28 years, but is it right that we are not noticed? Being a carer is exhausting. Mentally, emotionally and physically."

£10.4million a month or £124million a year. That is just in Camden."

She added: "Each week many carers give up work, give up their education time, put



Anna Wright the action plan



ANGELA TEBE, WORKED ON ACTION PLAN'S FOCUS GROUP

"The changes in the borough have, which have been introduced to combat the very real climate emergency, increased the time and energy required to access services. With my mobility needs, there are days when I have to go to work and take one of my cars to perhaps four different appointments in all four corners of the borough. So as somebody with mobility needs, I rely heavily on my car and need to be able to move quickly. This is becoming increasingly difficult. Unfortunately, the borough is becoming exclusionary to somebody like myself."

"My careers have cognitive, mental health, mobility and sensory issues and cannot always be left to wait while I try to navigate the local parking situation."

"So it is very important that with all the changes that we plan to include active transport."

"I'm a single dad with a 16-year-old kid with severe learning difficulties and autism, and so I go through all the challenges of managing his emotional health, his medications, and at the end of it, to keep him happy. This thing is demanding. It's isolating."

"Look at the financial strain of this too. A lot of the carers have left very lucrative careers to be carers."

"It's not a matter of choice. It's something that is a necessity. It's a duty to love for someone. We get a carer allowance of £80 for doing 35 hours of work. That equates to less than £2.30 an hour."



ARUN KUMAR, CARES FOR HIS 16-YEAR-OLD SON

"At some point in our life or not, you know, we will play the role of a carer and we will need care at some point or other. So it is not something that is existing for somebody else over there. We are all involved in this."

"They simply see themselves as family and friends who are supporting someone that they care about or love. But it's only by identifying yourself as a carer that you can make that essential first step to accessing the support that is here in Camden."

The Labour administration has support from opposition councillors on the scheme.

Lib Dem councillor Tom Simon, the leader of the opposition, said: "Something which really stands out for me is the idea that a carer is something somebody else is, somewhere else. It's a world that doesn't affect you until one day it does."

"I would like to commend this plan as a really brilliant first step to transforming the landscape of care in Camden."

Conservative group leader Councillor Steve Adams said: "We wholeheartedly support these initiatives. It may be a small thing, but perhaps there could be a greater public recognition for such dedication."

"There may be some who are more happy with anonymity, but I wonder if a badge of pride might be commissioned so that carers can be recognised and appreciated more."

"A simple four word emblem of 'I Care For Camden' combines two meanings and should elicit the response of a smile or even a thank you."

### My young kids became my carers

A COUNCILLOR held back tears as she recalled how her two children – both under 10 – tried to care for her after an accident left her unable to use her arm.

Kilburn councillor Nanouche Umeadi (pictured) said: "As most of you know, I'm a single mum with two kids. My daughter was four, and my son was seven years old and became my carer because I couldn't put on my shoes."

"I couldn't cook. I couldn't clean. At the time I was thinking, this can't be their life. The idea of dumping my care on them for life, that would have been heartbreaking."

Cllr Umeadi has recovered now but said



she remembered a difficult search for help.

She said: "I couldn't even climb into the bathtub. It was dangerous. So I had to call Camden Council and be like, 'I need a bath tub'. Proving that I was disabled enough to have it was very, very frustrating. There's no rest, and I feel like with experiences,

only if you've been through it yourself, will you understand. I couldn't physically be there for myself, couldn't physically be there for my children. "So I really hope, Camden Council, this won't be just like a tick box exercise and we really do something because people are really suffering."

REFRESHING SUMMER DRINKS

served fresh all day

90 Camden Road, NW1 9EA

ICED COFFEE. MATCHA. ICED TEA. SMOOTHIES.

**JOE ALLEN**  
3rd Generation Master Tailor  
**BESPOKE & COUTURE**

Tailoring for Ladies and Gentlemen  
Suits - Coats - Trousers - Shirts - Dresses - Ball Gowns

EVERYONE LIKES NICE CLOTHES - AND BESPOKE GARMENTS ARE DESIGNED TO FIT PERFECTLY. TREAT YOURSELF TO A NEW OUTFIT TODAY

**Tailoring Classes**  
Book now to ensure your place and learn a skill for life.

**020 7704 1040**  
44 Cross Street, London N1 2BA  
joellen.bespoketailoring@gmail.com  
Alterations - Repairs - Buttonhole service

**AFFORDABLE PRIVATE DENTISTRY IN THE HEART OF CAMDEN TOWN**

**NW1 DENTAL CARE**

- TEETH WHITENING CENTRE
- FREE IMPLANT CONSULTATION
- FREE INVISALIGN CONSULTATION
- CUSTOMISED TREATMENT PLAN

**NW1 020 7485 4626**  
DENTAL CARE www.nw1dentalcare.co.uk  
92 Camden Road NW1 9EA - Open Mon-Fri 9am-7pm Sat 9am-4pm