

CWAC (Children with Aids Charity) Feedback

Virgin Atlantic's generous grant of over £88,000 has greatly assisted CWAC's Hardship project, which meant that a total of 680 children living with HIV benefited from this support. During the period of April to September 2008, a total of £74,831 had been spent, with the remainder to be spent in the remainder of the year.

CWAC's Hardship Project

The Hardship Project is a source of financial assistance to children living with HIV, currently available to children and young people up to the age of 18. The application process includes a 5 page form requiring the parent or carer's name, address, social service area, primary care trust, amount requested and household weekly income/expenditure amongst other factors.

In addition to the above, all applications must be endorsed by a known social worker, healthcare professional or voluntary organisation worker involved with the family. CWAC can assist children who are themselves HIV positive or affected by a family member being HIV positive. No application can be made without the consent and approval of the family and all applications must clearly demonstrate benefits to the children of the family involved.

All information supplied to CWAC is treated in the strictest confidence and the organisation abides by the stringent confidentiality policy. All clients must send a letter of HIV diagnosis signed by a health professional to CWAC.

Example of client feedback:

'CWAC has helped me a great deal. They provided me and my family with emergency money when we were evicted from our house. That money helped us survive until the situation was sorted out. Without this help I don't know what we would have done or how we would have coped. CWAC has also provided me and my family with emotional support through a difficult period in my life. CWAC is a beautiful charity with great people working there.'

Each month approximately £10,000 is awarded from the funds and approximately 70 families. With the support of Virgin Atlantic, CWAC has been able to assist an additional 450 children to date, and this is set to continue throughout the year due to other funders endorsing our work.

Key results for the Hardship Project

Key results for the Hardship Project over the 6-month period include the following:

- The average grant awarded was £169, compared to £146 the previous year without VAA's support
- The average weekly income of families supported was £102, compared to £107 the previous year, which sadly shows the rising rate of poverty.
- CWAC received 149 referrals from clients who had never applied to the projects before.

The most frequently requested and awarded items of all requests included:

30%: Children's clothing & school uniforms

24%: Children's items (prams, buggies, early learning items, shoes, cots & feeding equipment)

19%: Start-up baby grants

17%: Beds & bedding

10%: Essential household appliances (fridge freezers, cookers, washing machines), house repairs, child care & utility bills.

George House Trust in Manchester with 142 grants for its clients, UK wide branches of the Terence Higgins Trust

CWAC also worked most closely with the following referrers providing grants to children:

• George House Trust	142 grants
• Terrence Higgins Trust	51
• Positive East	24
• Great Ormond Street Hospital	24

Many of the families helped by CWAC not only face the daily stresses of a life long, chronic illness but they are also forced to survive on low or zero income. There are those who are well and able to work, support and provide for their families, but there are also those who have prolonged and often erratic periods of illness, which make regular employment or even claiming benefits extremely difficult:

‘Shannon was employed but lost her job when she experienced renal complications as a result of her HIV status. Shannon and her 2 children are currently staying with a friend and she has been awarded Job Seekers Allowance. We are assisting her to claim child benefit and child tax credits but she is living in increasing poverty right now and is still reliant upon friends for financial assistance. She is unable to afford to buy winter clothing and shoes for her children who have outgrown what they have – a grant of £160 is desperately required to keep her children warm’.

Questionnaires returned from the clients brought up a number of consistent issues and helped form the following recommendations:

If CWAC had a larger Hardship budget that could be used to give children a better quality of life, parents would like to be able to offer their children more extra-curricular activities such as tennis, music or swimming lessons.

Children are growing all the time so the clothing support is extremely helpful. A significant proportion of clients wished they could access support more often than every 6 months due to their not having the right to work.

Numbers of Children Living with HIV in the UK

A total of 1,460 children up to the age of 16 were reported to CHIPS (Collaborative HIV Paediatric Study) by the end of March 2008, with 88% of all HIV infected children reported to the NSHPC (National Study of HIV in Pregnancy and Childhood) since 1996, and 96% of those receiving HIV related care from 2006 onwards. Of the 1,460 children reported to CHIPS, 1,142 were alive and in active follow-up at a CHIPS centre, and 150 had transferred to adult care services.

An estimated 9,000 children are affected by HIV in the UK alone, due to a sibling or parent being HV positive. Given the total numbers infected and affected, CWAC's Hardship & Respite Breaks Project would benefit from a detailed review of the guidelines in the near future, to encompass changing needs of children and the latest feedback from clients helped.

Future Plans

The project hopes to develop its funding base to be able to increase the amount of grants awarded per month and to review its remit (criteria for grants) further to ensure that those living in the most extreme poverty are given the maximum opportunity to assist their children in a way that would be helpful to enhancing quality of life. For example, a grant of £260 might be used to provide extra curricular activities once a week for a year. Consultation would be needed in terms of defining the meaning of 'essential' items and how CWAC would best prioritise these kinds of requests for assistance (if at all) against more basic needs.

Items that are long established as being of effective use to families are increasingly sourced direct from companies in the form of in-kind goods such as toys, books, clothing and bedding. This helps to sustain the project during times when the demand on the project is high e.g. over the Christmas period. The website www.angelwish.org is a great example whereby approximately 70 brand new high quality toys were delivered free of charge to the charity in the run up to Christmas.

Financial planning takes place at the end of each month when known income is compared against projected income for the next two years. Any periods of anticipated low income months are brought to the attention of fundraisers and a strategy is planned to increase income over those months.