

Summer/Autumn 2020

GREAT NORTH NEWS

www.gnaas.com



Resilience

How we're taking
on COVID-19,
with your help.

**Charity funded,
world-class
critical care.**



/GNAirAmbulance

Registered Charity No. 1092204

Our operations

Make no mistake, COVID-19 has at times threatened the continuation of our service across Cumbria, the North East and North Yorkshire. Yet to date, we have not lost a single minute of operational time because of the virus.

For that I am incredibly proud.

Proud not just of my colleagues on the clinical side who provide that front-line care, but also of those in the charity who have had to consider the financial implications of this situation and develop new ways of trying to sustain income.

Through this, we have been able to keep flying two aircraft while also offering our evolving overnight rapid response vehicle service too. Lives have been saved as a result.

Going backwards a little to the start of this outbreak in the UK, and throughout the changing situation, it's always been my overarching aim to make sure our service is there for those who need it the most.



On the front-line we would always be at the highest risk, and because we have to work as a team this infection could be easily spread. Indirectly, we were facing the loss of staff, with doctors possibly being redeployed back into the NHS.

With this in mind, and because we cover the largest area of any charitable air ambulance in the UK, we had to find a way to fly patients safely. The initial guidance was that air ambulances could not be used to transport patients, but we looked at our rural communities and knew that this could mean the difference between life and death.

With our aviation partner Multiflight we began to look at ways to minimise risk to the pilot - who unlike other crew members is unable to wear the appropriate PPE.

We made and installed Perspex screens to separate the pilot from the patient. This gave us the ability to fly those patients who, put simply, would die without that flight.

Just as we wanted a solution for the aircraft, we also aimed towards a firm solution for PPE. This came in the form of respirator hoods.

These can be decontaminated and offer very high levels of protection during those high-risk procedures.



COVID-19 has changed the way we deliver care, but it certainly hasn't changed the care we deliver. We have worked incredibly hard to fight our way through this crisis because we are absolutely committed to the service. And we can only keep fighting with the belief and generosity shown by our supporters. Thank you.

Andy Mawson
Director of Operations



The effect on fundraising

It's not just our front-line service which has had to adapt to the changing world. Our fundraising activities too, have taken a different route than the one we anticipated at the start of the year.

When the country was asked to stay at home, and when public gatherings of people began to be cancelled, we knew tough times were ahead.

The green and white collection tins we have in businesses across the region? Out of bounds. The summer of public fundraising events organised by our supporters? Cancelled. Our annual ball and the GYRO cycling event? Postponed.

All this activity was expected to bring in more than **£100,000 a month**. And we will not see a penny of it. Of course, we fully support measures taken to slow the spread of COVID-19 and protect the NHS. But there was a moment of horror when we realised that this situation was a very real threat to the ongoing existence of our charity.

Over time, however, that initial shock has eased a little and in fact turned into something much more positive. Almost every day, when we check the messages coming through the website, or have conversations with supporters on the phone, we hear about what they are doing to help and the reasons why. It never fails to move us.

Here are just some of the ingenious supporters who have raised money in these most challenging of times:



After 12 gruelling hours in the saddle, nine-year-old Alfie Aitchison of Croglin, Cumbria, completed a **100-mile bike ride at home**.



Photographer Bridgette Ibbotson of Penrith used her daily walk to take portraits of neighbours on their doorsteps. The money raised was given to GNAAS.



The Chester-le-Street team from the Go North East bus company set out to raise £500 but **smashed through the £5,000 mark** after a series of fun sponsored events including head shaves and pies in the face.

We are far from out of the woods. The longer the effects of COVID-19 are felt, in both healthcare and economic terms, the more precarious our position will be. But if there's one thing that this crisis has shown us, it's this:

We can rely on our supporters to be there for us when we need them the most, just as they can rely on us.



Sarah Hutchinson sold home-grown sunflowers for £5 around Teesside, raising more than

£400



Barbara Benson-Smith MBE, of Whitby, set herself a target of dancing 90,000 steps as a way of marking her 90th birthday.



Sonny Wetherell, 10, of Gateshead, enlisted the support of David Walliams for his challenge of running 1k a day for ten days dressed as characters in Mr Walliams' books.



Your support in action



'I'll never forget it' - a rescue in the fells



Nicky Ridley had just started an ultra-marathon in the Lake District fells with her husband when she suddenly collapsed and suffered multiple seizures.

The 41-year-old from Milnthorpe, Cumbria, was about to reach Loadpot Hill when she fell to the ground on 30 March 2019.

"I remember setting off going up towards Loadpot and we'd overtaken the three people that actually stopped to help me," she said.

"I don't remember much after looking behind and seeing these three people."

The group that Nicky had overtaken forfeited the race and tried to keep her warm and talking while she was slipping in and out of consciousness, while her husband Chris went to get help.

The emergency services were called and the local mountain rescue team were travelling to the scene but due to the isolated rural location there was a long response time expected and GNAAS was called to attend the incident.

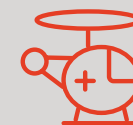
Within nine minutes our critical care team had flown from the base at Langwathby and landed near Loadpot Hill. They assessed and treated Nicky before airlifting her to the Cumberland Infirmary in Carlisle where she spent five days recovering.

On her birthday last year Nicky returned to the scene of her incident with her husband, friends, and the people from the race who stopped to help her. As a surprise they had wrapped the cairn like a birthday present and decorated it with lights.

She said: "As we got closer I noticed the lights twinkling and my eyes started filling up then they all started singing Happy Birthday."

Since the incident Nicky has vowed to return to ultra-marathons and fundraise for GNAAS, once it is safe to do so. She's also paid tribute to the GNAAS team who helped her.

Nicky said: "I think what they did for me was amazing and I think so many people just need to donate to things like this because it's a wonderful charity."



**"It is a day
in my life
I will never
forget."**

'My life changed that day'

– crash survivor
Anthony Rowan



Anthony Rowan, from Murton, County Durham kissed his wife Joanne goodbye and said he would be back soon. Thirty minutes later the police arrived. "Is he alive?" she asked...

Anthony, 47, had jumped on his bike on the morning of 8 January 2017 and made his way to the gym. A journey that he makes almost every day.

After spending 18 years as a Royal Army Physical Trainer, this short journey was just a drop in the ocean compared to his active and adventurous past – or so he thought.

He said: "I can't remember the accident itself, but from what I have been told I think my bike slipped on wet leaves or mud and I went over the handlebars and hit my head on a concrete post."



"Their treatment was life-saving and I would not be here if it wasn't for them."



Anthony's wife Joanne recalled: "He said I will be back before you leave, and he wasn't. I hadn't even been at work long when the police turned up.

"By the look on their faces I knew it was serious and I said, 'is he alive?' and they said 'yes, at the moment.'"

Anthony's injuries were catastrophic. He said: "I had a cut to my head with substantial swelling and I was placed in an induced coma on the roadside. I broke my back in three places, had a punctured lung, and bleeding on the brain."

Due to the fog that day, GNAAS could not travel to Anthony by helicopter and instead, travelled in the rapid response vehicle.

Thankfully, Anthony has made a full recovery although he hasn't yet been back on his bike. He said: "GNAAS are an amazing charity and we donate to them whenever we can. Their treatment was life-saving and I would not be here if it wasn't for them."

Since his accident, Anthony said his outlook on life has totally changed. He told us: "After a long career in the military I have since changed how I think, and I can now take a step back and look at things differently.

"I applied for a job in HMP Durham and got it. Then I went through ten weeks of training to qualify as a prison officer. It's all thanks to GNAAS that I have been able to do this."



A pilot's perspective

Chief pilot Jay Steward joined GNAAS nine years ago. From his upbringing in Greece to his 24 years spent in the Army, we spoke to him to find out more about his life, career, love of flying and what it means to work at GNAAS.



"I always knew I wanted to be a pilot but when I was seven, my family emigrated to Greece where I stayed until I was 16 so unfortunately, I didn't really have much schooling.

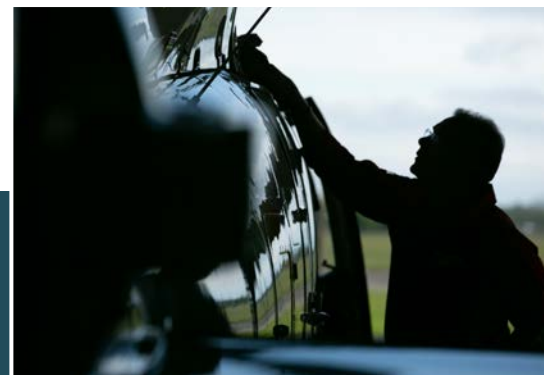
"When I was 17, I found out about the Parachute Regiment which sounded like lots of fun, so I decided to join up. From there, I applied for the Army Air Corps and the rest is history."



"I spent half of my aviation career teaching students to fly, as well as instructing on operations abroad. I retired from the army after serving over 24 years and I have been at GNAAS ever since."

"Since being at GNAAS, for me the most amazing places to fly over are the Lake District and the Northumberland coast - both stunning."

"My long career has taken me all over the world. I spent nearly five years on operations in Northern Ireland. I have also done a couple of tours of Afghanistan, Kenya, and all over Europe as well as several trips to the United States."



"The best thing about my job is meeting people who would otherwise not be alive today if it wasn't for the fantastic work the charity does.

"Although I still find it hard dealing with children that are unwell or injured. I have on many occasions had to help the critical care team deal with situations that make you reflect about your own children and family."

"At GNAAS, the team are all like-minded, crazy fools who have a right laugh together, but when it's needed, it's game faces on and we hit the challenge together as a team."



Building blocks for the future

For reasons identified earlier in this newsletter, we expect coronavirus to hit us hard. But thanks to moves made over the 12 months before the crisis, we have given ourselves the best chance of surviving the expected financial hardship to come.

GNAAS probably saw more change in the last year than at any other point in the charity's history. At the centre of it was the move to our new headquarters at Progress House, near Eaglescliffe. The move took place in April 2019 but the preparations date back several years before then.



Before Progress House, our charity staff were mainly housed in two rented – and cramped – offices, in Darlington and Newton Aycliffe. For years we have harboured the ambition of owning our own home.

When we visited the site for the first time, we knew it ticked all the boxes – room to work, room to grow, and crucially, room to build a hangar for our helicopters!

We announced late in 2019 that we have secured a deal on a new helicopter. The **Dauphin N3+ aircraft** will look very similar to our existing helicopters but will be worlds apart in terms of the power it packs and the technology available to the pilot.

It will mean we can fly for longer and safely carry heavier loads, among many other advantages, and will replace one of our helicopters, which are each around thirty years old.

We expect it to begin work later this year and to serve the entire region for many years to come. All of this was done while responding to more than **1,400 emergency call-outs** on our helicopters and cars across the North East, Cumbria and North Yorkshire.

If you've ever supported our charity, you should feel proud about what you've helped achieve. We aren't sure what the immediate future will bring, but we do know that with your help we've given ourselves the best chance of weathering the storm.

After the charity staff moved in, work started on the hangar and other accommodation for our pilots, paramedics, doctors and support staff.

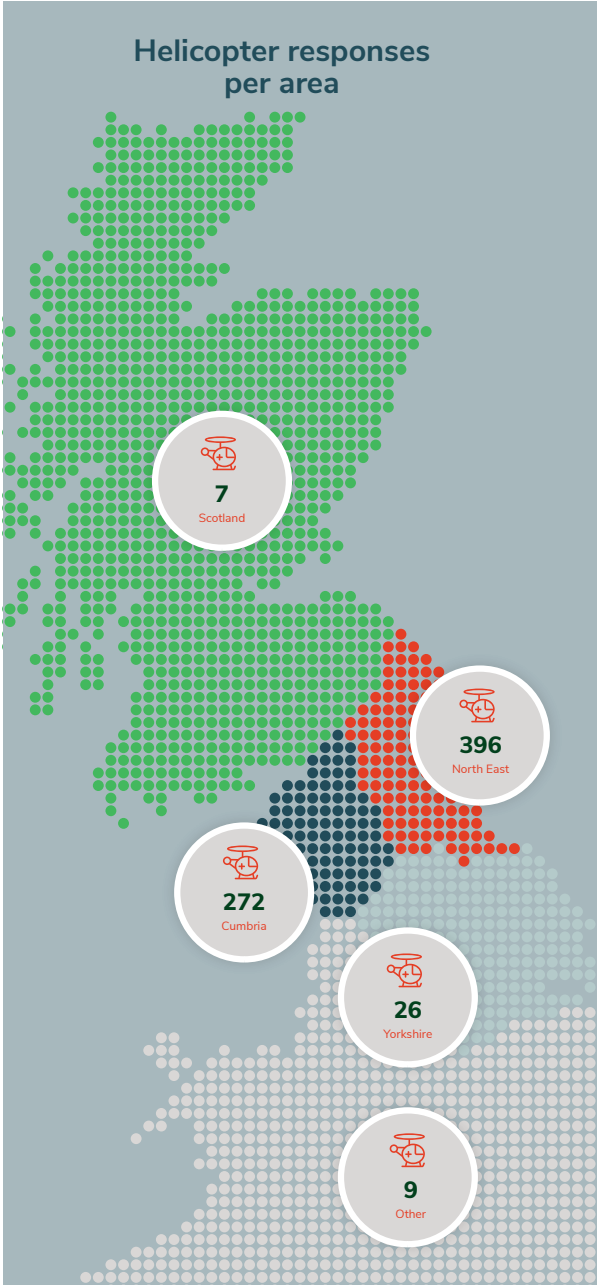
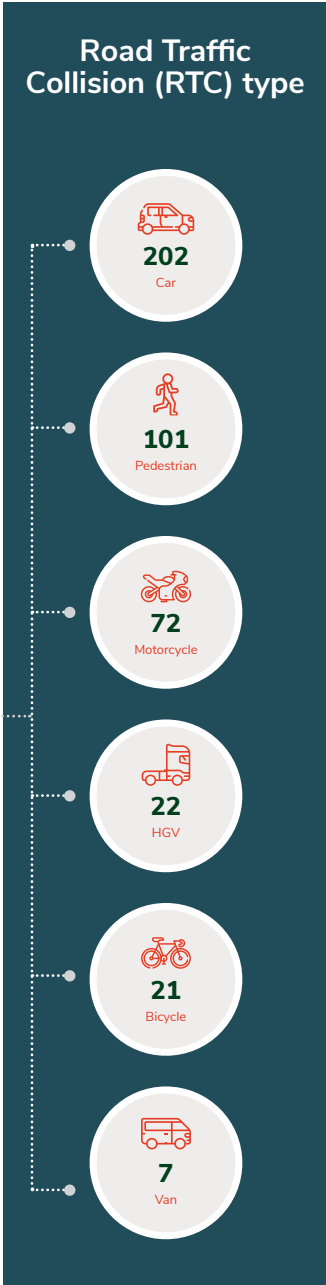
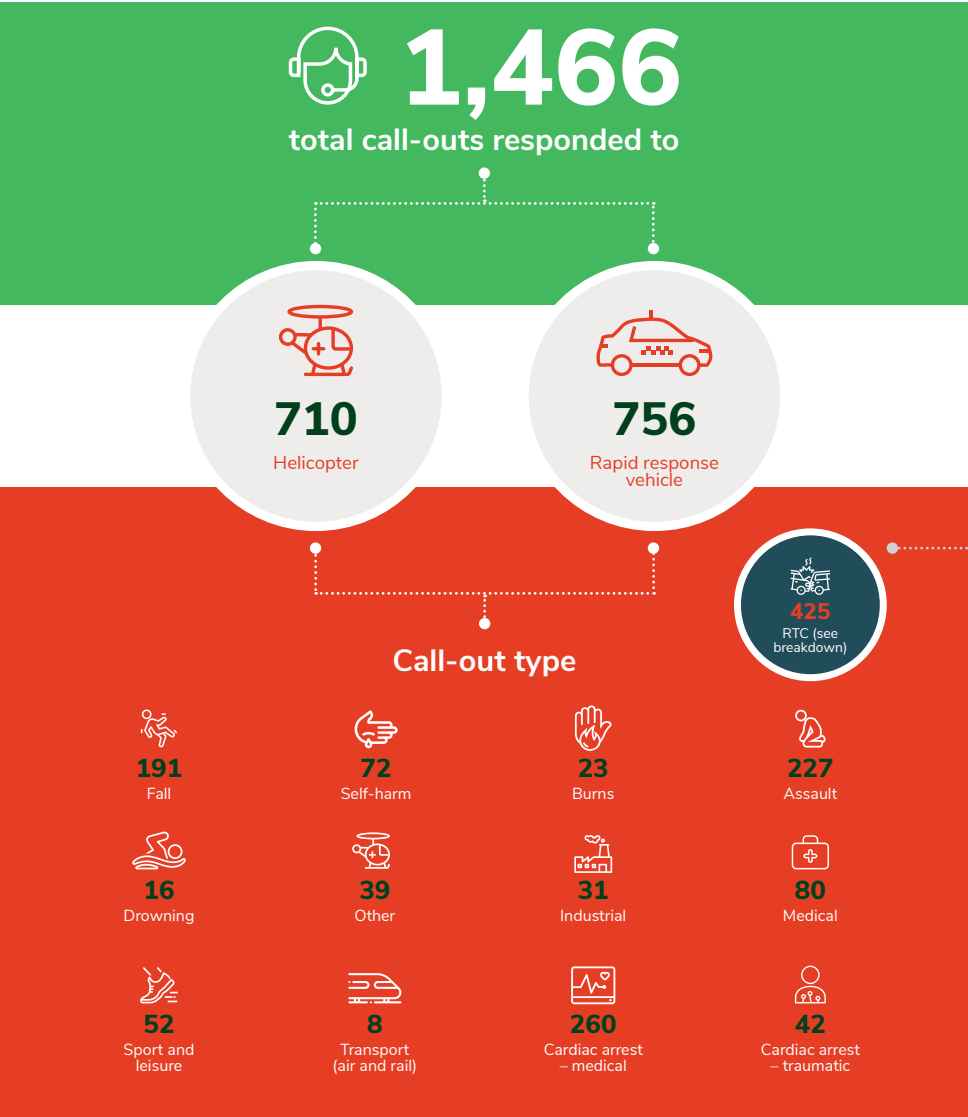
Their move was expected in Spring 2020 but due to the outbreak of coronavirus it was postponed until safe to do so. We are aiming for late summer 2020 now, so by the time you read this, we may all be under one roof for the first time.

Owning our own headquarters gives us the stability we need right now, at a time when our donations are expected to be down approximately **£100,000 a month**. We can't wait to show our supporters around, but this will obviously have to wait until we are safe to open the doors to the public once more.



What we've been up to...

The following data shows how we were kept busy in the financial year 2019/20.



Data taken from 1 April, 2019, to 31 March, 2020.

The Great North Air Ambulance Service
brings pioneering pre-hospital care
to the scene, rescuing hundreds of
severely injured or ill patients every year
throughout the North East,
North Yorkshire and Cumbria.

We are 100% charity funded.

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