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P R E S S   R E L E A S E

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HELPING THE COMMUNITY TO CARE - 10.5 MILLION IN GOVERNMENT AID

The Government is making a total of £10.5 million available over the next three years to help volunteers, families and others to care for people who need support. The new scheme will be called 'Helping the Community to Care'. It represents a new commitment of funds additional both to the general scheme of grants to voluntary organisations - for which a budget increase to £11 million has already been announced - and also to existing specific schemes such as Opportunities for Volunteering and the initiatives relating to under-fives, intermediate treatment and drug misusers.

This was announced today by Mr Norman Fowler, Secretary of State for Social Services in a written Parliamentary Answer to Mr William Cash, MP for Stafford.

Mr Fowler said: "The basic objective of the Government is to ensure that each individual in need receives care and support in the manner most suited to his needs and personal preferences. The vast majority of sick, handicapped and elderly people would prefer, wherever possible, to receive any necessary care and support in their own homes or in familiar surroundings in the community. Many people are supported in this way by families, friends or voluntary helpers. The contribution of these carers is indispensable. I am therefore today introducing a new programme of special grants to assist such carers in their work.

We have called the programme 'Helping the Community to Care' - for that is its objective. We will be making a total of £10.5 million available over three years, almost all through voluntary bodies. This will be aimed particularly at improving care for elderly people and people who are mentally ill or mentally handicapped, by assisting volunteers, families, neighbours and others to care for them more effectively and with greater confidence.

Schemes which we plan to assist in the first phase of the programme are, for example, home from hospital projects for the elderly. When old people leave hospital, they are particularly vulnerable. They have got out of the way of doing things for themselves. Many of them will be in need of encouragement, companionship and practical help while

they get back their confidence in living at home. Such assistance - in co-operation with statutory agencies - can help old people to take up their lives in the community again when they return from hospital. Our new programme will provide training and back-up services to volunteers running such services. We also intend to encourage and provide training for volunteers to work with elderly people in ethnic minorities who may have problems of communication and obtaining access to the services they need. Helpers can provide practical assistance but equally important can make sure that information is available and comprehensive and can encourage such old people and their families to use it.

Other schemes we wish to support in the first phase are training for those providing care in the community for the mentally handicapped, the development of practical arrangements for the after-care for schizophrenic patients, the provision of common services to support self-help and mutual aid groups, and development work to help set up family self-help centres.

Arrangements for funding projects will be worked out in detail with voluntary bodies participating in the programme. This will include a number of special demonstration projects; but much of the money will go towards tailoring information and training material to meet the needs of individual carers, and those who organise volunteers or manage voluntary groups. Major national voluntary bodies will be working with us on different parts of this programme."