

# Stepping up to help a family when ironing a shirt becomes a luxury

Having a seriously ill or dying child not only leaves families devastated but often unable to cope with the burden of everyday life. But, with our new campaign to launch a volunteer-led service, Each and the *Cambridge Independent* are aiming to make a difference. GEMMA GARDNER reports on the impact the scheme can have.

Clare Kendrick Robinson was an education professional working with children with additional needs before she retired two years ago.

The 62-year-old went on to become involved with a film club and an arts centre. But she wanted to do something to help others in challenging circumstances and became involved with East Anglia's Children's Hospices (Each) Help at Home volunteer scheme.

"I was aware when I started work with the family that it would be really useful for them to know that the work I do would get done regularly – but what I really hadn't realised was just how rewarding it would prove to be for me," Clare told the *Cambridge Independent*.

"I get so much pleasure driving away after each visit, knowing how much of a difference it makes to the mother that she doesn't any longer have to worry about getting the house cleaned.

"Experiencing the situation that the whole family, including grandparents, live with every day has also been thought-provoking – helping me to be able to put some of my own concerns into perspective."

Clare, from Wivenhoe, Essex, began helping Karen and Justin Maude in October 2015. They live in Colchester with their two sons and seven-year-old daughter Cara.

Cara has a rare metabolic condition that means she cannot

break down fat. Having too much in her diet would be poisonous.

Since August 2015 she has been an inpatient at Great Ormond Street Hospital in London, where she has had her pancreas removed due to chronic pancreatitis – when the organ becomes permanently damaged from inflammation. She is currently recovering after a secondary operation and working towards returning home in March.

Clare visits the family once a week for around two-and-a-half to three hours to help with the housework, including cleaning the bathrooms and doing the ironing.

"Cara's dad was ironing his shirt before going to work for a long day. He leaves early and drops off the boys, so I can make that easier by ironing his shirt. That's a luxury for him but for me it's nothing."

Clare is no stranger to difficult situations but says what the family experience is on "another level".

"I think it's given me even more respect for how families manage these situations – it's incredible," she said. "I haven't found it emotionally difficult because my career had made me quite resilient. You forget about the things that might be bothering you because they're so minor compared to what this family is going through. That's something that's been powerful for me. But I certainly think it wouldn't be for everyone."

Clare praised the support given by Each to volunteers and said the

training she received was the "best she'd experienced".

She said: "I am looking forward to continuing work with the family in the future and would urge anyone with any amount of spare time, however little, to seriously consider becoming a volunteer – it's one of the best decisions I've ever made.

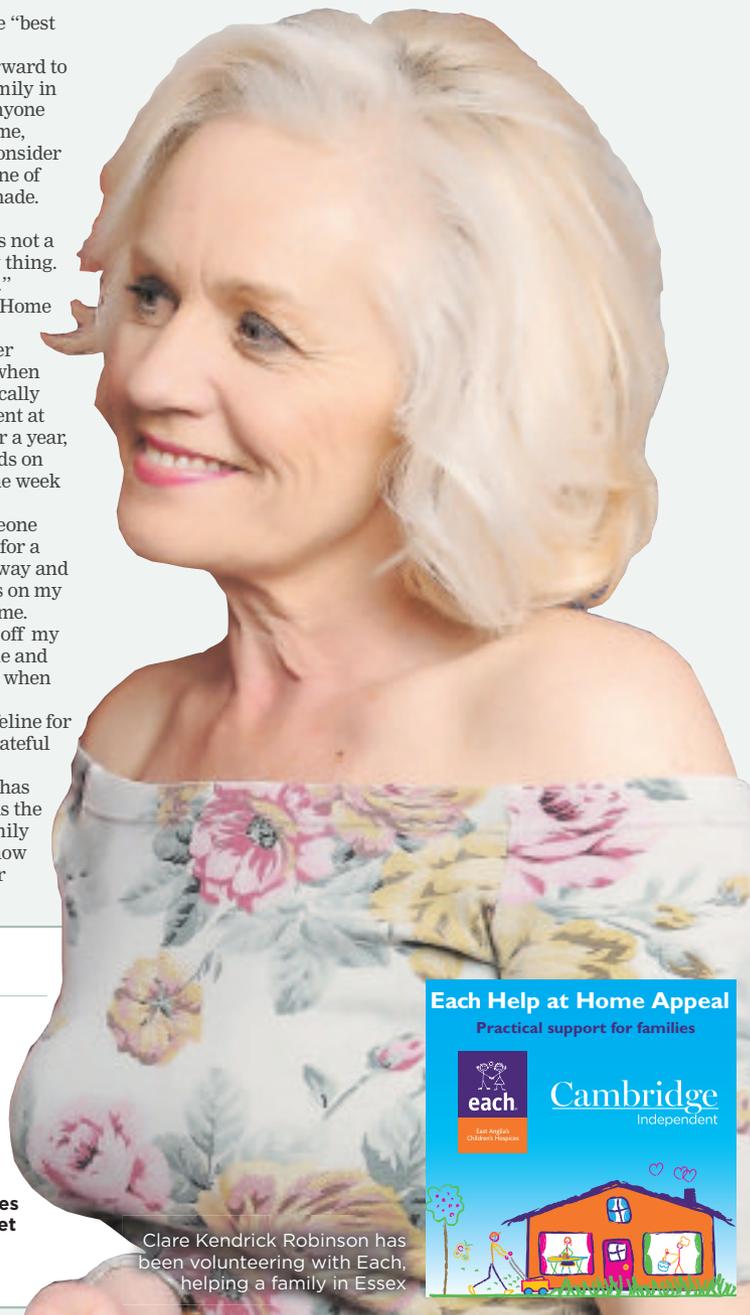
"I would emphasise the reciprocity aspect of it. It's not a one-way thing, it's a two-way thing. It is unbelievably rewarding."

Karen said: "Each Help at Home is a huge help to our family, especially me. For any mother of three, life is a juggle, but when one of your children is medically complex and has been a patient at Great Ormond Street for over a year, there are many more demands on your time. I spend most of the week in London looking after my daughter. Knowing that someone will come in weekly to clean for a few hours takes one worry away and allows me more time to focus on my other children when I get home.

"It also takes the pressure off my mother, who wants to help me and keeps our house functioning when I'm in London.

"The service provides a lifeline for our family and we're very grateful to Clare and Each."

Clare concluded: "What it has really made me understand is the importance of giving the family practical support. I've seen how important it is for their other children to have a life."



Clare Kendrick Robinson has been volunteering with Each, helping a family in Essex

## The campaign

The *Cambridge Independent* is campaigning to raise £87,500 to bring the Each Help at Home service to Cambridgeshire. Here's how it works and what you can do to make it happen.

■ Volunteers are needed to help families who have children with life-limiting illnesses. Tasks can include such things as gardening, cleaning, ironing or shopping – everyday things that parents struggle to find time for.

■ The £87,500 will provide three years of funding, paying

for a volunteer co-ordinator as well as training volunteers.

■ We need your help with the fundraising. You can donate at [uk.virginmoneygiving.com/fund/EACHHelpAtHome](http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/fund/EACHHelpAtHome)

■ You can drop off cash or cheques – made payable to

Each – at the charity's Milton office at 42 High Street.

■ Or you can set yourself a challenge and get your family, friends and colleagues to sponsor you. Be sure to let us know: [gemma.gardner@iliffmedia.co.uk](mailto:gemma.gardner@iliffmedia.co.uk)



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