

ANNIVERSARY YEAR ENDURING APPEAL OF THE GRAND APPEAL

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IN the words of that well known cheese loving inventor Wallace, the charity supporting Bristol Children's Hospital does: "A cracking job Gromit".

The much loved Grand Appeal, which proudly bears Britain's most famous man and dog combination as its figurehead, marks its 21st anniversary this year.

During that time it has raised more than £40 million to deliver the small special extras and the big pioneering equipment that the NHS hasn't the resources to fund in order to transform the care of sick children and their families across Bristol and the wider south west region.

At its heart is Nicola Masters, with a career forged in retail and merchant banking, who was approached by former local health authority chairman, the late Peter Durie, OBE, with the idea of forming a charity to support the building of a £22m replacement for the Victorian St Michael's Hill Children's Hospital that had served the city well since it was built in 1866, but was no longer fit for purpose.

The target was set: to raise £10m towards equipping the new building next to the Bristol Royal Infirmary.

Nicola gives a wry smile when she recalls that in the beginning all their ideas were contained in one single brown manila file - and they took it from there, setting up with the Charity Commission, recruiting the trustees, the board, and the fundraising committees.

Then they had another cracking idea. To approach Bristol's own Aardman Animations - riding high in 1995 with the success of the Oscar-winning A Close Shave - to see if the company would, perhaps, maybe, could be, help the fledgling charity.

Nicola said: "We went to them and said that we had an idea for a logo and maybe they would animate it and they came back and said - 'Well, we haven't really got much time but do you fancy having Wallace and Gromit instead?' Can you believe it?"

And so a unique and wonderful partnership was born.

The Grand Appeal set out to raise that £10 million - with its fundraising spearheaded by Wallace and Gromit - and has gone way beyond, surpassing the first target by £2 million and, with the help of the generosity of everyone in the region, raising an amazing £40 million to date all of which has gone to help children receiving treatment at Bristol Children's Hospital.

The latest initiative has been to buy a rundown building two doors down from the charity's offices in Upper Maudlin Street opposite the hospital.

A former cafe with student accommodation over, it needs a lot of work, but the charity is going to transform it into accommodation for parents and their extended families whose loved ones are being cared for



■ Patients celebrate 21 years of the Grand Appeal

NICOLA MASTERS

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in the hospital, something these families desperately need.

"There will be two suites on the lower ground floor to accommodate larger families and upstairs there will be up to seven beds in a range of different sized rooms to accommodate different needs, and a separate one-bedroom apartment for the relatives patients being treated for complex, long term-conditions such as cancer or burns where, for the young one, there is a long stay in hospital ahead.

Nicola said: "It is about bringing a sense of normality into a very stress-

ful situation.

"Parents can walk across the road from the hospital and for a moment you are not in a clinical environment anymore, but you are so close to your loved one. If anything is wrong you are there in an instant."

What everyone regrets is that, on occasions, parents have had to sleep in their cars because they are too far away from home or can't afford accommodation in the city.

That's where The Grand Appeal comes in: the charity already funds and operates Cots for Tots House, a 12-bed accommodation lifeline for



■ The first patient to use the MRI scanner funded by The Grand Appeal, Jack Mooney, with his mum Rachael and consultant neurosurgeon Mike Carter



■ Above, Nick Park by the M Shed at the Gromit Unleashed launch; below, Nick with more Gromits Pictures: Oliver Edwards



parents whose sick or premature baby unit are in the special care unit on St Michael's Hospital

But Nicola is adamant. Don't think the Grand Appeal is a cheque book to replace the NHS. "We are here to deliver a difference to patient care," she said.

"We are here to provide things that are not statutory. "It's not about replacing the NHS it is about complementing it. It is about providing so many things we would like to do to help deliver and do the very best we can for the sick children at the hospital."

The charity's relationship with Aardman is very special. "We are hugely fortunate to work with Nick Park, Pete Lord and Dave Sproston at Aardman," says Nicola. "Their generosity is truly humbling. They are great philanthropic people. This is not just a branding exercise, they are really involved. They genuinely care about what we do. They've visited the hospital and are involved in all aspects of the charity.

"It is a great partnership and it is great to be able to deliver this for Bristol and the South West." Great job Gromit.



■ The Grand Appeal shop at The Mall, Cribbs Causeway

HERE'S TO ANOTHER 21 YEARS, SAYS PETER



■ Grand Appeal chairman Peter Lord with another Aardman favourite, Morph

■ Peter Lord, co-founder of Aardman and chairman of The Grand Appeal, looked back and reflected on the Grand Appeal's 21 years. He said: "The £40million it has raised in that time is a true cause for celebration. "I remember the first meeting when the charity approached us and we all decided that Wallace and Gromit would be the perfect figureheads for a new appeal. "It seemed then, and it still seems, the perfect partnership for Bristol, and we're de-

lighted to have been able to help make a huge difference to sick children's lives. "Since then, it has been a great honour for me to stay so closely involved with the charity's work - currently as its chairman. "Everyone at Aardman is proud of our very special relationship with The Grand Appeal, and the part Wallace and Gromit have had to play in all of the amazing things the charity has achieved. "Here's to the next 21 years."

CREATING A CHEERIER HOSPITAL

■ So, what does the Grand Appeal do with the £40m that the generous people across Bristol and the South West have raised?

Every penny is precious, brought in by big fundraising initiatives such as the Gromit Unleashed art trail of 2013 and its follow-up Shaun in the City in 2015, both of which have set the pace for fundraising countrywide. In total they have raised millions.

So there are the little things, that maybe we don't think of so much. Like the lollipop symbols outside the hospital, welcoming young patients and saying actually the hospital is not so scary after all.

The artwork on the wall of the wards. There's no sterile beige, bland walls, but bright floral or animal scenes to cheer up youngsters. Alternatively, children can use an iPad to take their mind off what may be invasive treatment.

On the very top of the hospital is a conservatory for the children's cancer unit. There are toys, ride-ons and the youngsters can look across Bristol, all the way to Dundry. They can't go outside, but the outside comes in for them.

The same goes for the ground floor where teenagers can enjoy a garden atrium.

The Grand Appeal has funded one of only two £2.5m robot machines in the country that can remove brain tumours, and is in place in Bristol.

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