

PRESS RELEASE – June 27th, 2018

**South Tyneside hospital volunteers honoured to share 70th birthday
with NHS**



As the NHS prepares to mark its 70th birthday on July 5th, a group of dedicated South Tyneside hospital volunteers is sharing the same remarkable milestone.

To celebrate, the League of Friends is presenting every baby born at South Tyneside District Hospital in June with a special teddy bear wearing a League of Friends t-shirt.

The League of Friends of South Tyneside Hospitals is one of the oldest voluntary organisations in the NHS. It began with a group of kind-hearted people from the South Tyneside area getting together in 1948 to form the South Shields Hospitals Voluntary Aids Association, with each member paying a one shilling membership

fee. The aim was to help provide comforts for patients in hospitals which 70 years ago were not the comfortable places they are today but could be cold and draughty and lacking in facilities.

Bed jackets and bed socks were popular items and members spent a lot of time in those early days knitting to keep up with demand. Books were very popular, too, as a way for patients to help pass the time. The group also provided entertainment, with members wheeling a harmonium on to wards and conducting sing-songs and religious services.

In its first year, the association made £1,187, receiving donations from 10 local companies. In March 1981 its name changed to The League of Friends of South Tyneside Hospitals.

The group currently has about 100 members and the organisation is still thriving. Its current president is businesswoman and philanthropist Dame Margaret Barbour, whose family business began in South Shields. Among previous presidents was celebrated South Tyneside novelist Dame Catherine Cookson.

The League estimates that over the years its volunteers have raised well in excess of £500,000 to provide patients and staff at the District Hospital and the old Ingham Infirmary, in South Shields, and Palmer Community Hospital and Primrose Hill Hospital, in Jarrow, with extra comforts and equipment. Most of the money raised comes from its shop in the main entrance of the District Hospital's Ingham Wing.

Earlier this year, the volunteers gave almost £11,000 to buy vital equipment for the Cardiology Department at South Tyneside District Hospital in the shape of three temporary pacing boxes and seven blood pressure monitors. Their most recent donation of almost £2,000 was used to buy three new chairs to improve the comfort of patients having blood tests in the Phlebotomy department.

League Chairman Maureen Young said: "We are so proud to share our birthday with the fantastic NHS which has done so much for the health of the nation over 70 years. We'd like to say a huge thank you to each and every one of our volunteers down the

years who have played their part in helping us to help our local hospitals. We are still getting requests to join us and we're look forward to the next 70 years."

South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust Chairman Neil Mundy said: "Our League of Friends volunteers are truly remarkable. They have touched the hearts of so many South Tyneside families with their enthusiasm and commitment to supporting our local hospitals over so many years. It is very fitting that the League shares the same anniversary year as the NHS; they are both well-loved institutions which play a vital role in people's lives."

The Trust will be celebrating NHS70 in a variety of ways. On the anniversary, Thursday, July 5th, there will be a display in Alexander's restaurant at South Tyneside District Hospital charting major milestones in the history of the NHS, and members of the public and staff will be invited to write their personal 'Thank you NHS' messages. Also on the day, patients will be treated to celebratory cakes.

Ends

Photo caption: Left to right, Win Patterson, Maureen Young, Ann Thompson and Sue Goddard, of the League of Friends, with some of the teddies

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