**PRESS RELEASE**

Tenth anniversary Surviving Winter campaign
 smashes target to break records

A CAMPAIGN to save the lives of elderly people by keeping them warm in the winter months has broken all records by raising £100,000.

Dorset Community Foundation’s annual Surviving Winter campaign was launched ten years ago in response to the number of deaths among older people caused by fuel poverty. An average of 730 die each year in Dorset due to cold-related illness.

The campaign, which has raised more than £250,000 and helped thousands of people over the last decade, runs in partnership with Citizens Advice Purbeck to provide £200 grants to people over 60 in fuel poverty or to those over 50 who have significant health conditions, are on the highest level of benefits or have little current chance of improving their life circumstances.

Dorset Community Foundation Chief Executive Grant Robson said the success of the campaign has been down to the generosity of the people of the county. “Each year Dorset people step up to support this campaign but this year we have seen an extraordinary response and we are so thankful,” he said.

“We know from our partners at Citizens Advice that people are finding it harder than ever to heat their homes because of the economic fallout from Covid and the fact they have to stay at home more. I’d like to thank all of the people who donated their government Winter Fuel Payment as well as the trusts, companies and long-standing supporters who have shown such compassion.”

Kate Pryce, project manager at Citizens Advice Purbeck, said the pandemic has had a drastic effect on fuel bills. “The energy costs for everybody has escalated because people are at home so much longer,” she said.

“Normally people would go out at least part of the day, even if it is a visit to the local library, to go somewhere and be busy instead of being cold at home. But now they are not able to do that because everything has had to shut down.”

She said she is delighted at the news that the campaign has broken the £100,000 barrier. “It’s fantastic to hear so much has been raised, we are very pleased to see the support,” she said.

“It’s really good to have this campaign, particularly this year because of the situation with Covid. People in lockdown now are finding it very difficult to heat their properties. We’ve heard stories of people just being in one room with a heater trying to keep warm. One gentleman was referred to us because he was using the plate warmer on his cooker to warm his hands up because he was so cold.”

So far the CAB has awarded 136 Surviving Winter grants and expects to be busy all through the winter. Ms Pryce said people don’t often to admit to struggling with heating bills but it is identified when they come to the CAB about other issues.

She said: “Our advisors will ask them what their thermostat is set to and when the answer comes back ’15 because I can’t afford it to be any higher’ it puts it into perspective how people are struggling to get by.

“People are also telling us that they are making a choice between paying their fuel bills and eating properly. They tell us ‘you can’t have both’.

She said the CAB has had backing from two councils. “We’ve had great support from Dorset Council and BCP Council who have made quite a few referrals to us,” she said.

The Energy Saving Trust has also supported it with Fighting Fuel Poverty funds so that it can make grants to people who don’t meet the age criteria for Surviving Winter.

The Surviving Winter campaign is running until the end of March. Mr Robson said: “We’d love to see the total go even higher because the more we raise, the more people we can help. There are 19,000 people living in fuel poverty in Dorset – that’s almost one in ten people.”

Donate to Surviving Winter at dorsetcommunityfoundation.org. Contact Citizens Advice at purbeckadvice.org.uk.

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**Pictured:** Dorset Community Foundation’s annual Surviving Winter campaign has already raised a record-breaking £100,000 this year

**EDITOR’S NOTE:**

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