

Impact Report

2023





“Thank you to BRACE for all that you do, too many people are living with dementia and knowing there is a charity dedicated to research gives hope for families like mine, that we will get that cure we desperately need.”

Anne, BRACE Supporter



Chris Williams CEO

Dementia is an urgent crisis, almost one million people are living with the incurable condition right now. Each person living with dementia is a one in a million to their loved ones.

Tackling a challenge of this urgency demands ambition and significant investment in research.

The response from our supporters to protect dementia research, during these times of austerity, has been incredible, and we truly cannot thank you enough. Thanks to you, 2022 was a record year for BRACE with 78p in every £1 going towards our charitable activities.

An incredible £705,765 has been awarded to new researchers, alongside ongoing research, in 2023.

Thank you to each and every individual, family, business, trust and organisation, such as the Medical Research Council, and our committed researchers, for making research possible.



Jane Dare Chair of Trustees

As Chair of the Trustees, I give my heartfelt thanks to everyone that has supported our work in 2023.

It has been an incredible year, with the charity going from strength to strength thanks to a strong and growing BRACE team, supported by the trustees, and our loyal, dedicated volunteers.

In the aftermath of the pandemic, that took so much from research and from families affected by dementia, we are feeling particularly proud of our achievements.

We have renewed confidence that BRACE will continue to make a significant impact in the fight against dementia.

Please know that your support in 2023 has made a big difference, and we are truly grateful to have you by our side as we go into 2024. Thank you.

Together we will defeat dementia.

Vision

2023 was the year to re-build and strengthen the charity.

Real progress has been made since BRACE was founded in 1987. The charity has played an important part in improved understanding of the causes of dementia and the ability to treat people living with dementia.

We are turning the tide on dementia; the past year has been one of the most exciting times for breakthroughs in dementia research in many, many years. We are edging closer to treatments that could slow down Alzheimer's and one day be licensed on the NHS.

To ensure that BRACE can continue to play a valuable role in the fight against dementia, we need to focus on our strategy and vision.

It's an exciting time for the charity, with ambitious plans for BRACE to be a £1,000,000 organisation by 2028.

Growth offers greater opportunities for research and the chance to offer long-term continuity for valuable research at the South West Dementia Brain Bank and 6 other key research sites.

Our Aims

- To be a regional research charity with a UK wide reach
- To have a physical presence in Bristol, the South West and South Wales
- To have supporter groups in every city where BRACE funds research
- To have 10% income growth year on year
- To have regular, public information events both in person and online, including an annual event
- To be creative in promoting debate and learning about dementia - 'a thought leader'.

2023 saw a new direction for BRACE, with you, our supporters, at its heart. Thank you for your ongoing support.





“BRACE funding has underpinned the vital work of the South West Dementia Brain Bank for decades. The recent appeal continues the charity’s long-standing support for dementia research. BRACE has enabled the development of a highly-skilled, dedicated team and, most importantly, kept them in the field of dementia research. Thanks to BRACE, thousands of brain tissue samples are processed and sent to scientists, nationally and internationally, for use in research each year.”

Laura Palmer, South West Dementia Brain Bank Manager

The Impact of Science

Pilot Projects

BRACE funds pilot projects which pursue new and promising lines of research. These are small scale projects which test ideas before bigger research projects can go ahead. As a small charity we are committed to planting the acorns, so big trees can grow.

A recent breakthrough pilot project is Fastball - the world's first early Alzheimer's EEG test.

Dr George Stothart has developed the test with BRACE funding at the University of Bath, alongside Dr Liz Coulthard, at the University of Bristol. The findings of the pilot project gathered national and international attention and has resulted in a £1.5 million grant from the NIHR.

The funding will be used to test 1000 patients at the Bristol Brain Centre and will investigate if the test can support earlier diagnoses on a large scale.

Earlier diagnosis offers patients and their loved ones the chance to receive treatment sooner. Treatment could one day include the newly developed Alzheimer's drugs which, during current trials, are showing signs of being able to slow down Alzheimer's.

The test is also being developed for possible wider NHS use, which could save the NHS a significant amount of money and time, and free up resources to support patients in other ways.



Our Funding

In 2023 BRACE funded 3 pilot projects and 4 PhDs. We are currently supporting around 40 ongoing research projects across 6 different key research sites. With our continuing support for the South West Brain Bank and our Dementia Research Nurse, this totals an investment of £705,765 in dementia research.

Dementia Research Nurse

Since 2019, BRACE has been funding a part-time Dementia Research Nurse. The position plays a crucial role in research trials through recruiting patients, undertaking patient assessments (blood test and cognitive assessments), coordinating patient visits and facilitating blind trials. In 2023, the Dementia Research Nurse has supported the set up and delivery of 11 dementia research studies within the Bristol Brain Centre, at Southmead Hospital.

What is Fastball?

'Fastball' is a simple Alzheimer's test which measures patients' brain waves while they watch flashing images on a screen and wear an EEG headset. The headset looks a bit like a swimming cap with wires and is linked to a computer to measure brain activity.

It is painless to use, and the test is quick and easy.

Previous research by Dr George Stothart and Dr Liz Coulthard has shown Fastball can measure small changes in brainwaves that happen when a person remembers an image. Their research also shows this response changes as a person develops dementia.

Fastball and Dr George's work continues to be supported by BRACE, with a recent grant awarded for a PhD student to support Fastball. The PhD student will work on developing the test to detect three more common types of dementia.





South West Dementia Brain Bank

BRACE has provided core support to the South West Dementia Brain Bank (SWDBB) since it was set up in the 1980s, and 2023 was no different. The SWDBB is a crucially important platform for both UK and international dementia researchers as it provides tissue samples which many laboratory-based studies depend on. The material has also been used to develop the international diagnostic guidelines for cerebral amyloid angiopathy (CAA) and vascular cognitive impairment (VCI).

Thanks to BRACE funding, the SWDBB has underpinned several high-impact publications and locally, as part of the University of Bristol Dementia Research Group (DRG), has provided tissue samples to allow the development of important new scientific techniques. In 2022 and 2023, the Brain Bank has sent more than 15,000 tissue samples to dementia researchers.

BRACE in numbers

£705,765



Scientific Advisory Committee grants awarded

56



projects supported researchers at an early stage in their career

15,018

brain samples sent to researchers from the South West Dementia Brain Bank (2022/23)



23

research grant applications



4

BRACE-funded PhD students



2,249

hours volunteered for BRACE



£23,434

was saved thanks to volunteers*



64

people volunteered for BRACE



95

BRACE runners



£41,305

raised by challenge event participants

19

talks in the community



43

community engagement activities



members of the BRACE team

1,518km



walked & ran for BRACE by fundraisers



1,747

attended BRACE events

23,470

individual Christmas cards sold



1,703

magazines sent to supporters

7,150

followers across social media



PhD Studentships

BRACE is committed to funding PhD studentships thereby ensuring the future of dementia research. In the last 5 years alone, BRACE has funded 18 PhD students with some of the BRACE alumni going on to lectureships and professorships in prestigious institutions around the world. Each PhD studentship represents a modest investment with a significant impact, furthering knowledge, understanding and building research capacity, which is essential if we are to defeat dementia.

Oliver Hermann

BRACE-funded PhD Student



Early Career Researchers

Working with our colleagues across the research sector, in 2023 we identified major challenges and barriers to success faced by early career researchers and have shaped a new way of grant giving, to support the next generation of research leaders.

BRACE PhD Alumni, Dr Adam Smith, has gone from strength to strength at the University of Exeter since graduating in 2019. As an early career researcher, he is making a significant contribution to dementia research.

Adam teaches on several of the undergraduate programs at Exeter, alongside his role as Laboratory manager and Research Fellow.

The university awarded Adam an Above and Beyond Silver this year, in recognition of his achievements. He is currently co-supervising 3 PhD students and in 2021 became a Fellow of Higher Education Academy.

Incredibly, Adam has also had 20 peer-reviewed articles published, showcasing his expertise.





Adam Smith

“BRACE have funded my entire scientific career; without the charity I certainly wouldn’t be where I am today. The support offered by BRACE is essential to early career researchers like myself.”

Chloe Tulip

Chloe Tulip took on her BRACE funded PhD at Swansea University. Her research focussed on sleep and dementia.

“The past four years of my PhD have been an extraordinary journey, made possible by the support of BRACE.

While it’s widely acknowledged that sleep is a cornerstone of good health and wellbeing, there’s a notable shortage of trained professionals who can guide those in need, particularly older adults, both with and without dementia.

Throughout my PhD, I discovered a passion for improving sleep quality in others. My goal is to bridge this knowledge gap by offering sleep education to those who need it most and, looking forward, to train others in the field. The potential for widespread impact, initiated by BRACE’s funding, is really quite special. From this seed of support, countless individuals stand to benefit.

I am profoundly grateful to BRACE for their incredible work and unwavering support.”



Sharing our Knowledge

Let's Talk Dementia

Families from across Bristol and further afield joined dementia experts at Let's Talk Dementia on Saturday 30th September, at Paintworks Event Space.

We welcomed 200 attendees keen to learn more about dementia, the support on offer, and dementia research volunteering opportunities.

The brain dome offered visitors the chance to discover more about the brain and to experience what life may be like for someone living with dementia.


Wonderful therapy dogs were friends with all, and really showed how important pets are for wellbeing.

We had a very special visitor join us, Lord Lieutenant Peaches Golding, who really enjoyed a visit to the brain dome.



Community Engagement

As a small charity, we take great pride in sharing our knowledge with the wider community. We offer speakers to social groups, such as rotary clubs and U3A, keen to learn more about dementia. Each year we host various free public information events where we share the latest information on dementia research, information on what dementia looks like, how to support loved ones with dementia, research volunteering opportunities, and much more.

A photograph showing two elderly women seated at a wooden table in a bright room with large windows. The woman on the left is smiling and looking towards the right. The woman on the right is wearing glasses and a pink scarf, looking forward. In the foreground, a woman with dark hair, wearing a black dress with a colorful floral pattern, is seen from the side, appearing to be speaking to the seated women. The table has a water bottle and some papers on it.

“I would highly recommend a talk from a member of BRACE to any organisation. We chose BRACE as our charity because dementia affects so many people and their families and it was a charity close to the hearts of many of our members.”


Wendy, BRACE Supporter

Collaboration

We are stronger when we work together. During Dementia Action Week we hosted many community events. Working alongside Bristol Dementia Action Alliance and the Royal West of England Academy (arts venue), we hosted 'Arts and Minds' for people living with dementia and their carers.



What our Supporters Say



“The only thing I have any interest in since Eve died is seeing an end to dementia. I know I won’t see it in my lifetime, but being a member gives me a connection to people who care about it as much as I do.”

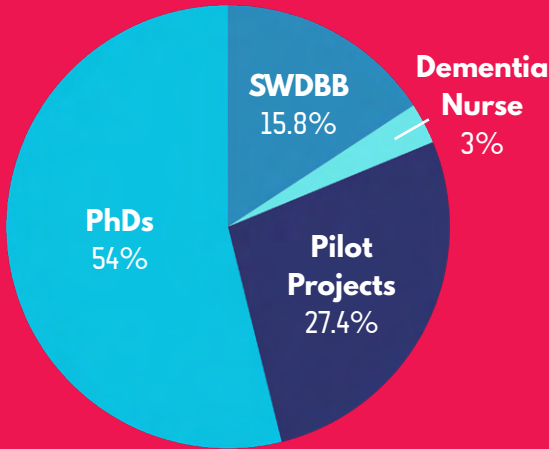
Pete, 1987 Foundation Member

“I am so proud to have finished my first ever 10K and raised over £300 for BRACE. I have lost a family member to Alzheimer’s and my grandad is currently living with Alzheimer’s, so I wanted to help in some small way.”

Emily, Challenge Event Participant

Finances

What have we funded?



£705,765

grants awarded in 2023:

- **PhDs**
£380,043
- **SWD Brain Bank**
£111,155
- **Pilot Projects**
£193,025
- **Dementia Nurse**
£21,542

Where have we funded?

📍 **Swansea**
£133,932

📍 **Bristol**
£385,179

📍 **Exeter**
£92,632

📍 **Bath**
£94,022

📍 **Cardiff**
continued PhDs



If you would like to learn more about our finances, please visit the Charity Commission at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission for more information.

Looking to the Future

It is our aim:

To support

efforts to find a cure for Alzheimer’s and other dementias

To maintain

and expand the number of research sites we work with

To grow

our income to support our aims

We will achieve this through these five core areas:



Stability



Relationships



Digital



Engagement



Future Proofing

Thank you

Our mission to find a cure is made possible by our supporters, volunteers and partners. BRACE is extremely grateful to our valued Corporate and Trust and Foundation partners. Many thanks to each, and every, supporter for their inspiring commitment.

