

Rob George



PHOTO: JOHNNY LINDHARDT

The Rob George Foundation secures its future

This month's story from Essex Community Foundation celebrates an initiative set up in memory of a remarkable young man, and whose long-term future is now secured

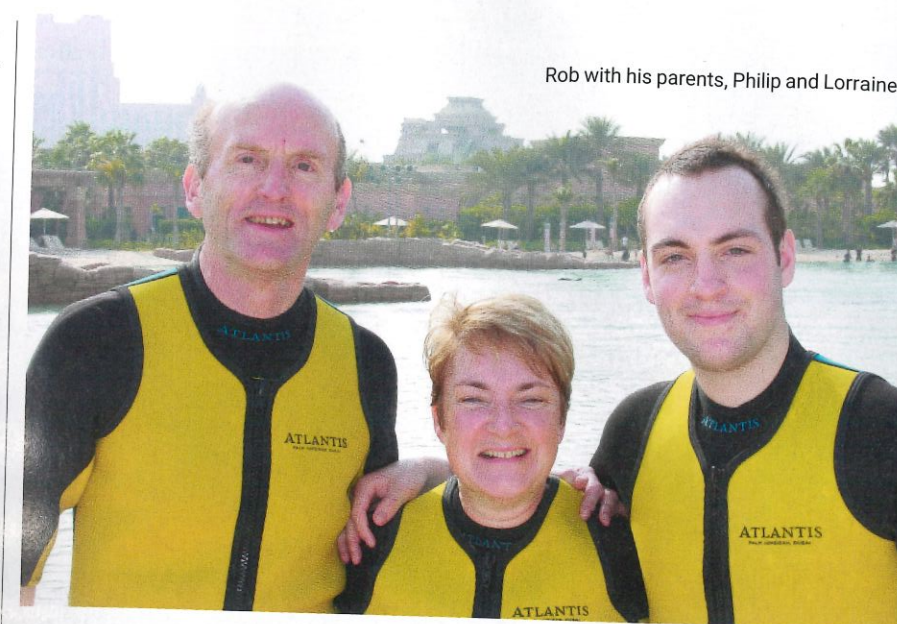
A family's tragic loss has been turned into a major force for good, reaching the milestone of giving grants worth £1m to young people with life-threatening conditions and helping those with exceptional talent in sport or the arts. After more than a decade, the Rob George Foundation (RGF) is celebrating its achievement and is securing its long-term future by transferring its operations to the independent charitable trust, Essex Community Foundation.

Founded in January 2014 in loving memory of Rob George – who died aged just 21 following a long battle with leukaemia – the RGF has already supported more than 1,700 young people who are facing life-threatening illnesses or pursuing excellence in sport and the performing arts.

Rob, a former student at Colchester Royal Grammar School and Loughborough University, was a talented sportsman and excelled at cricket, golf and hockey. At the time of his last illness, he had just broken into the Colchester and East Essex County Cricket 1st XI and had been elected a full playing member of the MCC.

When Rob lost his battle with leukaemia in 2013 his parents, Philip and Lorraine George, who now live in Wivenhoe, were determined to carry out his wishes to help other young people. Philip says: 'Rob's life was cruelly cut short by acute myeloid leukaemia. He was diagnosed in June 2011 and treated at Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge. Rob achieved full remission, but we were all devastated when, two years after his initial diagnosis, the leukaemia returned.

'Further chemotherapy followed, and a stem-cell transplant was planned, but Rob



Rob with his parents, Philip and Lorraine

died in December 2013. He was brave and dignified, caring not for himself, but for his family and friends. Rob supported the idea that a foundation should be set up in his memory. Its aims – to support young people who faced similar difficulties to those he had encountered, including the intolerable strain and obstacles involved in obtaining financial support when diagnosed with a life-threatening illness – came from Rob himself.

Lorraine adds: 'Rob also wanted the foundation to help young people making their way in the world of sport or the performing arts. We think Rob would have been absolutely thrilled at what has been achieved in his name and very pleased that his dad and mum and the other RGF trustees can

now relax in the knowledge that the future of the fund is secure, with the transfer of his legacy to the management of ECF.

'So much has been achieved in the decade since setting up the RGF in memory of Rob. Our supporters have made some incredible fundraising efforts and the trustees have worked tirelessly, giving their time generously and for no financial reward.

'But we are not getting any younger and the time had come to think seriously about the future. We could have appointed a professional fundraiser as our CEO to take over responsibility for income generation and governance issues. However, this solution would not have been consistent with the culture of the RGF.

YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE RECEIVED SUPPORT FROM RGF INCLUDE:

Max, who is four years old and has a glioblastoma brain tumour, which was 85 per cent removed in March 2023, only for it to start growing again in June 2024. To help Max get through the numerous hospital appointments needed to monitor his progress, the RGF gave him an iPad to use during his treatments to keep him stimulated; an effective distraction that saw him able to watch his favourite TV programmes and videos and play games.

Eve, a talented and dedicated young cricketer playing for England's Emerging Players Programme and Essex Women's Elite Eagles Programme (WEEP). RGF enabled Eve to buy equipment to support her ongoing development, including

a new helmet, thigh pads, batting gloves, indoor cricket shoes, cricket bag, bat care kit, practice balls and bat grips.

Seraphina started cycling during lockdown aged 12 and fell in love with the sport. She has already won the General Classification at the Isle of Man Youth Tour and The North-West Youth Tour, alongside other regional wins. Support from RGF helped her with travelling expenses to events. This year, she moved up to the under-14s and is competing in the British Cycling Youth National Circuit Series on open roads, closed circuits and town centres.

Tabitha received a grant from RGF to help fund a pre-professional circus training course, which

includes a mix of acrobatics, aerial, equilibratics, trampolining, handstands and strengthening. The aerial hammock, trampolining and rola bola are her chosen specialities, but she is also learning stage management, equipment set up and rigging.

Bailey, is a performer who applied to the RGF for a grant to help with the cost extra associate training programmes and extra dance school classes. She says: 'I am proud of my training, work ethic and my progression in dance and performing arts. I hope to continue to learn and thrive all round to then go on to audition for dance college when I leave school. I will be eternally grateful to the RGF for their support and interest in my development.'



RGF helped fund a pre-professional circus training course for multi-talented Tabitha

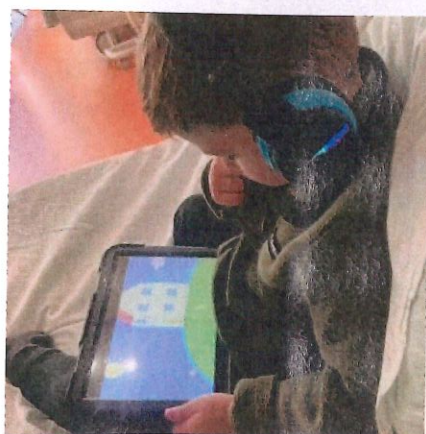
'We have always prided ourselves on keeping our overheads at very low levels, so that our supporters could be confident that almost all the monies raised by them would go towards grants for deserving young people, rather than being swallowed up in expenses.'

'Partnering with ECF allows us to preserve the spirit and purpose of the RGF, while placing it in experienced and trusted hands. We're excited about the future and comforted by the knowledge that the fund created in Rob's name is now safeguarded for generations to come. Rob would have been proud of everything we've achieved and proud that we've found a way to ensure the work carries on.'

ECF brings nearly 30 years of expertise in managing charitable funds and shares the RGF's commitment to maximising impact, while keeping overheads low. The two organisations have previously collaborated on several jointly funded awards, building a relationship founded on shared values and transparency. For supporters, the transition will feel largely seamless. Donations and fundraising efforts will continue as before, with all contributions going directly to the



Performer Bailey has had RGF support for training programmes and extra dance-school classes and says she's 'eternally grateful' to the foundation



The iPad provided for four-year-old Max by The Rob George Foundation provided stimulation and served as a valuable distraction during his treatment for a brain tumour

RGF endowment fund held by ECF. Grants will be awarded monthly within a framework that ensures sustainability.

Caroline Taylor, CEO of Essex Community Foundation says: 'It is a real privilege for us to take on the management of the Rob George Foundation and help carry forward the incredible legacy that Philip and Lorraine have built in their son's memory.'

'Since 2014, RGF has made a profound difference to the lives of young people with life-threatening illnesses, or who are pursuing excellence in sport and the performing arts.'

'We are proud to continue this important work and ensure Rob's memory lives on through every grant made in his name. The partnership reflects our shared ethos of creating lasting change and supporting people in need.'

Grants will be awarded under the Rob George Foundation's original aims, supporting young people with life-threatening conditions and helping those with exceptional talent in sport or the arts.

Applications can be made by young people in Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and any London borough. ●

For more information about the Rob George Foundation and its new partnership with ECF, see therobgeorgefoundation.co.uk

If you're a trustee of a trust and finding that the governance, administration, grantmaking and trustee recruitment is becoming challenging, contact Perry Norton, Head of Development on 01245 355947 or email perry@essexcf.org.uk to have a conversation and find out if ECF can help.

THE SENTINEL GALLERY

Rob's parents, Lorraine and Philip George now enjoy living in Wivenhoe, where they own The Sentinel Gallery in Chapel Road.

Lorraine is a keen artist herself and enjoys running the gallery on a 'not-for-profit' basis. Artists can hire the gallery by the week and run their own exhibitions, with the rent supporting the RGF.

Lorraine also sells her artwork from her studio at the gallery, with proceeds also supporting

the charity's work. The Sentinel Gallery is based in a landmark building in the small artistic town of Wivenhoe. Nestling on the banks of the River Colne alongside the Wivenhoe Trail and close to the mainline railway link, it's a great place to visit!

Check the website for details before you set out, as the gallery opening is dependent upon individual exhibitions. thesentinelgallery.co.uk



Artists can hire the Sentinel Gallery in Wivenhoe by the week and run their own exhibitions, with the rent supporting the RGF