

## **International Women's Day 2025 – PR**

Devon Air Ambulance (DAA) is proud to celebrate International Women's Day 2025, celebrating and honouring the remarkable women within their organisation.

The theme of this year's International Women's Day is #AccelerateAction, a call to acknowledge those who women have positively impacted others. DAA are taking this opportunity to shine a light on former CEO, Heléna Holt, before her imminent retirement from the charity.

Heléna Holt has led Devon Air Ambulance for over 17 years. She became interested in the charity while helping her sister with fundraising activities in Dartmoor and when the role came up, she applied and hasn't looked back since.

'When I started at Devon Air Ambulance, the charity raised roughly £3-4m a year to fund the ambulance service. Back then, it was essentially a flying ambulance service, focused on speed – getting people to the right care as quickly as possible,' said Heléna.

'Today, the focus has shifted to getting the right care to the patient at the scene of the incident, emphasising the speed of the treatment given rather than the transportation.

'Financially, the charity has transformed massively, thanks to our incredible supporters. Now, it has a turnover well over £15m, is clinically independent, has Care Quality Commission registration, and owns its own aircraft. The organisation is unrecognisable compared to its early days.'

Heléna has never taken the role for granted and says it has been a huge opportunity and a privilege.

'When I joined, people would ask 'what do you do' and I'd tell them I had the best job in Devon. I feel really lucky to have had the opportunity to work for Devon Air Ambulance.

'It's one of those organisations that gets under your skin. Everybody in their own way has an impact, even if it's trialling a new way of doing something, sharing an idea, or bringing a sense of humour to something. My job was

about facilitating that so people could make the best contribution they could.'

The impact the charity has had on people's lives will leave a lasting impression on Heléna.

As she leaves the organisation, one of Heléna's last acts will be to present a lifetime presidency award to Ann Ralli, the charity's founder.

'Ann is a force of nature. Once you get to know her, you realise how hard she had to fight to get DAA up and running. Her sheer determination in campaigning, fundraising, and lobbying is extraordinary. All that because her son, Ceri, died because he didn't get treatment quickly enough when he was knocked off his bicycle. She is truly inspirational and unique.'

Heléna also pays tribute to the thousands of people across the county who have supported the charity over the years. She said, 'Devon Air Ambulance is held in trust by and for the people of Devon, who make its work possible. The organisation is here to serve them, and that mission remains at the heart of everything it does.'

Heléna has now handed her duties over to new Chief Executive, Greg Allen, and will continue to support him until the end of March when she officially retires.