

# **Minutes of The Compassionate Friends Annual General Meeting on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> December 2018 Friends' Meeting House, Euston Road, London at 2.15 pm**

## **1. Chairman's Welcome and Introduction**

TCF Chair of Trustees, Maria Ahern, opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and thanking the approximately 80+ people for attending.

Maria Ahern drew meeting attendees' attention to the items on their seats, namely Agenda, Annual Report and Financial Statements 2017-18 and Minutes of the previous AGM.

## **2. Minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting (held on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2017).**

There were no matters arising from the previous Minutes. Formal acceptance of the Minutes. Proposer: Barry Bridges (TCF member) Seconder: Michael Pointer (TCF member).

## **3. Presentation of the Trustees' Annual Report by CEO Carolyn Brice**

Carolyn Brice presents the Annual Report for the period of April 2017-March 2018. She began by mentioning that the last 12 months have been an important time for the Compassionate Friends as the charity continued to innovate and develop services and support for bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents. She and the Trustees had previously set two strategic aims:

1. Providing high quality peer support to anyone affected by the loss of a child of any age to any cause.
2. Raising awareness of support available from TCF for parental and sibling grief support within the UK.

She mentioned that the charity is making excellent progress towards these two strategic aims and demonstrated it by giving a comprehensive summary of the charity's main activities and achievements in the financial year 2017-2018 by including the following:

### Key activities and achievements under Strategic Aim 1

- 70 local support groups around the UK supporting between 6 and 20 bereaved parents each month and new groups in Cambridge, Sussex, Devon, Lancashire, The Midlands, Dorset, Yorkshire, Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- Over 950 bereaved parents and families contacted our Helpline and over 500 parents and families were supported by email via our Helpline team directly or through professionals looking for information for their clients and patients. (Carolyn Brice thanks the Helpline Team led by Ruth Mercier for the dedication in providing such a vital service to newly bereaved family members).

- 13 various training and information days were held around the UK, for our current, new or potential volunteers, those on the Helpline or for Local or Group Contacts.
- We have now 10 (8 during the period of this report) moderated online groups on the web or Facebook. Each group has between 50 to 450 members and growing rapidly. (Carolyn Brice thanks the online group moderators for encouraging conversation and being supportive of group members). Our Forum is still growing with 2400 registered users and an average of 19 posts per day. (Carolyn Brice thanks our Forum moderator Diane Minshall and her team).
- Continued growth in number of supportive events and retreats. We have had 8 weekends and bereavement days which have supported over 460 bereaved parents and siblings. We had our first overnight retreat for bereaved siblings run by Hayley Hayes, Emma Andow and Rachael Claye. A first bereavement support day event in Hampshire run by Joy Sebborn and Sue Brooks. A second weekend retreat uniquely for parents bereaved by suicide, addiction or substance abuse following the success of the first weekend in July 2016. A third weekend also for parents in the earlier phase of the grief was held in March 2018. A short film was made about parents' experience of this weekend. There were also supportive events in Perth (organised by our dedicated team of volunteers in Scotland) and in Northants and Derbyshire.
- All our weekends offer one to one therapeutic support by bereaved parents who are trained counsellors. Many thanks to Ruth Mercier, Sue Brooks, Jane Harris, Lynda Tomlinson and Philippa Skinner for providing their counselling skills to parents and siblings.
- After the death of child, a family can experience financial hardship. We have been able to increase the bursary support for 18 parents unable to fund attendance themselves. Volunteers at supportive events or bereavement support days were either fully or partially funded whenever possible.
- TCF values and encourages informal social contact among bereaved families as result many varied events were organised across the UK in 2017-18 through Compassionate Pals and other private Facebook groups. There have also been bring & share events, walks, pub meet ups, crafts days and fundraising events.
- TCF continues to build specific support for specialist groups of the bereaved. For example, with those bereaved by suicide, through our Facebook group, physical support groups (e.g. Marie Best in London, Pamela Rocyn Jones in Bristol, Rosie Wilson in Cambridge), retreat weekends and specialist newsletter for TCF volunteers supporting those bereaved by suicide. Also, Siblings support is growing. Support for parents who have lost their only child is growing. We offered a retreat in July 2017 for these parents with bursary available for those in financial hardship. We also have a Facebook support group and a specialist newsletter edited by Elly Sutherland for these parents. TCF also recognises the stigma around child loss to drug or alcohol use. Our support for this group is coordinated by Sue Brooks offering a private Facebook group, weekend retreats and a specialist guide for volunteers supporting these parents.

- Sue Hughes helped us to begin a pilot scheme for grief companions, which offers befriending by those longer bereaved to bereaved parents in early grief. 30 pairs have been matched with the success rate of 50% of befriending relationship continuing and offering helpful peer support. We are looking to find funding to employ a dedicated coordinator to run the initiative.
- Our unique library of 1500 books moved to the National Office in summer 2017 and continues to expand under the leadership of our committed Librarian Mary Hartley. We now have an online book catalogue and the memorial book scheme is developing.
- Our redesigned Information Pack sponsored by funds donated in memory of Jean Austin, was sent to over 1000 parents and families seeking support after child loss.
- A huge thanks to Abi May and her team of volunteers for producing and nurturing the writing and production of over 30 different leaflets offering information and advice to bereaved parents and families as well as supporters and professionals. Our leaflets were downloaded over 25000 times and distributed at local groups and events. 2 new leaflets were launched: a guide to helping bereaved parents for funeral directors and helpful information for those returning to work after child loss. 2 new facts sheets on Death abroad and Making a complaint to or about the NHS were published. Many thanks to Andrew Miller, Trustee and bereaved father who continues to offer pro bono legal support.
- Over 5000 supportive magazines were sent to bereaved parents and families- including Compassion, TCF News, CP Newsletter and SIBBS newsletter. Many thanks to all editors, Gina Claye, Lyndon Hughes (now Elly Sutherland), and Hayley Hayes.
- Many thanks to the 6 part time staff and 180 volunteers who allow us to provide the support we do. We are investing in recruiting more volunteers and increasing our support for volunteers in a number of ways: network meeting prior to AGM (in 2017 and today), providing a section for volunteers on our website and emphasizing self-care. Our Regional Coordinators – Hugh McAninch, Sue Brooks, Dinah Perkins, Liz Leake, Adrian Keach, Anita Murray and Claire Phillips hold regular meetings. In Northern Ireland, there is an overnight gathering for volunteers and therapeutic support is funded for volunteers in the region.

### Key activities and achievements in 2017-18 under Strategic Aim 2

- Increased social media presence with 6000+ followers on Facebook and 1000+followers on Twitter.
- Regular email and printed news approximately 8 times per year.
- 139 visitors to our updated and rewritten website per day (4300 individual visits per month). Increased number of bereaved family members joining as supporting members or donors as a result of the easier to navigate website. The searchable map facility on the website generated increased requests for support online.

- Increased media visibility with appearances on both local and national TV and radio and as a result several media outlets are contacting us for discussions and comments on child or sibling loss and grief.
- Collaboration with other charities and organisations in the field of bereavement support including participating in APPG for bereavement Care (chaired by Carolyn Harris, MP for Swansea East) and input in the Child Death Review leaflet produced by the NHS for bereaved parents. TCF local volunteers also continue to build networks, links and take part in speaking opportunities with Cruse, CCSS, CAB, MIND, the police and the Samaritans to name a few.

Carolyn Brice also spoke about the Organisational Changes:

- The move of our National office and library from Jessica's Heart (generously donated to TCF by the Jessica Mathers Trust) to larger premises (4<sup>th</sup> floor of Kilburn Grange) was completed by August 2017. We are renting from Bellevue Place Education Trust for a period of 4 years.
- As a charity, we were saddened to hear about the death of our long time President and passionate supporter, Patricia Knatchbull, Countess Mountbatten of Burma. She was remembered fondly by members and volunteers of TCF who knew her as an incredibly kind and compassionate person who dedicate her time to helping the bereaved.
- Stephen Armstrong was appointed Head of Fundraising in April 2017 in order to increase our expertise in the area of fundraising. Stephen Armstrong has developed a fundraising strategy for our charity.
- Sharon Rose joined as Events Coordinator in October 2017 to work with our volunteers and support the charity due to the increased number of events. Many thanks to Sharon for making a huge impact in her first year.

### Future Plans and Aims

Carolyn Brice mentioned that our strategy, aims and objectives remain the same and notes some of the activities we have done or plan to do since April 2018 in order to continue to expand:

- Source funding and resource for the Grief Companion Scheme. This initiative is a key strategy for development in the next 1-3 years.
- Work to fund and improve our support and services to bereaved adult siblings. Consider a separate website, create informal events and run more overnight retreats.
- Encourage more informal events for bereaved parents such as walks, lunches and events for bereaved parents.
- Develop our specialist support for those parents and families bereaved by suicide, or drugs or alcohol, as well as childless parents. Increase and develop support for those bereaved suddenly, for instance through road traffic collisions and also those affected

by long illness such as cancer as well as those who were parent carers for children with special needs and / or disabilities.

- Continue to care and support our volunteers as well as recruit, train and support new volunteers which is key to the expansion of the Compassionate Friends. Continue to provide regional training and support days for all TCF volunteers. Working towards obtaining funding for the role of a volunteer manager whom we hope will work closely with the Pastoral Committee to increase volunteer recruitment and develop training.
- Develop supportive events for bereaved families, including weekends in the North East, South West of England and Wales. Plan and fund more one day local bereavement support events.
- Plan for our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2019. An opportunity to increase awareness of our charity through media and PR and to also develop new supportive and fundraising events for bereaved families to participate in. Looking to plan Macmillan style coffee mornings, a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary gathering and to produce a special 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary editions of Compassion and TCF News.

The CEO Carolyn Brice concluded by thanking the 190+ volunteers and members of staff for all they do and by mentioning some words from Maria Ahern Chair's letter in the Annual report where she talks about how supporting others, particularly others in the early, raw, acute phase of grief is not an easy thing to do, taking much great reserves, resilience, courage and commitment.

#### **4. Finance Report by Nigel Taylor**

A summary of the charity's financial position to the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 was presented by Nigel Taylor, TCF's Trustee responsible for Finance:

- Income has increased from £209,771 in the previous year to £274,426 during this year. Stephen Armstrong, our fundraiser who was appointed in April 2017 has hugely influenced the increase in the income due to his efforts in raising funds from Trusts and Foundations. As a result of the increased income, more support was given to volunteers and to bereaved families.
- Noted that when Margaret Brearley was chair, she impacted a leap of income in 2015 for the Compassionate Friends.
- Expenditure has increased from £260,422 in the previous year to £313,783 during this year. This was planned as reserves were planned to be used resulting in expenses being in excess of our income creating a deficit of £39,357.
- In the last 5 years we have doubled the amount of what we spend on due to the expansion our activities (more weekend retreats and information and training days to support our volunteers).
- 2014-2015, we had about 1-year expenditure in reserves. Today in 2018, we have 6 months of reserves (£119,332) saved up which would enable the activities of TCF

to continue for a minimum of 6 months (in accordance with the policy established by the Trustees after considering the guidance issues by the Charities' Commission). The level of reserves is reviewed regularly.

- Need to increase income and to increase the sources of income
- Maintain a sensible level of reserves to provide stability and flexibility for the charity.

A question and answer session was offered.

## **5. Vote on adoption of Annual Report; announcement of result of Trustees' Election**

The Chair asked for a vote on the adoption of the Annual Report and Financial Statements 2017-18.

Proposed: Melian Mansfield (TCF Trustee); Seconded: Andrew Miller (TCF Trustee)

A vote was taken, and the motion carried.

The Chair, Maria Ahern also announced the results of the Trustees' Election and outlined the changes to the Board of Trustees. Jane Harris has stepped down. Sue Hughes has been reinstated as Vice Chair. Sue Higgins and Melian Mansfield are the new Trustee board members.

The Chair also took the opportunity to introduce the rest of the trustees who were present.

## **6. Fundraising activities by Stephen Armstrong**

Stephen Armstrong our Head of Fundraising summarised the highlights of 2017-2018 as follows:

- Reached target for fund raised from grant-making trusts of £40, 000.
- Funders included Garfield Weston Foundation, Schuh Trust, Morrisons Foundation, Prudential.
- TCF projects funded include Helpline, Regional Work, Retreats, Work with Parents bereaved by suicide.

He then thanked all TCF members for their contributions to the fundraising effort in various capacities.

He also spoke about his future plans in the role:

- To double the target for this year, from £40,000 to £80,000.
- To make bigger applications including to the Big Lottery Fund; multi-year funding.
- To provide a fuller programme of challenge events, including 2 places in Prudential Ride London.
- To encourage TCF members to approach their employers, their clubs, places of worship and local Waitrose.

## **7. Sibling activities by Hayley Hayes**

Hayley Hayes started by mentioning the importance of offering peer to peer support to bereaved siblings. She spoke of how losing a sibling has such a huge effect on the identity of the surviving siblings. She then went on to outline the different activities for siblings:

- First ever Siblings overnight retreat took place this year. Run by four volunteers who are all bereaved siblings. Fully funded by the Lottery and had so much positive feedback. Another overnight retreat is planned for 2019 in the Spring.
- Media exposure: TCF Siblings took part in a BBC Documentary which raised awareness on siblings' grief. Raising more awareness about siblings' grief remains a priority for TCF Siblings.
- There has been a 43% growth in the number of members of the Siblings Support Facebook group. A total of 288 members.
- SIBBS Newsletter: a newsletter that aims to support and empower bereaved siblings.

Hayley Hayes concluded her presentation by listing the future plans to develop support for bereaved siblings:

- Telephone and email support to kick start
- To create more opportunities for social meet ups
- Train more volunteers
- To develop a website for just siblings
- To think about having two retreats per year instead of one

## **8. The Way Forward: How You Can Help TCF Chair's presentation**

Maria Ahern thanked all the staff members of The Compassionate Friends. She stressed the importance of raising more funds for TCF in order to do more and recruit more people as well. She also spoke about how we can all help as bereaved siblings, parents and grandparents. The Chair also mentioned that in 2019 on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we will be able to honour how The Compassionate Friends began. She recalled meeting Iris Lawley and asking her how they reached out to bereaved families with no social media and email and Iris Lawley's response was that they knocked on peoples' doors. Maria Ahern talked about the TCF community needing to rise up to reach out to other bereaved families and encouraged us to talk about TCF and to give funds. She urged us to tell our GP surgeries, local police and to support the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary by organising coffee mornings. She also talked about reaching out to local papers to talk about TCF and to also organise social events so that bereaved parents are less isolated.

## **9. Questions and Answers**

Attendees were invited to put any questions they might have to those who had spoken up at this point.

The business of the AGM concluded at 3.50pm followed by tea/coffee and refreshments.



