



TCF NEWS

A newsletter for supporters of The Compassionate Friends

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Voting at the AGM

“Our aims are to work towards every bereaved family being able to access support from TCF; to create an environment in which all TCF volunteers feel valued and well supported; and to promote the visibility of TCF nationally so that it is the first charity that bereaved parents, and their families, turn to after the loss of a child of any age and from any cause”.

Fantastic turnout at our 2017 AGM

Over 100 members attended the Annual General Meeting of The Compassionate Friends on the afternoon of Saturday 25th November at the Friends Meeting House, opposite Euston station in London. (In the morning we also welcomed 50 of our charity's volunteer team to a range of workshops covering different aspects of their role with our charity, including facilitating groups, running bereavement support events, and responding to bereaved parents).

Our Chair of Trustees, Maria Ahern then began the afternoon by opening the 2017 AGM and warmly welcoming everyone and thanking all for attending. The minutes of the 2016 AGM were approved and attention was drawn to the reports from TCF in Northern Ireland and Scotland on attendees' seats.



Our Chair, Maria Ahern

CEO, Carolyn Brice, then spoke about her first 18 months in office as a challenging and exciting period. Carolyn then outlined the Board of Trustees' and her own objectives for the year – especially the twin aims to raise awareness of TCF and provide high quality peer support to bereaved parents, and their immediate family members. Her presentation gave a comprehensive summary of the charity's main activities and achievements in the financial year 2016-17, covering areas such as:



CEO, Carolyn Brice

- Growth in use of digital and social media including TCF's new and greatly improved website, praising and thanking all concerned with producing it, including outgoing Trustee, Vicky Joseph as well as the generous donation of photographic material from Jimmy Edmonds.
- Increased outreach to national and local press and media has seen improved relationships and cooperation with other charities.
- A rise in donating membership and more requests for local and group support, bookings for retreats, general conversation and meet ups between charity members.
- The development of numbers of support groups and training and support for local and group contacts
- The Helpline took over 1000 calls and answered 400 email requests for support.
- More support for specific groups – including those bereaved by suicide, by addiction or substance use, those who are in early bereavement, and childless parents (particularly by Gill Hartley, who stepped down from her role as National Coordinator for this group in March 2017).
- A thank you to Mary Hartley, who has moved the unique Catharine Pointer Memorial Library to new premises in North West London.
- Tightened branding on leaflets and publications

Carolyn then noted some of the recent organisational changes, including the move of the National Office from the beautiful Jessica's Heart to new larger offices at Kilburn Grange. She emphasised how profoundly grateful TCF is to Stephen, Jannet and Anna Mathers for providing the wonderful office and meeting space in Deptford for so many years. Thankyous were also given to our committed and energetic Board of Trustees, firstly under the Chairmanship of Margaret Brearley from 2014-2017 and since January 2017 under Maria Ahern. Special thanks was extended to all the office staff and to Ruth Mercier who has been managing the National Helpline since mid-2015.

Carolyn concluded by summarising her aims and motivations as stated at the 2016 AGM - that every bereaved family should be able to access the support that she had received from TCF; to create an environment in which all TCF volunteers feel valued and well supported; and to promote the visibility of TCF nationally so that it is the first charity that bereaved parents turn to after the loss of a child.

She maintained that real progress has been made towards these goals and TCF has continued to develop and grow.

Next on the agenda for the afternoon, was a summary of the charity's financial position to the year ending March 2017 presented by TCF Trustee, Nigel Taylor. More detail is available in our Annual General Report and Financial Statements 2016-17 which can be ordered from our

National Office, or downloaded from www.tcf.org.uk – go to About Us/Policy Documents.

Stephen Armstrong, our Fundraiser, who joined us in April 2017, then gave a short presentation, beginning with stating how impressed he has been by such a dedicated organisation, and the range of people doing many different activities to fund TCF. He thanked the members for their efforts, which have included abselling, running, holding garden parties, concerts and even flying! He pointed out that 50% of monies raised to support TCF's work with bereaved families is undertaken by members and he, therefore, warmly thanked the membership. He offered to work with any member who would like to contact him for advice and help with fundraising.

Stephen then explained that he been going out to local funders all over the country and also reported that our Helpline, for the first time is almost fully funded. He suggested that by approaching corporate donors such as Network Rail, The Times, Aviva, the profile of TCF has been raised.

Maria Ahern, Chair of Trustees, introduced herself and gave a short address explaining how, since becoming involved in TCF, her total despair at the loss of her son James had turned to feelings of hope – in just 3 years. Maria spoke of her aims for TCF which included an organisation in which people are transformed from those asking for help, to those offering help to others – so that a metaphorical chain is

formed forwards and backwards as we seek help and support and then go on to support and help others.

Maria went on to outline the changes in the Board of Trustees, thanking Nicola Martin and Vicky Joseph who had stepped down at the end of their 3 year term as Trustees of the charity. Jen Hughes and Jane Harris were re-elected and Sheila Phillips, Gill Hardy and George Burn joined as new Trustees (you can read about these new Trustees on page 4).

Towards the end of the afternoon, we were hugely privileged that the Founder of TCF - Canon Simon Stephens – joined us. He gave a moving account of the compassionate, but intensely harrowing, work he has undertaken in recent months with young refugees in Africa.



Our Fundraiser, Stephen Armstrong

Supportive Retreat Weekend for Parents Bereaved by Suicide, Addiction or Substance Use



Feedback from parents who have attended previous weekends:

"It has certainly helped me on my journey of grief. It is so healing to meet with other bereaved parents. We can walk the walk together and be with others who truly understand and care".

"You offered an experience which allowed me the peace, space and environment to share my particular agony with other bereaved parents who I know will become new friends".

When: 6th - 8th July 2018

Where: Woodbrooke, Birmingham

To book online and for further information visit:
www.tcf.org.uk/woodbrooke2018

or contact TCF's national office by telephone
0345 120 3785 or email events@tcf.org.uk

This is the third year of this retreat, and a unique opportunity to come and meet with others who understand the pain of the loss of a beloved son or daughter. Here you can immerse yourself in the comfort and warmth of a dedicated team of bereaved parent supporters.

The weekend will be a mixture of discussions and activities which you are free to participate in as much, or as little, as you wish. Most of all, this is an opportunity to spend a few days away with people who truly understand what it means to be a parent bereaved in these particularly difficult ways.

Introducing...our new Trustees

3 TCF members joined our Trustee Board in November 2017.

Here they tell you a little about themselves.

I lost my brother, Billy, in 2015, when he died aged 44 after losing a battle with an aggressive form of cancer. He and I were always close, and seeing him die early in life, and seeing the impact on my mother, my sister-in-law, my nieces and the broader family, has been both incredibly sad and incredibly important as a defining life experience. The support of various organisations, including TCF, has played a crucial role in helping us deal with our grief and come to terms with Billy's absence. I would love to contribute to one of those organisations, in order to help others who have to go through the horrible experience of seeing a loved child or sibling die.

As a lawyer with 20 years of experience, I have substantial technical legal ability that could be of use to TCF. I also have experience of working as a governor of two schools, one as chair of the governing body, and have experience of volunteering in roles for other organisations, I have knowledge that I think could also be of use to our charity.



George Burn

The mission of TCF is to support bereaved parents and other close relatives; having seen the value of support organisations for those dealing with the pain occasioned by grief, that is a mission to which I would very much like to contribute. A Trustee is a position of responsibility, with significant moral and legal obligations; I believe I have skills and experience that would enable me to meet that responsibility and in doing so help TCF and those that it supports.

I became a member of TCF in 2015 after the death of our son Tom. He was 22 and his death was accidental, unexpected and unbearable.

We were introduced to TCF and although we found our first meeting very difficult, we felt a mutual understanding. The support that we have gained from TCF has been invaluable and I believe that, without TCF, we would be in a much darker place now. It gave us hope when we had none.

Our experiences have led me to realise that there is a significant lack of relevant bereavement support from health care professionals for bereaved families and it seems to us that TCF provides this. I would like to put something back into the organisation that has helped us and hope that my skills and experience might be of some value.



Gill Hardy

I have worked at Director level in the pharmaceutical industry for many years and have run my own successful medical communications business for 13 years where I specialise in strategic direction, communications and event management. This requires the ability to strike early rapport, foster relationships and reach a mutual understanding with people. Running a small business also means that I get involved in a wide range of tasks from delivering board room presentations to laying out meeting room materials and I pride myself on "getting stuck in" to do whatever is necessary to get a job done.

On the evening of 25 April 2013, my beloved son, Duncan Andrew Phillips came home from work as usual, had tea with his wife and two small sons, and left the house to join friends for a game of football. He did not return. Unbeknown to both himself and us, his family, Duncan's heart muscle was diseased; he had inherited (apparently) a condition known as Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy. His heart muscle had hardened and the cells of the muscle were disorganised. The exertion of sport was too much for it to cope with that evening and Duncan's heart simply stopped beating.

The subsequent horror and despair at Duncan's sudden death was, and remains, indescribable. I do not remember how I coped with day to day living for the first year, except to say that neighbours, friends and colleagues at work were tremendously supportive in the way that they approached us (my husband, myself and our daughter), invited us to meals and allowed us to cry.



Sheila Phillips

In the Spring of 2015, Derek (my husband) and I attended a musical event at Wotton House in Buckinghamshire. There we met Dr Margaret Brearley who immediately gathered us in and tended our broken hearts with TCF understanding and sympathy. The relationship between TCF, Derek and I has been and continues to be one of emotional support, many willing and sympathetic listening ears, tenderness and compassion.

My working knowledge of accounting for charities, statutory reporting and awareness of what it means to be a charity trustee has been gained over more than 20 years. I welcome the opportunity of using these skills and experience in the furtherance of TCF aims and objectives which I heartily believe are so valuable in sharing the pain of and easing the burden for bereaved parents.

Volunteer Charmion Mann Reports on the Helpline Team Training Day & Get-Together on 3rd February

“We know that we belong to a supportive team – a real encouragement as we dispersed home to continue with our individual sessions on the helpline”.

I've been a Helpline Volunteer for 18 months, so this was my second training day. I was looking forward to meeting up again with the other volunteers - as we are working from home it can feel a bit lonely! We enjoyed catching up with one another the evening before.

In a damp London morning the 11 of us made our way to the new TCF office. Kilburn Grange School is a state-of-the-art building – all airy glass, with our office on the top floor. Passing the bright infant classrooms we took the lift to the fourth (top) floor from where we could look down into the spacious atrium, and, from our “classrooms”, look through the window wall onto the streets below.

It was a delightful setting for our training day - very conducive to the work we were there to do.

We were greeted by Ruth Mercier and Carolyn Brice who introduced us to the helpline volunteers living in London who had come for the day.

Ruth suggested that we all introduced ourselves by sharing something about ourselves and our child. It was very moving as we listened in an atmosphere of caring support as each bereaved parent spoke. My neighbour told me afterwards of the release she felt in being able to speak about her son and know that she was being upheld with such compassion. As Helpline Volunteers we spend time listening, so it was good to have the opportunity to be listened to ourselves.

Following Ruth's well crafted programme, the morning was given to “Improving our empathic and effective listening skills”. I found this most helpful as we considered aspects such as supporting specific loss, and how to end a call. It was reassuring to hear how others responded to particular situations, and raise questions which had arisen from my own experience.

We finished the morning focussing on the importance of self care. To quote the helpful handout: “We cannot be there for others if we do not care for ourselves”.

Sustained by a delicious buffet lunch we continued with “Improving our follow-up process”. This included the more practical aspects of dealing with the helpline. We discussed follow-up letters to callers, and the subsequent linking with Local and Group Contacts. We checked out our response



to a caller who was not a bereaved parent (family friend, social worker, for example) including a look at the revised Helpful Organisations list available on the website.

We gave some thought to communication with the office, and were encouraged to hear from Carolyn about innovations for 2018 - notably the Grief Companions project and the development of sibling support. I found her perspective on TCF as a whole very enlightening.

We started the day well-aware of our inadequacies as Helpline Volunteers and in need of a confidence boost. We left with our spirits lifted, affirmed and encouraged. Having truly “Got Together” we know that we belong to a supportive team – a real encouragement as we dispersed home to continue with our individual sessions on the helpline. I feel privileged and proud to belong to such a team playing our part in the inspiring charity that is The Compassionate Friends.

If you are interested in training to be a Helpline volunteer with TCF find out more at www.tcf.org.uk. Go to HELP US/VOLUNTEER FOR TCF. Or contact Ruth Mercier at helpline@tcf.org.uk.



Remembering Jean Austin 6th November 1932 – 5th November 2017

Carolyn Brice writes..."Many of you will know or have spent time with long time Compassionate Friends member and hugely dedicated volunteer, Jean Austin, who sadly died in November last year. Jean's health had deteriorated rapidly last year and she died peacefully at home with her family at her side.

Jean and her husband Peter were involved with TCF for many years. They virtually ran the TCF Helpline single-handedly in the 1970s and early 1980s. They also ran a support group for an incredible 35 years in Surrey and were part of the organisers of many National and International Gatherings. Jean was greatly missed at Sedgebrook Hall Hotel at the Gathering last November.

For my own part, I met Jean when I first started to volunteer on the TCF National Helpline in 2008 – at a training and information day. She and Peter were extraordinarily kind to me – a newbie as a volunteer – sharing with me the story of the tragic death of their daughters, Linda and Sandra. Jean was gentle, compassionate and generous – and also funny – while being unendingly supportive. Both Jean and Peter continued to be so wonderfully helpful in my subsequent time on the Helpline and in other roles for TCF. In fact, Jean only stopped volunteering in very recent years as her health deteriorated.

On hearing the news of Jean's death, Margaret Brearley, our ex-Chair of Trustees commented "I too, like so many, was embraced and comforted by Peter and Jean at my first and subsequent Gatherings. They were a living embodiment of courage and kindness within utmost adversity". And Sue Hughes, our current Vice-Chair told me "Jean was really lovely. She was the first person at TCF I ever spoke to - when I first rang the Helpline". Jean helped many, many bereaved parents in her time with TCF. As Gina Claye, a TCF Trustee and editor of Compassion, said of Jean "Hers was a life devoted to TCF".

At Jean's Funeral on 17th November Margaret Pringle was asked to give an address:

Peter asked me to say a few words recently at Jean's Memorial service about The Compassionate Friends, which

was founded in Coventry in 1969. The aim is to offer friendship and support to families after the death of a child. Following the death of their precious daughters Linda and Sandra - Peter and Jean became involved and have been local contacts for many years until very recently. They have offered comfort and friendship to hundreds of families - not only in their area but whenever they have met anyone in that situation - at UK Gatherings and even at International events in USA, Australia and Canada. They frequently manned our national helpline - often covering Christmas Day when everyone else wanted to be with their own families.

"Share the Love" was played on the organ - a special song, written by Joe and Elizabeth Rousseau in memory of their daughter Lauren Elizabeth and gifted to Compassionate Friends in 1984 when they visited UK.

Both Peter and Jean loved to join the singing group at our UK Gatherings whenever possible to perform this song and we missed them very much at the last event at Sedgebrook Hall - they have always been there - always holding out the hand of friendship, or offering a shoulder to cry on. The words sum up what our organisation is all about - sharing the joy as well as the pain and sorrow - remembering our children - reaching out to one another and walking together.

It was through Compassionate Friends that Jim and I first met Jean and Peter as long ago as 1984 - three years after the death of our own son David. Although we live many miles apart, we have met regularly at least 2 or sometimes 3 times each year. We have shared a very special friendship and have many happy memories of travelling literally around the world together - from Sydney to Alaska!

We know that no-one will miss Jean more than Peter - but we want him to know that his Compassionate Friends will always be there for him in the weeks and months ahead - many send their love to him and his family - and we thank him for his wonderful friendship and remember - you need not walk alone - we are the Compassionate Friends.

Margaret Pringle

Tributes to Jean from around The Compassionate Friends family...

Please, please pass on our sincere deepest sympathy to Peter on Jean's passing. I personally met on on several occasions and she was a HUGE part of TCF - what sad news. A beautiful gracious lady.

Anita Murray TCF, Northern Ireland

We are devastated to hear of the death of Jean. This woman was the most compassionate person that we ever knew. Peter must be heartbroken.

Irene Baldock

Jean and Peter were the first Compassionate Friends we met when we attended our first Gathering. Special people.

Dinah Perkins

I am so sorry to hear this sad news. I remember Jean's kindness when I met her at a training day many years ago. I met her and her husband again at the national gatherings and was so pleased to have spent brief moments in conversation with them. Her kindness touched my heart.

Marie Best

I am so sorry to hear of Jean's passing. I remember spending some time with Jean and Peter when I attended my first gathering, and again at a TCF conference in London. Jean was a remarkable lady in every sense- she had such warmth, and so much compassion. As a Helpline volunteer, Jean and Peter always made themselves available to answer calls over the Christmas period.

Diane Taylerson

I have so many good memories of both Jean and Peter remembering how kind and helpful they were at the gatherings when I was a newly bereaved parent.

Margaret White, Tyne and Wear

Jean was so lovely. Always there for us. I remember Jean and Peter from the very first Gathering I went to in Blackpool. They gave me immediate love, warmth and care. Jean was a wonderful lady with a great sense of humour and an example to us all.

Jan Alcock



The funds donated to TCF in memory of Jean Austin have been used to sponsor the printing of the information packs we send to every newly bereaved parent or sibling, or those new to TCF. The sponsorship message reads:

Printing of this folder is in memory of Jean Austin – for the many bereaved parents Jean comforted and to whom she offered understanding, support, friendship and hope from 1975 – 2017.

A round up of some of the wonderful fundraising going on for our charity

*A warm thank you to all our fundraisers and donors
- large and small - for your continuing support.*



Show your support for our wonderful LONDON MARATHON runner!

Adelle Brenner is running this iconic race on 22 April to raise funds for The Compassionate Friends.

Adelle writes..."You may be wondering why I have set myself this challenge of running 26.2 miles through the streets of London in April. It's clear to those who know me that I am not a natural athlete. I was one of the last to be picked for sports teams at school and I certainly have no natural sporting talent. However, what I lack in ability I hope to make up for in sheer grit and determination,- qualities I have had to develop since our beloved daughter Celia died in 2011 and which I believe I share with all other parents who have live with the pain of losing a child.

Celia died aged three and a half when she fell from a high rise building where we were living in Singapore and where my husband was working.

I joined The Compassionate Friends and they were a lifeline to me over the coming months and years. In my darkest hours I called their helpline and spoke to other bereaved parents knowing they understood how I was feeling. Often I had nothing specific to say, just an unbearable sadness which somehow became more bearable by being shared. At other times I may have been upset by something hurtful that someone had unwittingly said or done or by the approach of Christmas or a birthday. Talking to others who truly understand cannot solve these things but does make the burden less heavy.

I am happy to say that I am now the local Compassionate Friends contact for the Bath area. Where I have been helped I am now able to help others. I run a monthly support group at my home where we meet to talk, support one another and share our experience. There are tears but also laughter and the bond we share is an enormous source of strength and comfort for all of us.

Grieving the loss of a child is a very isolating experience. However well intentioned, our friends and family cannot fully understand how we feel and nor would we want them to. The motto of The Compassionate Friends is "We need not walk alone."

You can read more of Adelle's story and support her here: www.uk.virginmoneygiving.com/AdelleBrenner

Could you run for TCF?

2 places are available for runners fundraising for The Compassionate Friends in The Royal Parks Half Marathon on Sunday 14th October 2018.

If you would like to take a place for our charity contact Stephen Armstrong on **0345 120 3785** or **stephen@tcf.org.uk**.



Royal Parks Foundation
Half Marathon

Microlight flight raises £4000!

Arthur Davies writes..." As the 20th Anniversary of the loss of our dear son Wesley was approaching, I was trying to think of something charitable to mark the date.

After a long deliberation I decided to do something out of my comfort zone and take a sponsored Microlite Flight. I decided that The Compassionate Friends would benefit from my dare devil act, as they had supported our family for many, many years.

I gave myself the whole of October in which to request sponsorship and raise my target of £1,000.

The 20th Anniversary was on 10th November 2017. Unfortunately, the flight was postponed due to weather conditions and it was rescheduled for 19th November. The weather was beautifully sunny, bright and crispy cold with very light winds; apparently perfect conditions.

And before you ask - no I didn't "enjoy" the experience. It was very cold up there and I just wanted to return to terra firma, but in the back of my mind I knew I was doing this for a superb charity and that this was a dream of Wesley's to be in the sky.

To date the total sponsorship raised is nearly £4,000!! The money will go towards the continued good work which The Compassionate Friends do in supporting families who desperately need to know "they are not alone" in the darkest of times in their lives.



Arthur's dare devil moment



New funders!

Thank you to our new funders

- Gledswood Charitable Trust
- Marsh Christian Trust
- Octopus Foundation
- SMB Charitable Trust
- Sobell Foundation
- Tesco's Bags of Help
- The Worshipful Company of Armourers & Brasiers Gauntlet Trust

A huge thank from all of us in our charity for supporting the work of The Compassionate Friends.

New Fundraising Pack

Our new fundraising pack has ideas and tips for helping our charity.

To order yours contact Stephen at stephen@tcf.org.uk or call us on **0345 120 3785**.

Date for Your Diary

The European Doctors Orchestra will dedicate their concert in the Cadogan Hall, London on Sunday 21st October 2018 at 3pm to The Compassionate Friends. All welcome to this special fundraising event in aid of our charity.



Sharon Rose joins TCF as Events Coordinator

In October 2017, Sharon Rose joined our charity's National Office as Events Coordinator, working part time to provide support and assistance to the volunteers who are organising and planning our growing programme of supportive events, gatherings and retreats. You can contact Sharon in our National Office on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays by calling 0345 120 3785 or by email at events@tcf.org.uk Here Sharon tells you a little about herself.

"I learned of TCF shortly after the suicide of my daughter Emily in 2011 but didn't become a fully signed up member until several years later.

I have a degree in drama with American studies and for several years worked in theatre and film, then moved into publishing where I worked for Virgin. After the birth of my two children I continued to copy-edit at home and even now complement my part-time work at TCF by working with a biographer and a novelist on their books. I also volunteer at a community centre where I do the washing up after a senior citizens luncheon club.

I used to love reading but since the death of my daughter have found it hard to concentrate enough to read much so I watch vast amounts of TV and go to the cinema and theatre as much as I can. I also took up life drawing a few years ago.

I live in North West London and joined the TCF office team as events coordinator in October 2017. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or suggestions about forthcoming events".

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

SALE NOW ON!

Show your support for and publicise the work of our charity with bereaved parents and families with our range of Compassionate Friends merchandise.



Stylish Mug ~~£8~~
NOW £6.50 (incl. p&p)



Cotton Shopper ~~£4~~
NOW £3.50 (incl. p&p)



Jute Bag ~~£8.50~~
NOW £7 (incl. p&p)



Teardrop Hearts
Single £5, on leather £7

Handmade
in porcelain
or stoneware

These and other items can now be purchased easily and conveniently
online at www.tcf.org.uk/merchandise
or order by calling TCF on 0345 120 3785.

All item prices include packing and postage to a UK address.

Save the Date in 2019

The Compassionate Friends
International 50th Anniversary Conference
& Gathering.

When: 4-6 October 2019

Where: Stratford-upon-Avon

More details and how to book coming SOON!



Leave a Legacy

Each year thousands of parents suffer the loss of a son or a daughter. Please help us to continue to support families in their time of greatest need.

Find out how at
www.tcf.org.uk/legacy



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