



TCF NEWS

A newsletter for supporters of The Compassionate Friends

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We are delighted to announce that Lady Penelope Mountbatten, The Right Honourable The Countess Mountbatten of Burma, has accepted our invitation to serve as the President of The Compassionate Friends, UK with immediate effect.

The Countess writes...

"To be asked to become President of The Compassionate Friends is indeed an honour, but what touches me deeply is the fact of being invited to join all of you who share our common bond of having a child who has died.

Each of us has known great sorrow, yet from everything that I have read and heard, The Compassionate Friends offers the comfort that we are not alone, the assistance to live through the pain, and the opportunity to go on to help others in due course.

I hope that I may be able to be of some small assistance to The Compassionate Friends, and I look forward to meeting many of you in the future."



Lady Penelope Mountbatten

About our new President

The Countess Mountbatten of Burma was born on the 16th April 1953 in England. She grew up in Switzerland and was educated there until she returned to take a degree at the London School of Economics and Political Science. During that time she met her husband Lord Romsey (eldest son of The Compassionate Friends late President). They were married in the midst of a family tragedy following her husband's grandparents and brother's death in an IRA bomb attack.

Her husband being the heir to the 1st Earl Mountbatten of Burma title and family seat, the couple went to live at Broadlands where they had a family of three children, Nicholas, Alexandra, and Leonora. The youngest, Leonora, died of cancer at the age of five. Subsequently, Lord and Lady Romsey established the Leonora Children's Cancer Fund to support paediatric oncology nurses as well as research into the causes of child cancer. This charity eventually merged with her husband's grandmother's charity to become the Edwina Mountbatten and Leonora Children's Foundation. Lady Brabourne, as she had become, ran this and was involved with various other charities and local organisations. She had always shared the running of the Broadlands Estates and family businesses with her husband, the 3rd Earl Mountbatten of Burma, until she took over full time when he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.

A news round up of recent supportive weekends and retreats



Dawn & John, mum and dad to Jason

Weekend for parents in early bereavement

March 2018 in Derbyshire

Bryan and Patsy lost their daughter and only child, Evie, in January this year. Bryan here shares with you his thoughts about the TCF supportive weekend for parents in early bereavement at Willersley Castle in Derbyshire from 23-25 March 2018.

"Patsy and I have just got back from the Compassionate Friends Retreat in Derbyshire. Whilst this is a club that none of us want to join, being around people that understand, being able to talk openly and frankly about your child without people looking away, and just being able to cry without fear of judgement has been immensely liberating.

Evie died just two months ago from a massive brain tumour and the pain is incredibly raw. But after 2 1/2 days of discussions and openness we feel empowered to take on the future. Knowing that we aren't alone, knowing that we have new friends who WILL listen, knowing that it is just a few short months until we can go to another event such as this has given us the strength to get up tomorrow and tackle the future head on. It's not a future that we want, and the pain is still fresh and excruciating, but it is a pain that we can beat, thanks to a charity set up specifically for people like us. Thank you to 'Compassionate Friends' for being there, for being a shoulder, for creating the type of environment to draw together like-minded people.

Our daughter was a beautiful human being, intelligent, creative and caring. We owe it to her to carry on, to preserve her memory and to honour her. If you've not been to one of these events, please go, you won't regret it".

Jimmy Edmonds is a volunteer for TCF. Here he shares his thoughts about the group for bereaved dads he led during the weekend in Derbyshire.

I've been leading the father's group at various TCF retreats for a while now and it's good to see our numbers gradually increasing. The session at the TCF weekend for those in early bereavement was well attended by dads who were much newer to grief than I. It had taken me a full two years to be comfortable enough to come to a TCF gathering, or to talk about my grief with other men. There were fathers here who had lost children within the last few months!!

I'm wondering whether there has been a gradual shift in social attitudes in the way men are expected to manage their grief or whether it's charities like TCF that are making a big effort to accommodate more fathers into its midst.

In any case for one dad this was the first time he had had the opportunity to meet other bereaved fathers since his daughter had died. "In any other situation" he told me

afterwards, "we would get criticized for making such a stereotypical comment, but I am convinced that in general, dads grieve differently to the mums." Not surprisingly this was one of the main topics of our conversation – mums and dads do grieve differently just as we all, whether father or mother, grieve differently – we all have (or we all find) our own way to grieve. It is important to recognize that there is no rule book for grief. At the same time it's clear that the opportunity to share our feelings with others in similar circumstances or from similar social groupings (i.e. bereaved dads) is important as we grapple with the task of coming to terms with the death of our child.

This father commented further, "it was good for me to meet other dads and realise that I've been behaving similarly to them; keeping busy; trying to 'fix' things; struggling at seeing our wives crying constantly; at times suppressing our emotions so as not to upset them further; feeling guilty over the odd bit of enjoyment we allow ourselves, etc."

I suspect many, if not all, dads will recognize these thoughts. Yes, we do want to try and fix things, yes we do hate to see our partners dissolve into floods of tears, and yes we do try and hide our own grief in a vain attempt to remain strong. Owning up to these fears (if that's what I can call them) is also difficult which is why sharing them with others in a group that is both safe and non-judgemental is so beneficial.

As another dad commented, "too many men (are) not able to deal with what's happening to them". Like others he found reassurance from the way we all opened up on these common issues. In particular the way he was beginning to feel 'a little isolated at home as friends drifted away'. Personally I can relate to this though I'm not sure what the answer is. Many of the emotions that come with

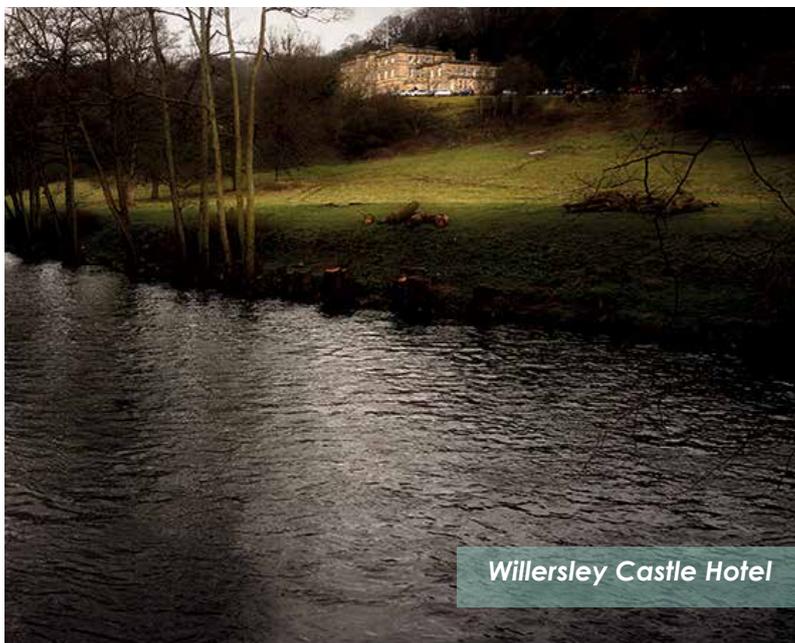
grief are not seen as befitting a full grown man. To break down and weep in front of work colleagues is something we all fear (even if in actual fact it would bring out more empathy than we ever suspected). But to hide our feelings also has a cost as friends and family find themselves more and more unsure (and afraid) of how to respond to what could become an ever more 'silent grief'. Yet to know this, to know that other dads have and do face the same dilemma, is also to find comfort that you are not alone.

What I like about the fathers' groups at TCF is that they aren't so much about trying to find answers to problems (of trying to fix things), more they are simply an opportunity to remove the mask and just be who we are – dads who are desperately trying to come to terms with the death of their child and to accommodate it into the rest of their lives. For most this is stuff we have never done before. We didn't learn how to mourn as kids, grief is not on any school curriculum, and everything we learn about being a man and a Dad leave us totally unprepared for death, least of all the death of our child.

I like to see these fathers' groups at TCF as a kind of bubble where we can learn from each other and practice expressing our grief in a safe environment all the better to deal with what may or may not be conscious insensitivities of the outside world.

And as another dad said, "the dads' group, probably more than anything was an occasion where I made friends with several dads and I aim to keep in touch with them. I learnt that there is light at the end of the tunnel."

You can view a short film featuring recently bereaved parents -Sharon, Colm and Sue- talking about their experience at the weekend on the TCF website at www.tcf.org.uk/filmwillersley2018





Craft activities at the Sibling Retreat

Overnight retreat for bereaved siblings

April 2018 in Birmingham

"I did the unthinkable... I walked into a room full of strangers and left with lots of hugs and tears and great memories. Thank you so much for the retreat, I didn't realise how much I needed it" (S)



After having to be cancelled in early March due to the weather conditions, the weekend of 21/22 April finally saw 30 bereaved siblings gather together for The Compassionate Friends overnight retreat at Woodbrooke in Birmingham. We've had lots of wonderful feedback from the bereaved brothers and sisters who came to the retreat to be together, share their stories and find understanding and hope after the loss of a sibling early in life. Often called 'the forgotten mourners', this weekend was a unique opportunity for these siblings to find support and share with others who have experienced a similar loss.

We are hugely grateful to the Big Lottery Fund for funding the weekend and to the volunteers Rachael, Emma, Hayley (bereaved siblings themselves) for organising this special supportive event. Also thank you to Sue for providing counselling support over the weekend.

Georgia Coan, sister to Elliott, shares her thoughts about the weekend...

When I lost my brother Elliot in 2013, I wondered how I'd ever survive it.

I was broken and nobody could fix me. When I walked into a room full of people, I felt a loneliness that hung over me like a dark shadow. I'd lost my brother, my best friend and nobody really understood. I was alone, trapped in my own misery with no way out. But all that changed at the sibling retreat.

For years after my brother's death I found myself putting on a brave face and fighting through the pain. I'm not sure if I did it for myself or to make other people feel more comfortable but it certainly wasn't a healthy way to grieve. The sibling retreat was the first time I'd spoken so openly about my brother's death and the trauma behind it.

Like many, I was terrified of going [to the retreat]. I didn't want to break down and I was scared I wouldn't feel comfortable.

But for the first time since 2013 I was in a room full of people who understood me. I could talk to people without fear of judgement, without the fear of making people uncomfortable or having to filter myself when things got awkward. I was surrounded by people I didn't have to explain myself to because they had been through the loss of their best friend, brother or sister. They knew the pain and we realised in those moments, when we bared our souls to each other and cried our hearts out, it was ok that we were broken. It was ok that we might never be fixed because at least we weren't alone. We finally had each other.

This weekend has changed my life in so many ways. From lighting candles for our siblings and reading poems together to speaking openly about our losses, it was therapeutic beyond words. Many of the talks we had were in words we'd never spoken. They were moments we'd hidden away in the back of our minds for fear we'd upset our family or friends. We spoke about the darkest times when we felt we couldn't go on and we had nobody to turn to, nobody who really understood and suddenly we realised it wasn't something to be ashamed of. We realised those were normal feelings.

I've learnt it's ok to cry, to feel like you haven't got it together all the time and you want to curl up into a ball. I've learnt those early years in grief where you feel like you're going insane are normal and experienced by others. And I've felt for the first time that I belong.

I was so inspired by the bravery and strength of these other siblings, who like me had faced hell and back yet still had so much love and kindness in their hearts.

I was actually scared of going back to reality. For that weekend I was in a safe, warm and familiar den. I was with the people who understood me. I was in this new reality where everything was a little bit easier. A bit more manageable.

But even though I was sad to walk away from that retreat and go back to the big, wide world, I knew one thing was certain. The people I'd met at the retreat would be the support system I needed for the future. I would carry them and their stories with me wherever I went because those people became my friends.

Grief is a life long journey. You never get over it. A therapist once told me it's like carrying a backpack around full of rocks. It will always be there, but over time it gets a bit easier to carry. That weekend, my backpack was a lot lighter.



Upcoming Supportive Weekends 2018

For parents bereaved by suicide, addiction or substance use

Birmingham, 6-8 July

For parents with no surviving children (childless parents)

Oxfordshire, 27-29 July

Summer supportive weekend for parents, siblings and grandparents

Derbyshire, 17-19 August

NEW North East supportive weekend for parents, sibling and grandparents

County Durham, 21-23 September

National Gathering for parents, siblings and grandparents

Northamptonshire, 2-4 November

Full details at www.tcf.org.uk – go to EVENTS.



You can view a short film featuring recently bereaved parents - Sharon, Colm and Sue - talking about their experience at the weekend on the TCF website

www.tcf.org.uk/filmwillersley2018

Stunning Memorial Garden unveiled at Scottish Gathering



The Compassionate Friends Garden in Perth, Scotland was unveiled at the April 2018 Scottish Gathering for bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents. All of us at The Compassionate Friends are so grateful to the charity Beautiful Perth for providing us a wonderfully tranquil and beautiful garden in which to remember our precious sons and daughters. If you do go to Perth please take a visit - it is a lovely, really special place for all of us.

This article appears on the Beautiful Perth website:

For the past two years Beautiful Perth volunteers, with support from Perth & Kinross Council, have been working in partnership with Compassionate Friends to create a contemplative garden within Riverside Park. Last year we planted a rowan tree together and the Compassionate Friends group installed a small marker stone at its foot.

This year, the group again held its annual gathering in Perth and 40 of its members joined us in the garden for the unveiling of a new bench and a beautiful carved commemorative stone at the entrance to the garden. The stone was generously donated by one of our most valued sponsors, Kilmac Ltd, and was unveiled by its Director Athole McDonald along with Hugh McAninch of The Compassionate Friends. Hugh also cut a ribbon to inaugurate the new bench, and members of the group tied ribbons on the rowan tree in memory of their children. Our volunteers at Beautiful Perth will continue to maintain the garden and we hope members of the Compassionate Friends group will visit in years to come to enjoy quiet contemplation, either as part of a group visit or as individuals.



To round off a simple but deeply emotional visit to this quiet part of the garden, Marion Cameron read a lovely poem 'Ribbons', written by Betty Madill:

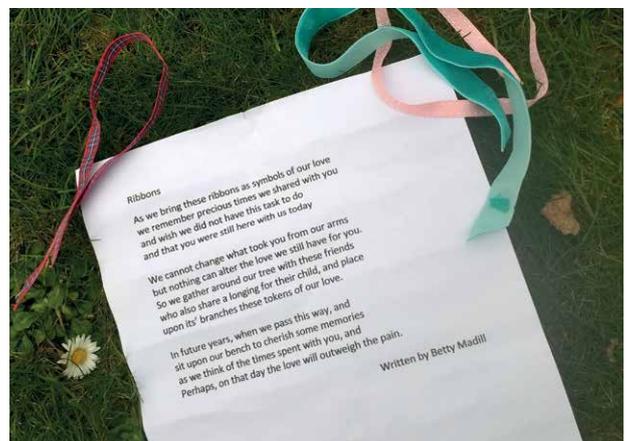
Ribbons

*As we bring these ribbons as symbols of our love
we remember precious times we shared with you
and wish we did not have this task to do
and that you were still here with us today.*

*We cannot change what took you from our arms
but nothing can alter the love we still have for you.
So we gather around our tree with these friends
who also share a longing for their child, and place
upon its branches these tokens of our love.*

*In future years, when we pass this way, and
sit upon our bench to cherish some memories
as we think of the times spent with you, and
Perhaps, on that day the love will outweigh the pain.*

Copyright 2018 Betty Madill



It's OK to be not OK

I didn't think the TCF Scottish Gathering would be for me. I wouldn't fit in.

As I sat in my room I thought OK, I will pop down for five minutes and just say hello then back to the safety of my room.

I could not be more wrong. I found my safety downstairs amongst a group of the most welcoming and compassionate people I have ever had the pleasure of meeting.

Within seconds I was brought into the embrace of the whole group. In everyday life most people avoid mentioning my daughter Lisa.

Approaching her second anniversary I felt her name was being said less and less even within my close family – not so at this weekend's gathering.

I got to talk of her with new friends who didn't shy away but asked more questions about her and made me feel more and more comfortable and relaxed.

Friday turned into Sunday in a flash, I found I didn't want to go back home. I think I have made some new friends for life. They "just get it".

I've actually learned that it's OK to not be OK.

By Gail Moore, Lisa-Jane's Mum

The whole weekend in Perth in April was about hope, warmth and togetherness. Two recently bereaved parents commented:

"Just a wee note as I'm now home, to say thanks again from the bottom of my heart for this weekend. The hard work that has gone into giving us all that amazing time is incredible. The little touches and the warm words made the weekend something I will never forget."

"We really appreciate from everyone all the friendship, support and for us hope, that we will find our path on this journey like no other. The different tips and ideas from so many on what worked for them will be so helpful."

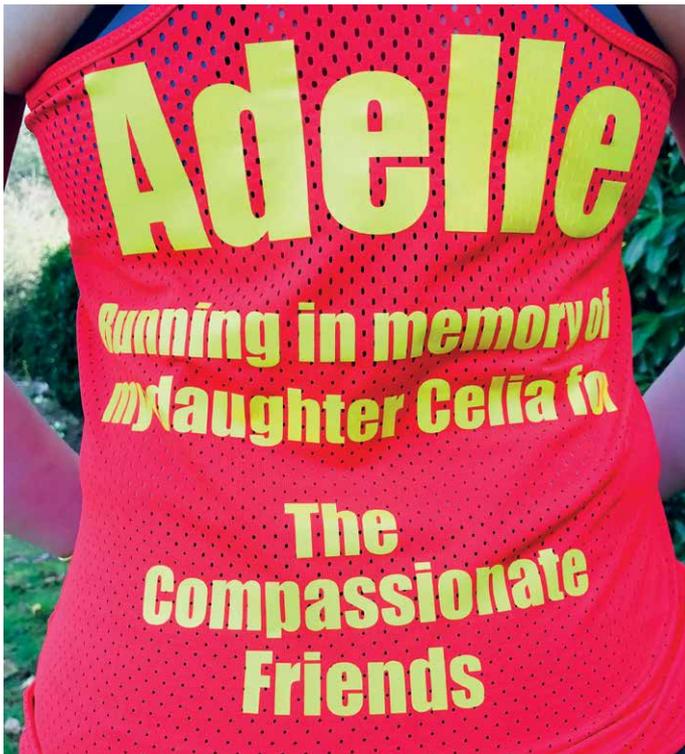
Next year's Scottish Gathering will be from 3-5 May 2019.

Details on our website later this year.

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.*

Adelle raises over £9300!



Adelle Brenner ran the London Marathon 2018 on 22 April in memory of her daughter, Celia and to fundraise for The Compassionate Friends. She raised over £9,300 for our charity – we are hugely grateful to everybody who donated and to Adelle herself for putting herself through such a gruelling training schedule and race.

Here, Adelle writes movingly the day after about her inspirational run in the hottest Marathon ever in London and what it meant to her.

“I couldn’t imagine feeling joy like I feel today...”

“What a day. Running the London Marathon for The Compassionate Friends was such an honour. Thank you from the bottom of my heart to all of you who have supported me and TCF in memory of your children. Your love and kind words helped me carry on when I doubted myself.

The hottest London marathon on record after training in the coldest winter was awesome and awful in almost equal

measure but I’m hugely proud that I finished it. I had to stop for a cry and a few jelly babies at mile 17 and was looked after by a lovely medic but I carried on and finished in 5 hrs 59 minutes.

For a long time after we lost our daughter Celia at 3 years old, nearly 7 years ago, I couldn’t imagine feeling joy like I feel today. My world was turned upside down when she died suddenly in an accident. I questioned everything I had believed in. My assumptions of a future watching my children grow up healthy and happy as I grew older proved to be wrong. The confident, positive person I had been was lost too.

Running the marathon for TCF has helped me rediscover not just who I was before we lost Celia but also who I have become since. I’m still not a very good runner but I’ve got determination in spades - I needed it just to get out of bed every day. It’s also helped restore my faith in humanity, the love of friends and family who encouraged me and the kindness of strangers who shouted my name, gave out ice pops to cool us down and sprayed us with water.

I ran dressed as Wonder Woman. Celia was fond of dressing up and I thought she would approve. She especially loved dressing up as Cinderella but I thought at 44 I was a bit old for that. Yesterday I honestly felt like Wonder Woman. It’s not just me though, all of us bereaved parents are super heroes. We have all had to develop superpowers to carry on without our children, to rebuild our lives and we should be immensely proud of ourselves for that.

My sponsorship fund for TCF has now topped £9,000! I never even dreamt of close to that. Not only will this enable more families to be helped but it’s also meant that people who have never been able to ask about Celia, to say her name, have been able to, even if it’s only in a sponsorship message. It’s started a conversation amongst many of my friends and family that I’ve been hoping for for years. Through this and talking to the Bath TCF group I’ve learned that as bereaved parents if we want to talk about our child and our grief, it so often has to be us who starts the conversation. It’s tough to do but if we can it enables those around us to support us better.

Thank you TCF x”

Adelle Brenner (Thank YOU from all of us at TCF)



Wonder Woman Adelle with her medal

You can still donate to Adelle's epic run at

<https://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/AdelleBrenner>

Bags of help from Tesco!

The winners of Tesco Ilkeston March/April 2018 Bags of Help was The Compassionate Friends. The first prize was £4000, which will be used to help fund our retreat weekends for parents in early bereavement.

Photographed left to right are Jamie Craig (Tesco), Lorna Rann (Group Contact) and Pat Thomson (Group Contact) of the Compassionate Friends and Angie Young (Tesco).



Dates for your diary

Joe's Walk and BBQ

Join us at a lovely opportunity to meet with other bereaved parents and siblings and fundraise for TCF

When: Sunday 24th June, from 2 pm

Where: St. Katharine's Charity House, Parmoor, Frieth, Nr Henley-on-Thames RG9 6NN

Itinerary:

Meet for walk (about 4 miles) 2.00 - 2.30pm (Optional stop at lovely pub half way round).

Pimms/tea/soft drinks in the garden of St Katharine's from 4.00pm

Followed by a BBQ at 6pm.

All welcome including family members, friends, kids and dogs – for some or all of the afternoon and evening.
For more information contact Sue at shughes@webmd.net



Booking Now Open



An exciting fundraising concert
by The European Doctors'
Orchestra

When: Sunday 21st October 2018, 3pm

Where: Cadogan Hall, London

The European Doctors' Orchestra opens with Dukas' The Sorcerer's Apprentice, well known from the version animated by Walt Disney in Fantasia.

Jack Liebeck, our exciting young soloist and 2010 winner of the Classical Brit Award – Young Artist of the Year, joins the Orchestra to perform Dvořák's lyrical Violin Concerto. BBC Music Magazine has described Jack's playing as having 'a beguiling silvery tone'. The concerto is imbued with themes from the Czech heritage, with a rich interplay between the orchestra and soloist.

The second part of our concert consists of Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony, one of the most well-loved of his works. In 1892 a Boston reviewer wrote: "We have all the untamed fury of the Cossack, whetting itself for deeds of atrocity, against all the sterility of the Russian steppes."



Ticket Information

£32, £25, £15

Concessions: all seats £10 for Under 10s with each full paying adult

Available from The Cadogan Hall website at
www.cadoganhall.com

All proceeds from this concert will be donated to The Compassionate Friends. Come and join us!

New funders!

Thank you to our new funders

- Rank Foundation
- Community Foundation for Surrey
- H C Beer Charitable Trust
- Helianthus Charitable Trust
- Baker Charitable Trust
- QBE Foundation
- Helen Roll Charity
- Waitrose Community Matters – Waitrose Winton, Dorset

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

Kaleidoscope of Hope

Jacqui Wainwright is a volunteer on our National Helpline, taking calls from bereaved parents and their families, as well as professionals and those supporting bereaved parents. Here she shares her motivations for doing this vital work with our charity.

On 15 March 2010, my 18 year old son Louis died and, as a family, we were catapulted into a living nightmare. Louis's traumatic death was sudden and completely unexpected, generating national media attention which brought press intrusion and subsequent police investigations.

Being quite a private family we found this added dimension to Louis's death incredibly difficult to bear. Thankfully, we were blessed to live in a close-knit community which enveloped us with care, as we all struggled to make sense of what had happened to us.

My first encounter with TCF was in November 2010, 8 months after Louis's death.

As I stumbled in the darkness, experiencing the emotional rollercoaster that grief brings, combating loneliness and extreme sadness, searching for answers and fearing for my sanity, I found TCF's website and finally, someone turned on the light....

Fast forward 8 years and...

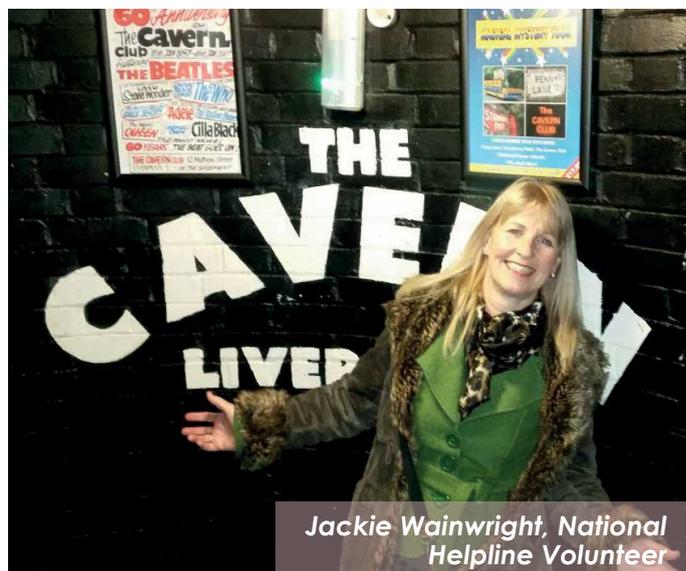
I have met many other bereaved parents; read every edition of Compassion, joined the forum; am a member of a local support group; have participated in training; I have attended 3 Gatherings and have co-facilitated a workshop. And in 2016, 6 years after the death of my son, I joined TCF's wonderful band of Helpline volunteers.

Just writing this down seems slightly surreal and makes me feel emotional. 8 years ago, I'd have told you that I wouldn't survive the death of my son and quite frankly I didn't care. TCF did care. TCF cared enough to let me know that this was a completely normal and natural response as a bereaved parent and that I was not alone in my thoughts and feelings. TCF gifted to me, their care and compassion, and helped me to navigate this new world – no time limit being attached, an enduring commitment of support.

Now, volunteering on the Helpline, enables me to re-gift the compassion shown for my own loss and guide those more newly bereaved parents, or those just beginning to feel able to talk openly about their loss, through the unfamiliar landscape which has laid waste to their existence.

Being able to support the Helpline gives me an immense sense of achievement and pride. Working for such a wonderful organisation that reaches out to parents in their darkest hours, sits with them in that darkness and is willing to share their pain gives me faith in humanity. The impact that TCF has on the lives of bereaved parents is very real and cannot be under-estimated.

Bereaved parents who call the Helpline for support come from all walks of life and all have lost a child in different circumstances. Each child's death and story is unique to us as individuals and it an absolute privilege to listen to each and every story and hopefully make some difference, however small, in how parents deal with their loss.



Jackie Wainwright, National Helpline Volunteer

Investing in today's bereaved parents may inspire some of them to reach out to tomorrow's: a kaleidoscope of many people, the pattern always changing but the light always shining through.

Through Louis's death, I have discovered the ability to stretch and grow in ways I didn't think possible, and for that I am thankful. After working for many years in the field of Education, I have found that this quote has become more meaningful to me:

"Experience is, for me, the highest authority. The touchstone of validity is my own experience. No other person's ideas, and none of my own ideas, are as authoritative as my experience. It is to experience that I must return again and again, to discover a closer approximation to truth as it is in the process of becoming in me."
Carl Rogers from On Becoming a Person, 1961

As bereaved parents, we have all had experiences, whether we wanted them or not, and I believe that this quote resonates with our need to be listened to and our feelings and thoughts validated.

What I have learned, as I continue to weave the fibres of my son's death into the fabric of my daily life, is that not one single parent can change the fact that their child has died, but the fact remains that we all do have choices in how we live with our grief and the relationship we now have with our child.

Every parent deserves to have a 'good mourning' and TCF freely gives this gift in abundance through love, support, and shared experience, and the knowledge that we can learn to live a meaningful life, just not the one for which we had planned.

By Jacqui Wainwright, Mother of Louis James Wainwright (aged 18 ³/₄)

If you are interested in volunteering for The Compassionate Friends please go to our website at www.tcf.org.uk – HELP US, volunteer for TCF.



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

50th Anniversary in 2019

The Compassionate Friends
50th Anniversary Gathering.

More details and how to book coming SOON!



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Friends**

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 [@thecompassionatefriendsuk](https://www.instagram.com/thecompassionatefriendsuk)

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