



The
Compassionate
Friends

Supporting bereaved parents and their families

Impact Report

& Annual Review 2018-2019



"When our son died we were lost and felt so alone. No one could understand what we were going through, what we were feeling. Meeting other bereaved parents we realised that we were not alone, they really understood our fears and experiences and helped us to cope". [P, feedback on Facebook page](#)

"This weekend has changed me as a person. I've met some of the bravest and most inspiring people I'll ever meet. The people who understand the pain and heartbreak of losing a sibling, who are there to listen as well as share their sibling's stories. ... I can't explain how amazing it is to talk to other people who have been through the same experience and won't judge you because they understand everything you are saying". [G, bereaved sibling's feedback](#)

"At the end of the day I felt "lighter". As if some of the weight of grief had been lifted by being shared". [Attendee at bereavement support day in Hampshire](#)

"During the first few years after my beautiful daughter died by suicide you were my lifeline. Meeting with other parents who understood was so important. Thank you could never say enough for the gratefulness I feel". [J, feedback on Facebook page](#)

"I gained strength from being immersed in the company of those who genuinely understand, and I left safe in the knowledge that the shared understanding and compassion of you and your team of volunteers, as well as the friendship of those I met, will help to carry me through my everyday". [S, her son died in 2016 from substance use](#)

"I saw you had updated some of your leaflets recently including the one about the loss of a baby. I thought it was excellent, it really resonated with me and reflected our experience". [R, by email](#)

"As soon as I arrived I felt at ease, calm and peaceful. I felt it was the first time in 18 months since my son died I could be myself. I heard people laugh and chatter and I felt comfortable with it. Knowing they were all in the same situation as me and my husband and they could still laugh gave me hope. The volunteers were amazing. I had such a positive experience - totally unexpected - so much so I didn't want to leave. We both could have stayed all week!! I have learnt so much and have gained new ways on how to cope with life". [Feedback from a bereaved mother, whose only child had died, after attending the weekend retreat for childless parents](#)

Welcome to the first ever Impact Report from The Compassionate Friends

We have had a busy and hugely productive year but we know there is so much more to do for all those parents and their families who suffer the loss of a beloved son or daughter, grandchild or sibling. Significant progress has been made in consolidating and developing our peer support for bereaved parents and their families and we have worked hard to increase awareness of the devastating and long-lasting impact on families of parental and sibling grief.

We hope you appreciate reading about our activities this year and the difference we make to grieving families. A warm thank you to everyone who has contributed to our achievements this year – our dedicated and committed volunteers, hard-working staff, supportive trustee board, and our generous donors and funders, large and small. We could not do it without you.



With warm wishes,

Handwritten signature of Carolyn Brice.

Carolyn Brice
Chief Executive

2018-2019 at a glance

An estimated

1050



BEREAVED PARENTS

welcomed and supported each month in local support groups around the UK

1100



INFORMATION PACKS

delivered to parents and families seeking support and information after child loss.



4597

REGISTRATIONS FOR ONLINE SUPPORT

via our moderated private online 'virtual' support groups and forums.

8 WEEKEND EVENTS & RETREATS

supporting **460 bereaved parents and siblings.**

Financial support was given to **49 parents** via bursaries.



1610

HELPLINE, TELEPHONE & EMAIL SUPPORT REQUESTS

for bereaved parents and families - the majority newly bereaved - plus professionals seeking advice for their patients and clients.





5300

WEBSITE VISITORS

to www.tcf.org.uk each month

30,000

TCF LEAFLETS DOWNLOADED

More than 30 different leaflets offering information, support and advice are available to download from our website.

1200



BOOKS & RESOURCES

can be borrowed by bereaved parents and their families from our unique library



14

TRAINING & REGIONAL DAYS

held around the UK for volunteers running support groups, offering local support and manning our national Helpline.

5115

EMAIL NEWSLETTERS



offering support and information sent **8 times a year** to bereaved parents, families and professionals.

Over

5000

SUPPORTIVE MAGAZINES & NEWSLETTERS

sent to bereaved parents and their families during the year.



All statistics cover the financial year April 2018 – March 2019 – Where possible these are actual figures or an estimate where we do not have complete data.

Who we are and what we do

"Every parent's nightmare is to lose a child"

This is a cliché, but for many, many families the nightmare tragically becomes a reality. Each year in the UK 9000 (Office of National Statistics) children and young people under the age of 30 years die – this figure does not include the 3000 stillbirth and neonatal deaths and losses of sons and daughters aged 30 and over, who may leave a grieving partner and children of their own.

The Compassionate Friends (TCF) is a charitable organisation of bereaved parents, grandparents and adult siblings dedicated to the support and care of other bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings who have suffered the death of a child or children of any age and from any cause of death.

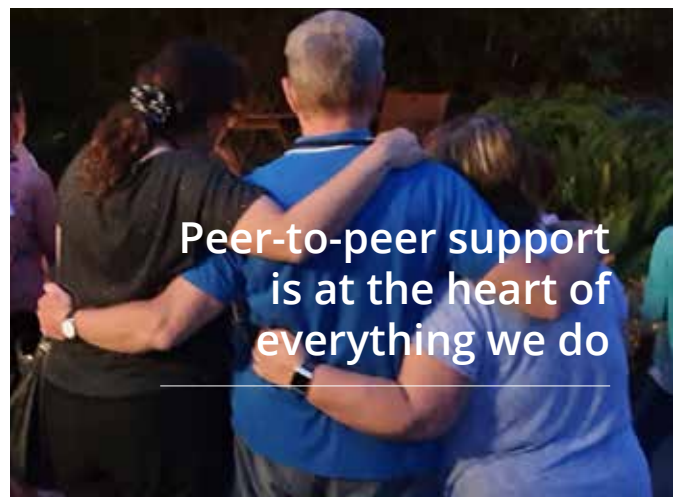
National peer-to-peer support

As the first peer-to-peer charity in the UK for grieving parents, we have been bringing understanding, support, friendship and hope to bereaved parents and their families for over 50 years. Our support began in 1969 when grieving parents Iris and Joe Lawley, Bill and Joan Henderson and Betty Rattigan were brought together for mutual support by Simon Stephens, then a young chaplain in a Coventry hospital. Together they formed The Compassionate Friends.

Child loss is out of the natural order

The grief of bereaved parents and siblings is devastating and overwhelming. In experiencing the

heartbreaking death of a beloved son or daughter, brother or sister, parents and siblings endure a loss so painful that it changes their lives forever in a multitude of ways. The premature loss of a baby, child, young person or older child, so out of the 'natural order', commonly brings with it deep and complex feelings including anguish, heartbreak, guilt and remorse, constant yearning, utter hopelessness and despair. The impact on parents and families is one of intense pain and isolation, with raw and anguished grief lasting longer than others imagine. A family's situation can be exacerbated by the lack of appropriate information or support services - particularly the case for parents who have experienced the sudden or violent death of their child outside of a hospital or hospice environment. Moreover, the death – especially if sudden or traumatic – can result in debilitating and long-lasting symptoms of acute trauma.





“We lost our amazing son in 2017 after a terrible road accident. It has only been 8 months but without the help, support and compassion from your charity I don’t think I could have got through this. Your helpline was an enormous source of comfort. I also attended a retreat weekend in March with my daughter at which we found hope for the future without J. The information on all the leaflets has been so helpful and an enormous support especially with dealing with things like the inquest. My daughter has found the siblings support amazing”. N, bereaved in December 2017

Peer support from fellow bereaved parents, grandparents or siblings either face-to-face, on the telephone or online is a special and unique kind of support which

- Reduces social isolation frequently experienced after the death of a child, grandchild or adult sibling
- Provides a hugely valuable safe place where parents and close family can speak honestly about how they are really feeling
- Understands, recognises and normalises the intensity of early grief and the long lasting impact of child loss
- Encourages and sustains bereaved parents and families, as hearing from others further on in their grief offers comfort and hope for a future without their loved one, and demonstrates ways they might survive such a devastating loss
- Continues support, understanding and friendship after family or friends’ support may have diminished



Our vision

A society where every bereaved parent, grandparent and adult sibling can access peer-to-peer support when their child, grandchild or sibling dies at any age and from any cause.



Our focus

To provide high quality peer support to anyone affected by the loss of a child of any age to any cause.

To raise awareness of support available from TCF in the UK and the impact of parental and sibling grief on individuals and families.

Review of activities and achievements 2018-2019

OUR FOCUS: To provide high quality support to anyone affected by the loss of a child of any age to any cause.

How did we achieve this?

Increased number of local support groups and contacts

We continued to support and encourage our successful existing support group facilitators and worked to establish **new local support groups** run by trained volunteer bereaved parents. We also continued to encourage and train local contacts offering one-to-one support in their locality.

We are proud to say we have **70 local support groups** around the UK, including Northern Ireland, welcoming and supporting between 5 and 20 bereaved parents each month. New groups began meeting in Leeds, Bristol, Alton (Hampshire), Kings Langley (Hertfordshire), Bradford, Chippenham, Chelmsford, Caithness and Glasgow (for those bereaved by suicide), Rye (Kent), Haywards Heath (Sussex), North West London and St Neots (Cambridgeshire). This year we undertook the **first survey of our support groups** to establish support, training and fundraising needs.

Local contacts continue to be encouraged to foster social contacts and create opportunities for parents to meet together outside of the regular group meetings.

This increased local support for bereaved families stems from our continued focus on training and information events for volunteers held around the country, including Information and Training Days on facilitating support groups in London, Manchester, Leeds, Cardiff and Perth.

Regional Volunteer Training and Information Days were held throughout the UK in England (South East, South Central, South West, North East, East Anglia), Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.



1050

bereaved parents
welcomed and supported
each month in local support
groups around the UK



"Thank you very much for the time you spent talking to me last night. It was helpful to talk and I did feel calmer after our call. You said some very understanding and helpful things. Just talking to a bereaved parent who is so compassionate and understanding and able to give to others at a time like this also gives me hope. Thank you" Feedback received from a newly bereaved mother who lost her very young child in a road traffic collision.

Developed further online and telephone support

Helpline calls and emails

Over 960 calls were received by our **National Helpline** - the majority from newly bereaved parents - but also professionals and longer bereaved needing support and information.

More than 650 emails received from parents, families or professionals – **up by 30%** in the year to March 2019.

Most calls or emails were from bereaved parents who wished to speak about their loss to another parent who can empathise with the heartbreak, devastation and enormity of child loss. Many made contact to find out about our on-going support or seek an empathic ear as they approach an anniversary, birthday or as they face an inquest or other investigation into their child's death.

There were 22 Helpline team members at the end of March 2019, all of whom are bereaved parent volunteers. A training day for volunteers was held in February 2019, run by Helpline Manager, Ruth Mercier. The link between the Helpline and referral of parents to local contacts has continued to be strengthened with volunteers and staff working closer together to ensure continuity of support.

Online forums and Facebook

Eleven moderated online groups on the web or Facebook continue to offer opportunities for bereaved parents and siblings to connect, find peer support, and arrange informal meet-ups and social activities. Each varies in size between **50 and 300 members** - all growing rapidly - and include groups for

- bereaved dads
- parents bereaved by long-term illness
- bereaved by suicide, or drug and alcohol use
- those who have lost a baby or very young child
- adult bereaved adult siblings

Our online groups also provide a safe place where parents and siblings arrange informal meet-ups and social activities for mutual support.

The **Online Community Forum** for bereaved parents continues to grow and at end of March 2019 had 2811 registered members with an average of 19 posts per day. The Forum is moderated by a small but dedicated team of volunteers, led by Diane Minshall.



“I cannot express to you how grateful I am for this bursary and the opportunity to go to the retreat. I feel so very isolated now that the dust has settled (although only 18 months ago) and a lot of people have moved on, but not me and my daughter. So, I can't tell you how much I look forward to, although nervous, being with other people who will understand how raw it is still”. F, bereaved mother after being informed she had a bursary to attend a TCF weekend

Increased the number of supportive events

Using feedback from previous events, we continued to improve and develop 8 weekend **gatherings and retreats**, supporting this year 460 bereaved parents and siblings.

These included our second overnight **retreat for bereaved brothers and sisters** (April 2018 – re-scheduled from March 2018 due to adverse weather conditions), a gathering in **Scotland** (April 2018) and **Derbyshire** (August 2018 – during the summer holidays which can be a particularly difficult time for bereaved parents). A specialist weekend was held for parents in **early months and years of their loss** (February 2019), and the **second bereavement support day** took place in Hampshire organised by Sue Brooks and Joy Sebborn (September 2018). The third annual weekend retreat **uniquely for parents bereaved by suicide, addiction or substance use** (July 2018) supported over 60 parents bereaved in these particularly difficult ways.

New this year was the **first successful retreat weekend held near Durham** (September 2018) organised by Liz Leake and her volunteer team which offered parents and siblings in North East England opportunities to access local peer support.

A **second overnight retreat for bereaved siblings** was planned during 2018-19 and took place in April 2019. The event supported 40 brothers and

sisters (a third up on the previous weekend) and our charity was able to fund the event by 50% to meet our aim to offer more support to bereaved adult siblings.

One-to-one therapeutic support was offered at all weekend events by bereaved parents who are themselves trained counsellors. For the first time this service was provided at the gathering in Perth, Scotland.


Financial hardship for parents is common following the death of a child as many struggle to return to work. During the period of this review, we were pleased to have been able to give **financial support through bursaries for 49 parents** who would have been unable to attend supportive weekends without financial support. This represents over **100% increase in funding** for those who have experienced financial hardship since the loss of their child. We especially strove to fund those who were newly bereaved or bereaved in particularly traumatic ways. Moreover, trained volunteers at supportive weekend and day events were fully funded wherever possible in order to ensure a totally focused support team.

In keeping with the ethos within TCF of valuing and encouraging **informal social contact** among bereaved families, varied social events were organised across the UK in 2018-19 – a number

through the Compassionate Pals and other private Facebook groups. These included a series of **monthly walks** in and around London organised by bereaved dad, Terry Ahern, which were well attended (15+ walkers) and often a first step the bereaved to access peer support. Further informal support offered by bring-and-share events and open houses (including for specific groups, such as childless parents or on specific difficult days

for bereaved parents, such as Mother's Day or New Year's Day), pub meet-ups, craft days and fundraising events such as Joe's Walk, organised by Trustee, Susan Hughes, or the Kettering TCF Group fundraising day organised by Carol and Adrian Keach and a team of volunteers.





49

Parents received bursaries to attend our supportive weekends.



"This charity does amazing things. The sibling retreat they organised this weekend has helped me massively and I feel so much comfort from meeting other siblings who have been bereaved. They offer so much support" G, bereaved sibling April 2018

Improved and developed support for specific groups of the bereaved

We continued with our objective to build our capacity for supporting specific groups of the bereaved.

Bereaved by suicide

Parents **bereaved by suicide** are themselves at risk of suicidal thoughts, with the stigma of suicide often still discouraging those bereaved in this way from seeking help.

Marie Best, TCF's National Co-ordinator for parents bereaved through suicide, has continued to develop the well-attended monthly support group in London and there are also groups for parents bereaved by suicide in Bristol and Cambridge. In early 2019 a new group opened in Glasgow for parents, siblings and grandparents bereaved in this way, facilitated by experienced volunteer, Linda Patterson.

A specialist private Facebook group – Bereaved by Suicide – has over 200 members. This is a very active group - posts cover all areas of grief: birthdays, anniversaries, inquests, relationships, dealing with family and surviving children, problems with treatment, counselling, traumatic loss and more. Peer support offered covers both practical and emotional help. Feedback on the page has included

"a lifeline, 'I don't know how I would have got through without this help".

We make specific provision at all our retreats for parents bereaved by suicide and our third annual 2-day retreat for parents bereaved through suicide, addiction or substance use was held in July 2018 supporting over 60 parents.

Our information leaflet 'After Suicide' is widely distributed to parents as well as to family members, friends and professionals to help with understanding of the impact of such a loss.

Our local and helpline volunteers receive specialist information and training on supporting parents bereaved by suicide. In early 2019 we published a **policy document** with advice and support for volunteers who experience parents expressing suicidal thoughts after child loss.

Bereaved by drug or alcohol use

Families who have suffered the death of a child as a result of **drug and alcohol use** still experience societal stigma and consequently can feel reluctant to seek support. They can experience a 'disenfranchised grief' with others not considering their loss as 'worthy' as other more 'socially acceptable' deaths, for example, to illness or a road traffic incident.

At TCF we recognise that these parents – just as others - have lost a precious son or daughter – sometimes after months or years of deteriorating mental health and suffering the illness of addiction. The depth and intensity of anguish is the same as all child loss.

Our support for this group is coordinated by our National Specialist Coordinator for parents bereaved by drug and alcohol use, Susan Brooks. We offer a specialist online support group, and at our weekend retreats specific support is given to parents bereaved by substance use. Our dedicated weekend retreat for these parents was held in July 2018.

A new supportive leaflet – **Bereaved by Drug or Alcohol Use** was published specifically for this group of parents in June 2018.

Bereaved siblings

Often the 'forgotten mourners', sadly, there is a general lack of support for **adult bereaved brothers and sisters**. Family and friends may enquire how parents are faring after child loss, but forget that siblings grieve intensely too.

At TCF, we recognize the importance and power of peer support for this group and have increased our support for adult bereaved siblings with a growing dedicated closed Facebook page which is well moderated, active and has grown to support over 350 members. Sibling overnight retreats were held in April 2018 and March 2019 supporting 70 bereaved siblings, organised and run by bereaved sibling volunteers. There have been informal sibling meet-ups arranged throughout the year in Bristol, London and Leeds.

In October 2018, we collaborated with musician and presenter, George Shelley, whose sister had died in 2017 in an accident. The resulting BBC documentary, **Learning to Grieve**, featured

George meeting other bereaved siblings at a Compassionate Friends retreat, discussing their losses together and the benefits of peer support.

Our sibling coordinator, Hayley Hayes continues to edit a dedicated magazine for siblings – **SIBBS Newsletter** – which reaches out to our sibling community offering ways to communicate and connect with each other. We continue to work on broadening the range and depth of our support and services for siblings. Many of our parental support groups are now open to and include members who are adult siblings.

Childless parents

Support for parents in the uniquely devastating situation of the death of their **only child or where all their children have died** (childless parents) continued in 2018-19. Many in this community of bereaved parents can find it difficult to relate to other bereaved parents with surviving children because they themselves have lost their only child or children. At TCF, we acknowledge the exceptional situation of these parents.

We provided a retreat weekend in July 2018 in Oxfordshire, and with the help of funding ensured that places at the weekend could be offered to the many in this community experiencing financial hardship. Membership of the private Facebook group for childless parents continues to grow and the members are active and supportive. Ongoing guidance to our Helpline team, local contacts and group facilitators continues to look at ways we can best support parents who have lost their only child.



“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”. J, TCF volunteer

Bereaved fathers

We know that the majority of our support is accessed by bereaved mothers. This year we have made efforts to encourage more men to engage with peer support. A private Facebook group is specifically for bereaved fathers and is active with conversation and support. Informal meet-ups, such as walks (for instance the series of walks in and around London led by a bereaved father) and pub meets have encouraged more men to find support from others.

Our retreat weekends now always include one or two sessions and discussion groups specifically for men and activities which might encourage men to attend.



Supportive weekends offer dads the chance to connect with other dads in a safe space



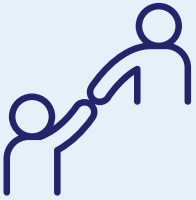
“We’d have honestly been lost without TCF – especially in those early unbearable days, weeks & months”. G, bereaved mother in Cumbria

Development of peer support

Grief Companions

During 2018 -19 we took some time to evaluate a pilot programme begun in the previous year matching **Grief Companions** to the newly bereaved. Longer bereaved parents volunteered to take on the role of befriending another, more recently bereaved parent, who would value and find support from regular meet-ups, telephone calls or email contact. The organisation of the pilot had been taken on a voluntary basis by our Vice Chair of Trustees, Sue Hughes. 30 pairs had been matched in the year and review of outcomes demonstrated a success rate of approximately 50% of befriending relationships continuing and providing helpful peer support. This was particularly important in areas of the UK where there is little local group or individual support or in sparsely populated areas of the country.

We have sought funding for the roll out of the Grief Companion scheme including a dedicated coordinator for the initiative.



<p>30 pairs were matched during the Grief Companion pilot.</p>	<p>50% have continued the relationship and benefited from the support.</p>
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Library

Our **unique library of over 1200 books and resources on all aspects of bereavement** – The Catharine Pointer Memorial Library – continued its personalised support to the bereaved from our national office premises in northwest London under the enthusiastic and experienced direction of TCF’s librarian, Mary Hartley. The memorial book scheme, offering parents the opportunity to dedicate a book in memory of their child, has continued to expand to ensure new titles are added to the shelves.



"Thank you so much for providing so many resources. I was starting to worry I wasn't going to find the right organisation to get help and you've given me a glimmer of hope. I can't thank you enough". T, recently bereaved mother, July 2018

Supportive leaflets, publications and resources

Our **range of over 30 leaflets and publications** – uniquely written by bereaved parents and siblings themselves – continue to offer helpful and supportive information to families and professionals in printed format and online. Our leaflets were downloaded over 30,000 times in the year and distributed in printed format with information packs, at local groups and at supportive events. Abi May and her dedicated team of volunteers reviewed, updated, or rewrote a number of titles for specific groups of the bereaved – including for those who have experienced the **loss of a baby, for grieving couples, parents with no surviving children**, and those concerned about their **surviving children**. A leaflet specifically for adult bereaved **siblings** was also published.

An advice leaflet for **employers** was also rewritten this year and helpful suggestions for **family and friends** were distributed via an updated leaflet **Helping Bereaved Parents**. 3 fact sheets covering **Inquests and Death Abroad** were also updated this year (the latter by collaborating with the charity, Murdered Abroad).

Our guide to **preparing a child's funeral** was completely updated and made available as an online resource for newly bereaved parents and their families.

A comprehensive **information pack** was sent to over **1000 newly bereaved** parents and families seeking support and information after child loss.

Over **5000 supportive magazines and newsletters** were sent to bereaved parents and their families.



Signposting the way for bereaved parents, family and professionals



"I want to say thank you; as in preparation for my support group meeting, I found your TCF volunteers training invaluable - it is a big thing to take this on, and I structured the meeting as you had suggested - it was a great help to feel as though I was supported by TCF in this way". S, feedback after first group support meeting

Increased support for our volunteers

With just 6 part-time staff, we could not provide the support we do without our 190 volunteers. Our volunteers are all bereaved who have been helped by TCF after the death of their child or sibling and are now in a position to help other more newly bereaved parents and family members.

We worked hard to **recruit new volunteers** throughout the year and increased our existing **support for volunteers** in several ways. At the charity's AGM in November 2018, a morning meeting provided workshops and presentations to aid volunteers to offer quality support in their local area. The day included a presentation from a specialist from the National Centre for Trauma, workshops on supporting parents bereaved by suicide or drug or alcohol use, as well as 'surgeries' addressing issues and challenges faced by those facilitating groups or supporting one-to-one.

Our hugely committed volunteer team continued to receive newsletters and access a dedicated section of the website for up-to-date information.

Self-care for our volunteers is a priority for our charity and we incorporate advice into our Training and Information Days and newsletters. Our key volunteers continue to access psychotherapeutic supervision and support funded by TCF and we wish to expand this service in the future.

At weekend retreats we ensure that volunteers have access to a trained counsellor for their own self-care. Our pastoral group hold regular meetings to ensure that our volunteers are cared for and supported.

Regional coordinators hold regular meetings for volunteers, where issues and experiences are discussed and shared and the importance of self-care is stressed. In Northern Ireland, funding allowed for an overnight gathering for volunteers and paid-for therapeutic support for volunteers in the region.





“Thank you for all the wonderful work your charity does, it’s good to not feel alone and to follow the things you post on social media”. R, bereaved mum

OUR FOCUS: To raise awareness within the community of bereaved and the general public of support available from The Compassionate Friends and of parental grief in the UK

How did we do?

Increased social media presence

During the year, we built our following to over 7800 on Facebook and 1000+ on Twitter. Our post on Mother’s Day in 2018 was seen by 23,000 people, liked 368 times and shared over 200 times. Our post on Easter Sunday was seen by over 16,000 people, liked 260 times and shared by 124 people. Through social media we have increased our networking with other bereavement charities and we have used our developing online presence to improve our reach to all our target groups including bereaved parents, professionals, young people – especially siblings under 30 – and the general public.

Regular email and printed news

A digital newsletter emailed approximately 8-10 times a year spreads our reach to bereaved families and to the professionals supporting them by keeping both groups in touch with news from our charity and the support available. Our printed newsletter, **TCF News**, continues to be sent to parents 4 times a year.

Increased website traffic

We logged **5300 visitors per month** to our website at **www.tcf.org.uk** during the year (up from 4300 per month in the previous year). Our website is regularly updated with news and activities ensuring we stay near the top of any search engines. Updates and changes were made to the Other Helpful Organisations section to improve ease of navigation for users. A review of and updates to our privacy notice and the way in which we ask for information were made to ensure we conform to the new GDPR data protection rules which came into effect in May 2018.

Joining TCF as a supporting/donating member became easier via our website, with a joining donation which was no longer fixed and could be determined by the member themselves. This has resulted in increased donations and more direct debits being set up supporting our vital work.



"Don't honestly know what I would do without this wonderful charity. They have kept me sane. They have kept me able to get up in the morning and given me a place where I can drop my mask and say things as they really are and the people there just get it. You are and have been my lifeline" CJ, August 2018 on Facebook

Increased media visibility

Our charity continued to increase media profile this year by timely and appropriate response to high profile events involving the tragic and sudden death of a child. In May 2018, TCF participated in the first anniversary events marking the Manchester arena attack. In August 2018, our CEO joined a bereaved mother for a discussion on the death of an adult child on BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour. The Compassionate Friends was featured as the guest campaign for MumsNet – one of the largest networks for parents, with over 14 million unique visitors per month (February 2019). Our charity was referenced in The Sunday Times newspaper in an article covering teenage suicide and social media (February 2019). We have had increased coverage on local radio too, for instance, interviews on BBC Radio Tees and Radio Derbyshire discussing our retreat weekends.

These appearances on both local and national TV and radio have increasingly encouraged a range of media to contact our charity for discussion and comment on child or sibling loss.



5300

Visitors to our website
each month



7800

Followers on Facebook



1000+

Followers on Twitter

Developed fundraising and awareness among the bereaved and the general public

In September 2018, we relaunched the **Friends of TCF scheme** for family members, colleagues and professionals who wish to support our work and to widen our outreach to the friends and colleagues of the bereaved as well as wider family members. It is easy to join at www.tcf.org.uk/friend

During the year TCF took part in **fundraising activities** that encouraged participation by our members and the wider public, for example voting in the Tesco Bags of Help scheme and in the Aviva Community Fund.

The very special **fundraising concert at the Cadogan Hall** in London (October 2018) organised by Trustee, Margaret Brearley, in collaboration with the European Doctors' Orchestra, gave a platform for our charity to increase our visibility and reach. We warmly thank Margaret and Stephen Brearley for this hugely successful event.

2019 is 50 years since the founding of The Compassionate Friends in 1969. In 2018 we began our planning for initiatives for our Jubilee year. This includes a **50th Anniversary Gathering** for 250 bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents featuring a programme of speakers, workshops, activities, discussion groups and commemorative elements. Planning for our fundraising initiative **'Tea & Cake at Fifty'** began and we will research and compile a **commemorative publication** to mark our Jubilee year. All offer us opportunities to increase awareness of our charity through media and PR, as well as develop new supportive and fundraising events in which bereaved families can participate as well as find peer support and understanding.

Our **Worldwide Candle Lighting** event in December 2018 created a 'wave of light' around the UK (and the world) in memory of children and brothers and sisters who have died too soon. Public and private events throughout the country marking the candle lighting were shared on social media. New for this year's event was a widely used virtual **'Book of Remembrance'** where families uploaded a photo and message of remembrance for their loved one on our website during the candle-lighting. Hundreds of parents and family members participated.



We collaborated with other charities and organisations

We continue to work with **other charities and professional organisations** in the field of **bereavement support**. TCF are represented on the **All Party Parliamentary Group for Bereavement Care** and the **National Bereavement Alliance (NBA)**. Our charity continued to contribute and provide input into the shaping of the Parental Leave and Pay Bill which provides for statutory bereavement leave and pay entitlement to bereaved parents. We also supported and promoted the establishment of the Child Funeral Fund in England and Wales.

We have good working relationships nationally and locally with a range of charities including Cruse, Papyrus, Coroners Court Support Service, AdFam, DrugFam, RoadPeace, SOBS UK, The Loss Foundation, The Good Grief Project, the Good Grief Trust and ataloss.

Our members, volunteers and staff have provided input into the **Child Death Review** information leaflet produced by the NHS England for bereaved parents, explaining what happens after the death of a child under 18 years. We have collaborated with, contributed to and supported the **Support After Suicide Partnership (SASP)** and **NBA** initiative of a **guidelines booklet for those wishing to start a bereavement support group** (due for publication September 2019). TCF attended and promoted our services at the **Suicide Bereavement UK International Conference** in Manchester in September 2018 and ran a workshop on parental grief at the **Cruse Scotland Conference (October 2018)**.

Contribution to **research into child loss and parental bereavement** continues to be an important part of our mission to increase understanding in this area.

Participants from The Compassionate Friends have been involved in studies including:

- First National Impact of Suicide Survey – a collaboration between the University of Manchester and the Support After Suicide Partnership
- Understanding the lived experience of being bereaved by drugs – University of Liverpool
- NHS England project to improve the feedback process for bereaved parents
- Health Education England’s study into families affected by the loss from suicide of an NHS employee
- An investigation and review by the Scottish Government into the arrangements in place for investigating the deaths of people being treated for mental illness or learning disability.

In Scotland we collaborated with the environmental charity, Beautiful Perth, to open in April 2018 a **memorial garden** in the city for The Compassionate Friends. This tranquil, stunning garden – featuring a memorial stone, rowan tree and dedicated bench is a place where bereaved parents and their families can come to remember their sons and daughters, brothers or sisters. Thank you warmly to Hugh McAninch, Regional Coordinator in Scotland who spearheaded this project.



Thank you to our supporters

The Compassionate Friends would like to acknowledge the support and express our immense thanks to all our donating members, friends of TCF, grant-givers and all those who donate to and fundraise for our charity – large or small. We also hugely appreciate the efforts of everybody who challenged themselves by running, cycling and walking throughout the year, and all who put on an event to raise vital funds for us.

All our services are provided at no charge to parents (or at cost or subsidised cost in the case of our supportive weekends and retreats) and it is due to the generosity, kindness and fundraising efforts of all of our supporters that we can achieve all that we do for bereaved families.



Thank you

to all our fabulous supporters!

The way ahead

We have had a busy and productive year but we know there is so much more to do for all those parents and their families who suffer the loss of a precious son or daughter, grandchild or sibling. We have made excellent progress in expanding peer support for bereaved parents and their families and increasing awareness of the impact of parental and sibling grief.

In 2019 and 2020 we will continue our focus on providing high quality support to anyone affected by the loss of a child and will raise awareness within the community of bereaved, as well as the general public, of support available from The Compassionate Friends. We will also continue to educate around the devastating impact and heartbreak that follows the death of a child.

We will:

- **Source funding and resources for the Grief Companion scheme.** With funding in place, this befriending initiative will be a key strategy for development during the next 1-3 years, helping to further reduce the isolation and lack of support felt by many bereaved parents.
- **Work to improve support for adult bereaved siblings** – including consideration of a dedicated website, creating more informal events and running bi-annual overnight retreats.
- **Continue to develop specialist support** for those parents and families bereaved by suicide, or drugs or alcohol, as well as childless parents (parents with no surviving children). We will increase and develop support for those bereaved suddenly, for instance through road traffic incidents, through murder and also those affected by long-term illness such as cancer, as well as those parents who were parent-carers for children with special needs and/or disabilities.
- **Care and support for our existing volunteers** will continue to be our focus. The **recruitment, training and support of new volunteers** will also be given priority. We will provide regional training and support days for all TCF volunteers and fund a new weekend training and supportive event.
- **Develop events for bereaved families** – including more **one-day events**, to encourage more localised peer support.
- **Focus on activities to support commemoration and fundraising** in our **50th anniversary year in 2019**. This will offer us opportunities to increase awareness of our charity through media and PR, as well as develop new events in which bereaved families can participate as well as find support and understanding.
- **Encourage and support more informal events** for bereaved parents, including walks, lunches, bring and share events, informal get-togethers.
- **Review and develop our online support services** including our private forums and groups, and other immediate helpline – type online support.



The Compassionate Friends

Supporting bereaved parents and their families

Get in touch

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Northern Ireland Helpline:

0288 77 88 016

General Enquiries

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TCF Library

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To find out more about TCF visit

www.tcf.org.uk | [f @tcf.org.uk](https://www.facebook.com/tcf.org.uk) [t @TCFCharityUK](https://www.twitter.com/TCFCharityUK)

Support TCF by donating



We cannot support bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents without your support. We appreciate any donations large or small.



Online

Donate online at
www.tcf.org.uk/donate



By phone

Donate by debit or credit card
call **0345 120 3785**

Founder: The Revd Canon Dr Simon Stephens OBE, President: The Countess Mountbatten of Burma

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