



Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of The Compassionate Friends (TCF)

Saturday 25 November 2023

Venue: Sarah Fell Theatre, Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London

1. Welcome – Given by George Burn, Co-Chair

George Burn introduced himself and Melian Mansfield, his co-chair, and welcomed those attending the 2023 Annual General Meeting. George introduced Carolyn Brice (CEO) and Sheila Phillips (Treasurer). He commented on the fantastic Strategy Away Day held earlier this month with the trustees, staff and representatives of the TCF volunteers' community. A productive discussion took place reflecting on things we had done well, what we can improve on and new ideas. The trustees are going to take this information and work it into existing strategic efforts and plans and results will be seen over the coming months. They recognize the superb work already being done, but there are challenging areas of the current wider economic environment. This impacts the strategy which has to be carefully balanced; both our fantastic staff and volunteers work extremely hard and the trustees would not want to overload them, but there is value still in looking at what we could do well, new or better.

2. Minutes of the 2022 AGM and matters arising

The draft Minutes were approved and adopted unanimously following the proposal of Jen Hughes, which was seconded by Adelle Brenner. There were no amendments nor matters arising from those minutes.

3. Chair's Report – update on the work of the Trustees - Given by Melian Mansfield, Co-Chair

Melian introduced the work of the trustees over the last 3 years following the review by Mosaic in 2020 and the subsequent setting up of a strategy group to draw up an action plan. They had 6 objectives, and 2 prerequisites which were to retain and build on TCF's infrastructure and to ensure sufficient funds, both really important to continue to provide the support we currently give.

The 6 key areas were as follows:

- Increase the reach, quantity and quality of services to bereaved parents
- Expand TCF services in those regions which are underserved
- Increase diversity and reach across all minority and under-represented groups
- Improve and develop support for bereaved siblings
- Provision of specialist groups without peer support by end of 2024
- Increase public awareness of TCF

These are all the areas we have been working on in the last 3 years and a lot of progress has been made and even through Covid there was amazing work by TCF to support families.

Melian then outlined what TCF had achieved:

- Our 50th anniversary in 2019
- The grief companion scheme formally set up in 2020
- The development of the walks programme around UK
- A new CRM system installed in office
- TCF reorganisation in Northern Ireland
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Policy and Complaints Policy developed and agreed
- Outsourced new bookkeepers to improve financial information
- Appointment of HR firm Connor to look at our policies and the way we recruit
- Volunteer agreement, Safeguarding Policy, Whistleblowing Policy, Social Media Policy, Pay Review Policy developed and agreed
- Beneficiaries and staff engagement survey to help us develop and provide the services in the best way we can
- Communications strategy presented to trustees
- New staff appointments: Grief Companion Manager and Administrator, Events & Community Fundraiser, Office Manager, Volunteers Assistant (who has left and has to be replaced)
- A recent away day

Outstanding matters:

- DEI and safeguarding training for staff, volunteers and trustees
- Incorporate the communications strategy into the work we do
- Complete our policy review
- Staff recruitment in process as 2 administrators have left
- A new 2024 strategy

Melian hoped TCF are providing the services that are needed and is always interested in other ideas of doing it differently.

4. Finance Report - Given by Sheila Phillips, Treasurer

Sheila presented the Annual Report and Accounts for the year 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. She advised that behind the figures is a lot of effort, goodwill and compassionate response to the work of resourcing and offering peer support to parents, siblings and grandparents. The Annual Report details the aims and achievements during 2022-23 which could not have taken place without the commitment of staff, volunteers and trustees. The funding needed to support the work of TCF has been generously donated by individuals, groups, businesses, trusts and foundations and many supporters of events held, and fundraising efforts made, during the year. Sheila referred to p25 of the *Annual Report and Accounts*, "Statement of Financial Activities" for 2022-23:

Total Income £488,834 (2021-22 £459,980)

Total Expenditure £567,343 (2021-22 £378,221)

The increase was a combination of a slight fall in general donations, subscriptions and other activities but an increase in income from events eg retreats and support days and general fundraising. Expenditure for the year was much higher than the previous year. This planned increase in all areas of support was possible due to the decision taken by the Trustees to ensure that unspent funds from the previous year, due to restrictions during Covid and an increase in income during the year, were effectively utilised. Fundraising is hampered if it is seen that too high a reserve of general, unrestricted funds is

held by the charity at the year end. There is distinction between unrestricted funds and restricted funds shown on p25. Charities are required to account separately for monies donated for specific projects or purposes. These funds are not included in the unrestricted funds figure when a charity's financial situation is being assessed by donors. Restricted Funds are those for which donors have specified a restriction, eg funding the Helpline, Grief Companion Scheme, or for work in a specific area of the country etc. We are obliged to keep clear records in respect of this type of income, and how it is spent, with a year end balance showing monies carried forward or funds all spent in the year so that a report can be given to donors to show that their funds have been spent in accordance with the restrictions placed on them.

At the end of the year 2022-23 the balances carried forward for this current year are:

Unrestricted Funds	£356,099	(2021-22 £421,488)
Restricted Funds	£ 78,693	(2021-22 £ 91,813)
Total	£434,792	(2021-22 £513,301)

On page 26 of Annual Report and Accounts, this figure is made up of

£ 40,149	Monies owing to TCF for gift aid, and monies spent which have been paid in advance for 2023-24
£411,108	Cash held on the main CAF bank account and other branch bank accounts
£ 16,465	Less monies owing at the year-end for supplier payments and HMRC taxes.

The funds carried forward provide a good start to TCF's work for the current year 2023-24. However, we are finding that raising income this year is a more challenging environment than 2022-23. We have a new way of accounting with more timely communication so can monitor the financial situation month by month. We have amended our budgeted expenditure for 2023-24 following assessment of the management accounts for the first six months of the year. To date this year the experience is:

- Income is lower than forecast
- Grants from Trusts and Foundations are less than expected
- Trusts and Foundations are generally not allocating multi-year funding
- The cost-of-living crisis means people are more cautious with their charitable giving
- The cost of running the charity is not going down as we are obliged to comply with numerous rules and regulations in respect of governance and this comes at a cost for professional help

The main focus of our work should be on offering and providing peer support so carefully detailed in the report. The work of planning and administering this work is undertaken by our staff and volunteers who work flat out to achieve a high standard and this comes at a cost, both personally and financially. At the beginning of this year our general reserves were healthy but as the year has progressed we have seen the downturn in income. Expenditure has to be curtailed so that we are able to end the year with sufficient funds to carry on into 2024-25. The Trustees monitor the finances carefully and it is turning out to be a tough year but we will rise to the challenge, Sheila thanked everyone for their support and asked that we raise the profile of TCF whenever there is an opportunity so that our essential work continues.

5. Vote on adoption of Annual Report and Financial Statements

George Burn thanked Sheila for all of her work in this area; Sheila, working closely with Carolyn, has kept TCF on an even keel after taking over from Nigel Taylor after he had to

step back. Nigel did a tremendous job and TCF are very lucky that Sheila has taken this on and are also fortunate to have another accountant in Warren Weiss, our Company Secretary. Together they all do a fantastic job.

The adoption of the Annual Report and Financial Statements was approved and adopted unanimously following the proposal of Adelle Brenner, which was seconded by Robert Richwood.

6. Update on the work of TCF – Given by Carolyn Brice, CEO

Carolyn introduced herself and advised that she had been in the role since 2017 having worked with TCF since 2012, and she is also a bereaved parent. Together with the staff team she is responsible for the operational side of TCF, working closely with the staff and wonderful volunteers to deliver our layers of support. The detailed annual report has been published so Carolyn thought it was helpful to go through the layers of support that TCF offer, which is a huge range on quite limited finances for a national charity.

National helpline

This is our oldest layer of support being around since the early 70s. Run by our Volunteer and Helpline Manager Ruth Mercier. In the year 22/23 they received 1200 calls up by a third on the previous year and 1400 e-mail requests for support, nearly a 50% increase on the previous year. We noticed that newly bereaved parents were finding us much earlier on in their loss, which has created challenges for our staff and volunteers.

Local Support Groups

We have about 90 volunteer facilitators running between 65 to 70 groups and 89 facilitators in a 1-1 local support role (some are also walks facilitators) We have 4 volunteers supporting around a specific type of loss.

Retreats/Support Days

We have had 7 retreats and 2 support days – (including a retreat and support day for siblings) some are around general loss, others for specific loss. We recently had a very successful Dads' Day in London; this was the first one with 30 attendees which we hope to repeat. This was one of our aims to get more dads involved.

Grief Companion Scheme

This is our befriending scheme where we match longer bereaved volunteers with newly bereaved parents. This has previously been lottery funded with some additional new funding from them; we may have to find extra funding to keep the scheme going. The scheme is managed by the wonderful Shirley Gower and assisted by Suzanne Cannon. Since the scheme started to the end of March 23 there have been 225 parents supported, between 3 to 12 months, where there has been no other local support.

Support for Specific Circumstances

This is part of our strategic plan. These were originally set up online during Covid but some have carried on to date as they have been very successful and welcomed where there is no local support. We are fortunate to have 30 regular online group facilitators. We also have a specialist suicide support team with 4 or 5 supporters for those parents bereaved by suicide.

Walks

Originally started in London by Terry Ahern and over the last few years have now developed all over the country with over 40 walks so far this year. A wonderfully informal form of support.

Library

Run by our volunteer librarian Mary Hartley who offers a brilliant highly personalised

support with over 800 books in the TCF library, originally set up by Catharine Pointer.

Printed/Digital Publications

We have over 50 leaflets and supportive publications and are unique as they are written by bereaved parents for bereaved parents.

FB groups

We have 11 private groups for different kinds of loss, moderated by our volunteers and we have our online forum.

Information for Professionals

We are being contacted more and more by professionals eg GPs/ counsellors/ NHS staff /social prescribers needing support for their patients or clients. They want to check us out to ensure we give high quality support, so we are having a lot more contact on the helpline by professionals. We have produced a new leaflet 'Information for professionals' sponsored by Mari and Eric who are with us today.

Sibling Support

This is part of our strategic plan. We have held a Retreat and support days, and regular online support.

Who we Support

Parents 10685

Siblings 1436

Grandparents 222

Professional 89

We need to be wary of the numbers as they are based on our CRM data which is not completely clean, but the percentages shown in the report are accurate. It can be noted a large part of our support is due to loss by suicide.

We have 311 volunteers which is amazing and we have more volunteers now who are performing less roles which is better, though it puts pressure on our staff team who are supporting them. We prioritise and volunteer supporters and we really value and respect them as we have no charity without our volunteers and the high quality support they offer. We have been focusing on volunteer recruitment but this has been a challenging time.

Volunteers must be three to four years bereaved. We have spent a lot of time providing a training and onboarding support programme with Sharon, Ruth and Shirley supporting our volunteers, both one to one and in online support meetings. We have our Hear For You listening scheme which all volunteers can access up to 3 sessions with counsellors who are bereaved parents. Our volunteers are also funded for our retreats and support days where we can. One volunteer said 'I really appreciate the care TCF show for volunteers.... Your care is very much appreciated and enables me to continue to supporting others'

Carolyn advised some of the findings from the 2023 members survey.

94% of responses were from parents, and where the parents come from is broadly in line with the UK population density. We are starting to reach areas where we didn't have support before eg North and SW England.

We are being found quicker; over half find us within first 6 months of loss, though this can create challenges for staff and volunteers.

We are working hard to spread our services into other communities although the survey says we are a predominantly white charity. Part of our DEI policy is to try and improve reach.

Most people found out about us via an Internet search; in 2020 it was 34%, up to 41% this year. We must ensure our presence is right up there and this is part of our communications strategy presented to the trustees. Word of mouth is important too.

We are aware of improvements and changes needed, such as insufficient regional support, quality of support groups, knowing about TCF, and specific sibling groups. We will look at these and will be working on them.

Carolyn thanked the trustees for their support, advice and sound council as she cannot do her role without them and their experience and knowledge. She also thanked the staff team, Ruth, Shirley, Sharon, Stephen, Jenny, Suzanne, Karen and Sophie. Two of our staff administration team, Charite and Karolina left this autumn but we will be welcoming a new head of administration, David shortly. Carolyn thanked the staff team for working incredibly hard and being dedicated, committed and passionate about supporting our volunteers and our layers of support. Carolyn thanked all our amazing volunteers, all over country, who offer the highest quality of peer support using their own experiences and she expressed her gratitude. TCF couldn't run without our volunteers. She expressed her privilege and pride to be the CEO of this amazing charity and promised to continue to do her best.

George offered his thanks to Carolyn and described the work of TCF as a 'tour de force'.

7. Fundraising - Given by Stephen Armstrong, Head of Finance, via zoom

Stephen advised that we depend on grants from foundations and trusts, and that makes up about 60% of our fundraising income, from existing and new. Next, 30- 35% of our income is from fundraising events eg marathons, birthday funds, cake sales, in memoriam page (on our website). Then we have individual donations, such as bursary donations, donation when buying merchandise. We get a small amount funding from sponsorship of leaflets and legacies.

The challenges we are facing are quite substantial as it is getting more and more difficult to raise funds from our usual sources. Some have diverted money to only fund the cost of living crisis such as food banks, some have smaller amounts to give away and some have even closed down. It is also taking three to four months before the money arrives from some trusts.

We must look at how to broaden the range of individual donors as much as possible away from the bereavement community and how to reach other people who might be willing to make a donation. We must look at our range of donors eg grant making trusts, individuals, corporate sector, community organisations, and broaden our range as much as possible of potential funders rather than relying on just three or four substantial donors.

We would like to put on a successful fundraising event of our own each year. The last 2 years we have run our 2.5 challenge (based on our 250 volunteers) which was less successful this year than the first. We are thinking about what we can do which people will enjoy doing.

How we can all help

- Big Give campaign starts on the 28th of November and will be publicised on the website
- Fundraise for your birthday via Facebook donation
- Hold a coffee morning/bake sale (we can provide collection boxes)
- Lots of events around next year eg cycling, running, walking – please speak to Jenny about those
- Sources of community funds local to you eg rotary, sports club, faith group
- Through your work if your company supports charities

Stephen thanked Maria Ahern for arranging to talk to the law firm that sponsored the dads' away day about bereavement support. Stephen thanked those in attendance for all they do. George thanked Stephen for his report and for his fundraising.

8. Any Other Business/Q & A's

Melian thanked all the staff, volunteers, donors and trustee board, and Sheila for doing the accounts. She particularly thanked Caroline for her amazing work, and commented that how much work has been covered is outstanding. She also thanked the staff team, and in particular the way the staff and volunteers kept the opportunities going during Covid. She thanked Stephen and those who donate as funding is critical in this difficult climate.

There was no other business and no questions received. She thanked all the attendees for coming to the AGM.

9. Guest Speaker

Melian welcomed Maria Ahern, former chair of trustees, and current volunteer, who gave a talk entitled 'A Compass and Some Sensible Shoes'

A vote of thanks to Maria was given by George. He commented that her talk was very moving and we were lucky to have Maria here today and were very grateful for everything she, and Terry, does in James' memory.

10. Close

The meeting was formally declared closed by George at 3.40pm.