



# The Compassionate Friends of Canada

## When A Child Dies...

## National Newsletter – Spring 2023

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### *Transforming the pain of grief into the elixir of hope.*

**Reverend Simon Stephens, Founder, TCF.**

Welcome to the Spring edition of the national newsletter! Our objective continues to be to provide news, information, and items of interest to connect members from coast to coast, and to provide guidance to leaders in organizing events and activities. If you have any material that you would like to contribute, or suggestions for topics that you would like to see included, please e-mail the National Office.

### **Thoughts for Spring**

The lengthening days offer a promise of more pleasant times ahead as another winter recedes into memory. However, we know that despite our best hopes, Mother Nature often has a surprise to set us back, just when we think the worst is safely behind us.

As bereaved parents, we have experienced the vagaries of our grief journey and know that the road ahead is fraught with unexpected, and unwanted, challenges. We also know that we have the resilience to overcome them and move forward.

We hope that this Spring brings you more steps forward than backward.

**Welcome New Chapters:** Over the last several months, we have been pleased to support new chapters in Abbotsford (BC) (restarted), Lakeland/Cold Lake (AB), Nipawin (SK), Ajax (ON), Hamilton and Area (ON), Peel Region (ON), and Sudbury (ON) (restarted). Welcome and thank you to the new leaders for their commitment to supporting bereaved parents in their communities.

**Donations:** We gratefully acknowledge donations made directly to our Treasurer and through the *Canada Helps* link on our website. This month, we send a big “Thank You” for recent donations from TCF Kamloops (BC), TCF Lakeland/Cold Lake (AB), TCF Perth (ON), TCF Waterloo (ON), and an individual in BC.

**Chapter Chats:** In keeping with our tagline “*We need not walk alone*”, we are initiating a series of quarterly meetings for chapter leaders. The objective is to provide an opportunity for leaders from coast to coast to meet informally, share news, ideas and questions, and reinforce the connections that we all feel as a family of grieving parents. The sessions will be hosted by a Board member over Zoom for up to an hour and attendance is optional.

The first “chat” session is planned for **Saturday, March 25<sup>th</sup> at 12:00 noon Eastern** time. Please e-mail the National Office if you would like to receive the Zoom invitation and link for this meeting.

**Chapter Check-ins:** We have completed most of our outreach calls but are still waiting for some responses. If you have not yet given your feedback, please contact the National Office.

**Chapter Annual Reports:** One of the few requirements for being a registered chapter of The Compassionate Friends of Canada is to submit a Chapter Annual Report to the National Office. The Annual Report is our principal channel for confirming chapter contact details, as well as a summary of activities, needs, questions, and concerns. In recent years, fewer than half of the chapters listed on our website have provided a report. We recognize that most chapters have no significant changes from year to year, but we do need to know that you are still active. As a minimum, please return the Annual Report form marked “No Changes”. The form was included with the recent outreach emails and is also available as a fillable pdf file from the *Chapter Leaders* section of the website.

Of course, we are always pleased to hear at any time of any special events or activities to help or inspire other chapters who may be looking for new ideas.

**Bright Idea!** From their check-in, we learned that TCF Parry Sound (ON) donated funds to install a memorial picnic table on a hill overlooking the city. After their Candle Lighting Celebration, parents are invited to write their children’s names on pieces of birch bark and scatter them in the woods surrounding the table. A simple but powerful symbol of letting go while honouring their child’s memory.

**Facebook Groups:** Our closed group for parents currently has over 1,200 members sharing their stories and messages of support. However, our *Men in Grief* closed group is much smaller and less active. To increase communication and discussion among members, we would like to invite a bereaved father to take on the role of admin for this group. If this special support role is of interest to you, please e-mail the National Office.

**Facilitator Training:** Seven members from Ontario, Alberta, and BC attended the most recent session on February 18<sup>th</sup> using the updated handbook. The next training session will likely be held in June.

**Mark Your Calendar:** The **2023 Annual General Meeting** of TCF Canada will be held on **Saturday, June 3<sup>rd</sup>** starting at **12 noon Eastern** time. This is an opportunity to appreciate the cross-country aspect of our community.

### **Why Do We Need By-laws?**

*(The following article from the September 2016 newsletter is reprinted as guidance to new chapters and as a refresher for those more established.)*

Our Chapter has just started up, why do we need by-laws? In reality, you probably don’t need them right now, but there are some circumstances where they are useful or may even be required.

Most organizations, whether they are a corporation, a small business, or a volunteer-run not-for-profit, go through stages of maturity as the scope and size of their operations expand. The stages generally reflect the degree to which their business practices (“the way they do things”) are documented and followed.

The first or start-up step is often referred to as the “Hero” stage, where everything depends on one or two individuals to provide vision, direction, and in many cases, actually do most of the hands-on work. The principal (and often only) documents are the *“Seven Principles of the Compassionate Friends”* and *“Sharing Circle Guidelines”*. Many TCF Chapters find themselves stalled at this stage and there is often a real risk that the founder(s) will either lose interest or burn out due to an excessive workload.

The second stage is reached when there are some written instructions that allow activities to be divided among several individuals. These may include basic information, for example, important contact details, where the meeting room keys are kept, how to facilitate a Sharing Circle, or how to organize special events, such as a Candle Lighting. These initial procedures allow others to conduct recurring activities while the original founder(s) can take on more of a coordination role.

The final stage of maturity is where all activities are fully documented with written policies and procedures that are reviewed on a regular basis. The organization functions smoothly, even though the original founder(s) may have stepped back or even moved on. The benefit is that everyone knows what they are to do and how they are to do it,

while the leader(s) can put their energy into more strategic issues and only become involved in day-to-day situations that require special consideration.

How “mature” is your Chapter? As volunteer-run organizations, only larger and long-established Chapters are likely to have or to need fully developed policies and procedures. However, for smaller Chapters, even simple instructions can reduce the burden on a few key individuals by allowing activities to be shared among several supporters.

There are situations where documented procedures are necessary. In particular, if your Chapter wishes to register as a charitable organization, the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) requires a formal Constitution and By-Laws to define how the organization intends to conduct its business. In addition to naming responsible key persons, CRA requires an annual report of your Chapter’s activities, including financial statements. These reports are intended to confirm that the organization is indeed operating as a legitimate charity and is not just a tax-avoidance scheme. In this situation, having by-laws allows your Chapter to qualify for charitable status so that you can issue tax receipts for donations to cover your expenses.

Another situation is when a Chapter intends to incorporate, either provincially or federally. Incorporation creates a separate legal entity that provides a degree of separation of liability for the individuals managing the day-to-day business. Both CRA and provincial agencies have specific procedures for incorporation that must be followed.

So, to answer the original question: if a Chapter is just starting up, it does not need to have by-laws. But if you want to encourage others to share the workload, consider writing down guidelines for how certain activities should be conducted. And if you intend to register as a charity, or to incorporate, sorry, but CRA has already made the decision for you!

**National Projects:** The current TCF Canada Operating Plan includes several programs to create and improve support services to bereaved parents across the country. Previous initiatives included refreshing our grief information leaflets and making them available at no charge, and creating a link for donations through *Canada Helps*. More recently, virtual support groups and a recommended reading list have been offered. We are now hoping to “reboot” some programs that have been delayed due to limited resources. Please contact the National Office if you are able to help with any of these initiatives.

**Outreach:** Most parents looking for support only hear of TCF by word of mouth. We would like to raise our profile with social service agencies, other support organizations, medical professionals, churches, funeral homes etc., in every province.

**National Gathering:** We have received several enquiries about organizing another National Gathering. Although the pandemic put a brake on our plans, we are still looking for a chapter to act as host.

**Archives:** Since TCF Canada was established in Winnipeg in 1986, the National Office has been relocated several times. Along with changes in technology, many paper records have been abandoned or even lost. The archives project is an attempt to recapture the history of TCF in Canada.

**Resources:** A reminder that the following resources are available on the website:

**Grief Information Leaflets:** The updated leaflets are available under the *Resources* tab as pdf documents for download at no charge. Please consider making copies available at your Sharing Circles.

**Facebook Groups:** Our largest TCF Canada community is the *Parents* closed Facebook group, which currently has over 1,300 members across the country sharing stories and offering support. We also offer smaller closed groups for *Siblings* and for *Men in Grief*. To join any of these groups, click on *Resources* → *Facebook Links*.

**Resources for Chapter Leaders:** The website includes a link to the *TCF Canada Leadership* closed Facebook group, and the *Resources* tab includes an area for Chapter Leaders with various forms and reference articles. Please contact the National Office for the password to access this area.

**Closing Thought:** We never lose sight of the fact that TCF is run by and for bereaved parents and our primary mission is to support families grieving the death of a child. Effective support combines empathy and understanding with behind-the-scenes coordination. Finding the right balance is a challenge but is essential to achieving our mission.