



# The Compassionate Friends of Canada

## When A Child Dies...

## National Newsletter – Summer 2023

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### NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

**Andy Bond** (Ottawa, ON)

– President

**Donna Rodin** (Medicine Hat, AB)

– Vice- President / Past President /  
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**Diana Cadigan** (St. John's, NL)

– Treasurer

**Eileen Bond** (Ottawa, ON)

– Chapter Development

### DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE

**Larry Cadman** (Ottawa, ON)

– Webmaster

**Barb Noseworthy** (Burin Peninsula, NL)

**Karen Destun** (Waterloo, ON)

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

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

Welcome to the Summer 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.

### **The Warmth of Summer**

We usually look forward to Summer bringing warm relief after the cold days of winter. However, in these uncertain times of climate change, wildfires in BC, Alberta, Nova Scotia and Quebec, and a record heatwave in Ontario, remind us to be careful what we wish for.

One wish we do hold on to is that our loved ones could be by our side and part of our lives again. But no matter how strong our hope, we know that it is not to be and that we still must face our loss.

May this Summer bring you comfort in your grief and warm memories of those who left us too soon.

**Annual General Meeting:** The TCF Canada 2023 AGM was held on Saturday June 3<sup>rd</sup> with 9 chapters represented. President Andy Bond reported that most chapters have resumed in-person meetings, and some are continuing with parallel on-line sessions. Our *Parents*

closed Facebook group has grown to 1,285 members, while the *Siblings* and *Men in Grief* groups continue with many fewer members and a lower level of activity. The website is viewed almost 2,000 times per month, with approx. 700 downloads. He noted the various chapter support initiatives undertaken in the last year and invited anyone interested in assisting to contact the National Office.

Chapter Development Director Eileen Bond reported that we currently have 47 active chapters and 13 contacts across the country. Start-up packages were sent to 9 potential chapters, and 4 new chapters started. Regrettably, 5 chapters closed. She noted that 10 chapters made a financial contribution, and only 15 chapters submitted an Annual Report.

Treasurer Diana Cadigan reported that with income from individual and chapter donations, use of volunteer resources, and ongoing cost controls, we were able to achieve a balanced budget in 2022/23.

Detailed reports are available from the National Office.

**Welcome New Board Members:** We are pleased to announce 2 new members of the Board of TCF Canada – Barb Noseworthy, Burin Peninsula (NL), and Karen Destun, Waterloo (ON). Welcome and thank you for your commitment to supporting the mission of TCF Canada.

**Welcome Back / New Chapter:** We are pleased to announce that the dormant chapter in Fredericton (NB) has restarted with new leaders. Thank you for your commitment to supporting bereaved parents in your community.

**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 Calgary (AB), Burin Peninsula (NL), Winnipeg (MB), Kelowna (BC), Metro Vancouver (BC), and one individual in Ontario.

**Chapter Chats:** Our first chat session reinforced the cross-country aspect of our TCF community by bringing together leaders from Vancouver Island to Newfoundland (and places in-between) for an informal discussion. The next chat will be held on **Saturday June 17<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 am Eastern** time for up to an hour. If you would like to participate, please e-mail the National Office for the Zoom invitation and link.

**Facilitator Training:** The next training session will be held on **Saturday June 24<sup>th</sup> starting at 1:30pm Eastern** time for about 90 minutes. The training will use the updated *Information for Facilitators* handbook and is open to both new and experienced facilitators to learn and to contribute. To register, please e-mail the National Office.

Since the handbook was compiled for the 2017 National Gathering in Medicine Hat (AB), the training has been presented 14 times with 93 attendees.

## **Where are the Parents?**

During our check-in calls, several chapters noted that in-person attendance at the Circles is much lower than pre-pandemic, often as few as 2 or 3. This may be due in part to a reluctance to re-engage in any social contact after months of semi-isolation, or the relative inconvenience of “dressing up” or travelling compared to meeting on-line. A second concern is parents who indicate that they will come but do not follow through. No-shows are disappointing for other attendees and for the facilitator who may have incurred rental fees or other costs to open the facility. Our reaction to their absence is an important factor in our own self-care.

As facilitators, it is important to remember that we can only offer a helping hand, we cannot make people take it. We offer support by just being there when needed. Those who do make the effort to come to a meeting show that they recognize and seek out the benefits of peer support. In a group, different points of view can stimulate discussion. Even with one person, the facilitator can know that they are helping that individual. The parent who decides to attend unannounced at the last minute will appreciate finding someone to share their story.

It can be discouraging to think that grieving parents who do not come to meetings do not appreciate the personal commitment required to organize a TCF chapter and to coordinate a Sharing Circle. If you are feeling discouraged, try to recall your motivation in starting a TCF chapter. Perhaps you found support when you needed it and wanted to give back. Perhaps your early meetings were well attended, and you saw the change in others. This mental “reboot” can help sustain your belief in the TCF mission despite the challenges that may arise.

Some practical suggestions to increase attendance and minimize no-shows:

- Publish a public service announcement (PSA) for the local press or radio community events calendar.
- Set up a telephone, text or e-mail contact list to remind members of upcoming meetings and other events.
- Invite a guest speaker to talk about a topic of interest.
- Follow-up with no-shows to see if there was a specific reason why they did not attend.
- Arrange a social activity, walk, potluck or picnic lunch, to encourage people to get together.

If you have any other recommendations, or examples that work for your chapter, we encourage you to share them on the TCF Canada Leadership Facebook page through the link on the website.

*On the subject of Sharing Circles, we are reprinting the following article from our October 2017 newsletter as guidance to new chapters and a refresher to those longer established.*

## **What Should I Say at a Sharing Circle?**

While there are guidelines and script suggestions for the Circle Opening and Circle Closing, the time between is deliberately unstructured to suit the particular needs of those attending. But even without a prescribed format, the group discussion should still adhere to the key Principles of The Compassionate Friends. In the Sharing Circle, the core principle is “*Respect*” which should be both given and received by all participants.

“*Respect*” means creating a safe space to share by not criticizing or dismissing any opinions with which we may disagree but presenting contrary ideas in a non-confrontational manner.

“*Respect*” means recognising that although we all share the pain of our child’s death, each individual grieves differently and may be at different stages of their grief journey. Each has the right to be heard, and in return, should be open to hearing other points of view.

“*Respect*” means that the newly bereaved feel that their loss is acknowledged and that even the feeling of “going crazy” that they often experience is understood and validated by those further along. Empathy and acceptance are key, along with realistic encouragement that openly sharing their story will help them get through the emotional turmoil.

“*Respect*” means sharing our own relevant experiences while refraining from offering grief “solutions”. Say “I found doing xxx helped me” rather than “You should do xxx”.

“*Respect*” means accepting the spiritual situation of each individual and not promoting any specific religious or philosophical ideology or practice. Remember the insightful words of the TCF Credo – “Some have found their faith to be a source of strength, others are struggling to find answers”. Offer support but let them find their own answers.

“*Respect*” means encouraging conversation by asking “open” questions (i.e., ones that require more than a simple “Yes” or “No” answer). For example, instead of “Did you have a good day?”, ask “How was your day?”.

Although emotions will often be quite raw in the Sharing Circle, clearly stating the “Ground Rules” in the opening and a respectful attitude on the part of each participant will ensure that almost any topic can be discussed openly and with sensitivity to the benefit of all.

**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 almost 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:** Helping others in their time of greatest need is both a rewarding and a challenging commitment, especially when carrying our own grief. As the airlines remind us, we should take care of ourselves first, so that we are then able to assist others. In thanking you for your support to grieving parents, we encourage you to be aware of your own well-being. Remember, we can only offer help to parents - we cannot make them accept it before they are ready.