



# The Compassionate Friends of Canada

## When A Child Dies....

## National Newsletter – Winter 2023

### REGISTERED OFFICE

The Compassionate Friends of Canada  
c/o 1346 Ravens View Drive  
Victoria BC, Canada  
V9B 6P7

E-mail: [nationaloffice@tcfcanada.net](mailto:nationaloffice@tcfcanada.net)

Website: [www.tcfcanada.net](http://www.tcfcanada.net)

Toll-free line: 1-866-823-0141

### NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

**Andy Bond** (Ottawa, ON)

– President

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

– Vice- President / Past President /  
Facebook Host

**Diana Cadigan** (St. John's, NL)

– Treasurer

**Eileen Bond** (Ottawa, ON)

– Chapter Development

### DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE

**Larry Cadman** (Ottawa, ON)

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**Karen Destun** (Waterloo, ON)

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

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

Welcome to the Winter 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 on the New Year

With the turning of a calendar page, a New Year used to represent the opportunity for a new start, a fresh beginning full of hope, promise and even resolutions to make positive changes. Today, it can be a challenge to find and maintain a positive attitude given the range of economic, environmental, and geo-political uncertainties that surround us.

For those grieving the loss of a child, another new year represents another marker on the grief journey, as days become weeks, months, and years without our loved ones. Although the length of each personal journey is unknown, we can hold on to the belief that we are moving closer to acceptance of our loss and a time when we will be able to look forward with hope rather than looking back with regret.

For those feeling lost, overwhelmed, or uncertain, we encourage you to seek out the support of others who have travelled the same road.

May this new year be your time to begin to look forward again.

**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” to TCF Ottawa (ON), TCF Montreal (QC), and one individual in MB.

**Chapter Chats:** Our chat sessions provide an opportunity for leaders across the country to connect, share ideas, ask questions, and discuss issues in an informal setting. With so many December activities competing for our time, the next chat has been deferred to January on a date to be announced. To participate, please e-mail the National Office.

**Facilitator Training:** The recent training session on October 21<sup>st</sup> brought together 7 participants from British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, and New Brunswick. The next session will be held on **Saturday, January 13<sup>th</sup>** and is open to both new and experienced facilitators to learn and to contribute. To register, please e-mail the National Office.

**World-wide Candle Lighting:** When you receive this newsletter, the annual candle lighting celebration will be less than a week away. We encourage chapters who are organizing their own event to publicize it as widely as possible and offer as many bereaved parents as possible the opportunity to acknowledge their children who have left too soon. Parents who cannot attend in-person events can still participate in the on-line sessions offered by TCF US in 4 time zones across the continent. Visit [www.compassionatefriends.org/wcl/](http://www.compassionatefriends.org/wcl/) to register. We hope that you will find comfort knowing that you are not alone, but part of an international community sharing this powerful and moving event.

**Outreach Initiative:** In July of this year, the Board started an outreach process to increase the awareness of TCF across the country. The outreach team began by investigating how parents are connecting with TCF. They found that while the landscape of grief due to child loss is as complex as ever, the way by which parents are seeking support may be shifting. This may in part be due to the changes in technology, and globalization of information.

By October, each chapter received access to a survey to identify gains and gaps in how TCF Canada reaches bereaved parents. The responses provided some action items to address as well as some recommendations. The team will continue to review and work towards outreach initiatives.

In identifying connections for outreach, the team linked with the Canadian Grief Alliance and their endeavor to improve grief literacy across the nation. During late November and early December, the CGA offered a public survey on grief resources to inform their initiative. TCF National provided this link to its chapters to ensure that child loss with its complexities was included in their information gathering.

The Board is aware of and grateful for the time and effort that each of you put into your chapters to be available and support other grieving parents while you yourself are also grieving. We understand how difficult it can be and thank you.

**Surviving the Holidays:** For many families, the Hanukkah / Christmas / Kwanzaa season is a time for celebration, gift giving, and happy gatherings. For those grieving a loss, it is a painful reminder of the absence of a loved one. BC parent Vanessa Hutton suggests some ways to minimise the stress by doing what feels right for you and not what others may be expecting. The full text of her article is on our website under *Resources -> Articles*.

**Decorating:** Take some time to consider what is right for you this year. It may be that decorating is too much, so take a pass or just buy a poinsettia.

**Entertaining:** Attending an event can be overwhelming. Hosting an event may be too much to expect of yourself depending on how fresh your loss is. Make your choices based on what supports you.

**Traditions:** It can be comforting to set up a ritual around a holiday tradition that honours your child and gives you a chance to feel connected to them.

**Crying:** Give yourself the space to cry without feeling like you are bringing others down. Prepare yourself for the tears that are likely to follow an event where you have had a good time or that your child might have attended with you.

**Take A Pass:** If you are able to and it supports where you are at in your grieving process, then by all means take a pass on the holidays. If you go away, remember you will take your grief with you wherever you go. A vacation may or may not be helpful to your process. It is up to you. There is no right answer.

**Small Talk:** Be prepared for questions you don't want to answer such as "*How many kids do you have?*" or "*What is your child up to?*". How can you respond to casual conversation without sacrificing your emotional well-being.

**Find Comfort:** Take the time to reflect and explore what brings you comfort. Simple things like a hot bath, a day of seasonal activities, listening to music or indulging in a hot apple cider by the fire may come easily. Seek comfort actively, celebrate the small successes you will have and try to grow from there.

**Seek Joy:** Remember your child and how much they love you and what they would want for you. Take comfort in this and seek joy in small ways throughout the day.

**Self Care:** Self-care is a unique personal expression that will look different to different people. It can be staying home if you don't feel up to going to an event, or an outing with family or friends. Please take good care of yourself this holiday season.

**Closing Thought:** As I complete my eighth decade this month, I've borrowed this space for some personal reflection. My working career was in program management but several years into a grief journey, and through my involvement with TCF, I found that I had become more empathetic with others. Combining empathy with my broad business and technical knowledge, I changed direction completely to a more satisfying role helping others as a career transition coach.

The lesson is that grief is a journey of transition. No matter your starting point, when you eventually emerge from your cocoon of grief - and you will emerge - you will find a new, stronger person with the courage to face the future, whose tragic loss is still part of who they are, but which no longer defines them. *With Best Wishes for the New Year, Andy*