



The Compassionate Friends of Canada

When A Child Dies...

National Newsletter – Summer 2024

REGISTERED OFFICE

The Compassionate Friends of Canada
c/o 31 Maplehill Way
Ottawa ON, Canada
K2C 3H1

E-mail: nationaloffice@tcfcanada.net

Website: www.tcfcanada.net

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

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

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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.

Annual General Meeting: The 2024 Annual General Meeting of TCF Canada was held on Saturday, June 1st with 8 chapters represented. President, Andy Bond reported that many chapters are finding that in-person attendance at meetings and events has not returned to pre-pandemic levels and suggested that, in addition to sharing circles, leaders consider organizing casual social activities to engage and retain parents. He outlined several initiatives undertaken over the last year and noted that the Board is always ready to welcome new members. Chapter Development Director, Eileen Bond reported that there are currently 45 active TCF chapters across the country and 16 contacts. She noted that only 18 chapters submitted an annual report and only 9 chapters made a financial contribution to TCF Canada. She described the various support resources available to chapter leaders, including on-line training and “Chapter Chats”. Treasurer, Diana Cadigan reported that, as result of voluntary donations and ongoing cost restraint, we achieved a small surplus over the year. The meeting approved the current Board of Directors

and the move of the registered office from Victoria to Ottawa. Detailed reports are available from the National Office.

Following the AGM, the Board approved Karen Destun as Vice-President and thanked Donna Rodin for serving in this role for the last 4 years. Donna will continue as the lead admin for our closed Facebook groups.

Chapter Annual Reports: From a discussion at the AGM, we learned that some chapter leaders could not access the on-line Annual Report Form without a Google account. To work around this unforeseen issue, we will forward a fillable pdf version to all chapters. Hopefully, this version will allow more chapters to submit a report.

Pins and Books: A recent review of national office files found a supply of TCF Canada pins and copies of the TCF Canada book of poems *Reflections from the Heart*. These items were being kept for the next National Gathering which regrettably was delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic and is still to be arranged. Rather than remain in storage, the

Board has agreed that, while supplies last, they could be distributed at no charge to chapters who request them. The only cost would be a donation of \$20 to cover the cost of postage for books or \$5 for pins only.

If you would like to receive pins and/or books, please contact the National Office and provide your mailing address. To ensure all chapters have an opportunity to take up this offer, there will be a limit of 3 books and 5 pins per chapter.

Donations: This issue, we give a big “Thank You” for donations from TCF Burin Peninsula (NL), TCF Metro Vancouver (BC), TCF Calgary (AB), TCF Winnipeg (MB), TCF Abbotsford (BC), TCF Kelowna (BC), TCF Waterloo (ON), TCF Kamloops (BC), individual donations in memory of Paulette Cadman (Ottawa ON), and individuals in Victoria (BC) and Vernon (BC).

The latter donation came with a message that reminded us that the results of our outreach are often not apparent. With the donor’s agreement, we are sharing it to encourage those who may feel they do not have an impact.

“I was in Armstrong BC today and stopped briefly at Askew's grocery store. I noticed an event table set outside the store with a "Compassionate Friends" banner fixed overhead. Since I was running late for an appointment, I didn't stop to engage with the kind people there who were preparing food and talking to others who had stopped. On my exit from the store, I paused briefly and saw some photos of smiling, lovely young people displayed on the table and realized they were loved family members and friends, taken too soon. One of the women behind the table gave me a warm smile and greeting. I said hello and am now sorry I didn't stop and speak with her. So what if I was late for an appointment? I'm guessing she has lost someone dear to her, and I would like to tell her I am so sorry and wish her well. Thank you, Compassionate Friends, for the work you all do.”

A Walk to Remember: TCF Burin Peninsula (NL) held their third annual event on June 8th, with 25 parents participating. Despite a last-minute change of venue, the weather cooperated, and many valuable memories were created and shared. And, to complete the celebration, there was cake!



Facilitator Training / Chapter Chat: These activities will take a pause over the summer. Please contact the National Office to register for the fall session(s).

One Chapter's Story: Ron Toews of TCF Abbotsford (BC) included a long update with his annual report that reflected several issues that we also hear from other chapters. With his agreement, we are sharing a slightly abridged version to demonstrate that, despite our extended geography, "We Do Not Walk Alone".

"We relaunched the Abbotsford chapter of The Compassionate Friends in 2021. In 2022, my wife Dianne was diagnosed with cancer and underwent chemo. She is now in remission but was adamant that I should continue in her absence, offering monthly in-person sharing meetings, the Candle Lighting event, as well as our summer barbecue. The Abbotsford Hospice Society graciously offered us a monthly meeting room (free of charge). We've been meeting there for ~ 2+ years now and will continue to do so.

The only event not held at the Hospice location is the summer barbecue, which we host at our farm. This event is significant in that it brings together the newly grieving with the "old grievers". The old grievers by-and-large no longer feel the need to attend the monthly sharing circles but do appreciate the opportunity to attend the summer barbecue, to connect with both former friends and the newly grieving. For that reason, we tend to have a considerably larger attendance at the potluck barbecue -- sometimes ~25-30.

I would consider the Abbotsford TCF chapter to be very active. It is quite typical to receive ~ 1 - 2 phone calls or emails a week from newly grieving parents. Dianne and I often invite the newly grieving to our home for coffee, to listen, lean in, cry together, and invite them to be aware of Abbotsford's TCF and resources. We also reach out proactively to parents who experience the devastating loss of a child. The Abbotsford Hospice Society also actively puts us in touch with newly grieving parents, which means that nearly every monthly sharing circle has 1 or 2 new parents/families in attendance.

When Dianne and I began attending the Abbotsford TCF monthly meetings in 2007 after our son died, we joined a fairly stable TCF. The members had become friends over time, and we found ourselves welcomed into a warm and caring -- albeit sad -- fraternity, with most parents having similar or compatible backgrounds. The group seemed more able to absorb and help carry the pain and grief of others attending. The new reality is radically different. Personal lives predating the death of children seem messier. When the death of a child is added to the mix, the newly grieving are often wracked and wrecked by layers of complexity in their families and/or marriages. The group is less cohesive and, in many ways, more needy. Now, "regular" attendance may look like attending 2 out of 4 monthly sharing circles. In our current experience, suicide, mental health, and poisonous drugs seem far and away to be the leading causes of death among children. Parents who attend with these presenting issues seem less capable of absorbing the pain of other parents, and this impacts how sharing circles are experienced. We accept, however, that our son's death was our qualifying experience to facilitate the Abby TCF, and we willingly and wholeheartedly give ourselves to this important service of walking with grieving parents through their devastating losses.

We no longer have a 'steering committee/advisory team'. While several couples cheered us on as we assumed facilitation of the Abby TCF chapter in 2021, these couples eventually and understandably discontinued regular participation. They simply 'aged out' and we celebrated and thanked them as they left. I hope to be able to draw in several of the folks who display strong commitment to TCF.

Once I send this email off, I will also send a donation to the support of the national TCF program. At present, my wife and I assume any/all costs associated with the local program. All the best as you continue creating the framework and resources that undergird The Compassionate Friends. Yours truly, Ron Toews"

Closing Thought: The messages from the authors quoted above inspire us to continue to reach out to grieving parents. When the future looks challenging, try to recall your original motivation for being involved with TCF and take strength in knowing that even the smallest actions can lead to someone in need finding support. Wherever you are, we hope that weather events do not impair your peaceful and relaxing summer.