



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA
All-Party Parliamentary Group for Funerals and Bereavement

The APPG for Funerals and Bereavement held a roundtable on Wednesday 26 May on the access and availability of child bereavement services within the UK. It was attended by members of the APPG, including its Chair Sir John Hayes MP and Officer Fleur Anderson MP, as well as charities and organisations providing child bereavement services across the UK.

The roundtable looked at some of the issues currently facing the sector, and how the pandemic has impacted both the demand and supply of services. A full report of the meeting can be seen below.

Introduction from Sir John Hayes MP and Fleur Anderson MP

Sir John Hayes MP opened the meeting and welcomed the guests and thanked them for attending. He noted that whilst the pandemic has shone a light on the sector, too often the impact of bereavement on children goes unnoticed by many.

Fleur Anderson MP noted that the issue has been talked about at the Education Select Committee in relation to youth mental health. This is particularly important as many more young people are experiencing bereavement as a result of the pandemic.

Overview of the issues

i. Long-term issues

Steven Wibberley noted that the pandemic has shone a spotlight on bereavement issues for children. Although the data is patchy, before the pandemic, it was estimated that 1 in 29 children experience bereavement, with this figure likely to be higher since March 2020. The evidence suggests that without proper support, bereaved children will have lower life prospects and be over-represented in the criminal justice system. Furthermore, if the right support is available in schools, then there should be a universality of support available.

ii. Funding

Steven Wibberley noted that funding is piecemeal. Most charities get some local NHS Trust support alongside community funding and national lottery money. However, since the beginning of the pandemic, volunteering funding (e.g. bake sales, marathons) has reduced. This piecemeal funding makes it difficult to plan service delivery and a lack of data make it difficult to determine the gap

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Vice Chairs: Robert Goodwill MP, Rosie Cooper MP, Gavin Robinson MP, Heather Wheeler MP
and Baroness Garden of Frognal

Officers: Dame Diana Johnson MP, Mark Pawsey MP, Fleur Anderson MP and Baroness Ludford

Registered Contact: Sir John Hayes MP, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

Email: hayesj@parliament.uk Tel: 020 7219 1389

Website: <https://www.appgfunerals.co.uk/> Twitter: @APPGFB

between need and access to services. Some 40% of charities worried about whether they will be able to maintain their current level of activity.

Sir John Hayes MP noted that it is important to ensure that services are efficient and co-ordinated.

iii. The pandemic in focus

Ann Chalmers noted that the pandemic has brought new fears and demanded agility from child bereavement service providers. During the early stages of the pandemic, there was a marked resurgence in demand from children who had already been supported. This stemmed from concerns over a risk of death to other friends or family. Children are often referred to as 'forgotten mourners' and school closures have denied many a stable routine.

A system of bereavement needs to be built that better understands each individual child's needs whilst there needs to be better signposting so individuals have the correct information regarding the type of support that they can access.

Sir John Hayes stated that children will always be bereaved and there is a need to ensure that teachers are well equipped to cope with this.

Inclusion

Fergus Crow stated that inclusion is ingrained within the sector as there is an open access to services. Whilst it is a relatively young sector and there is a lack of research, recent research conducted by the University of Cambridge has shown that teachers want to help where they can.

The sector also recognises the needs of some of the most disadvantaged children, who often have the longest support journey. A noticeable shift is happening amongst the young, with more and more young people seeking help.

The sector continues to ask questions about itself and how it can improve. Themes of these questions include: the availability of service, how responsive the sector is to diversity and whether the support offered is well tuned to world views.

Linda Magistris noted that throughout the pandemic it has been difficult to connect and reach out to people who need support. Basic signposting services have not been available, so people have been grieving without knowing that services are available. This includes many healthcare practitioners who

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do not know that services are available. The importance of bereavement support was exemplified by the fact that 95% of young offenders have had 6 bereavements by the time they reach 18.

Issues as we emerge out of the pandemic

Julie Dunk asked how the funeral and deathcare sector can help support child bereavement charities.

Sir John Hayes MP noted the important relationship between funeral directors and the bereavement sector to assist the bereaved.

Rachel Bradburne also commented that conversations about death were happening more often during the pandemic and teachers didn't have standard routes to access information. She suggested writing to educational leads with signposting information and contacting the National Governors Association.

Any other business

It was asked how the APPG can help, and Steven Wibberley responded that it would be useful if the APPG could help get better data from the general registry office.

Fergus Crow noted that it would be helpful to invest time, energy, and expertise in the capacity of adults (e.g. teachers) to provide support.

Sir John Hayes MP closed the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.

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