



The Compassionate Friends Victoria Inc.



# ANNUAL REPORT

2022-2023







I am so pleased to be the patron of The Compassionate Friends Victoria (TCFV) because it is an organisation that enshrines principles I hold so dear.

TCFV is a peer support organisation. This means it places lived experience as a most valuable component in helping people when they have faced a death in the family. Being with others who know what you are going through, who have had similar experiences of loss and grief is not only comforting, but also research shows that it strongly assists in recovery.

TCFV has at its heart the subject matter of death – a much stigmatised and feared topic in our society. By not only acknowledging death as a part of life that can happen at any time to any individual or family, TCFV is also helping to eliminate the stigma, fear and shame surrounding death of a family member.

As well, I want to pay huge credit to Lindsay and Margaret Harmer, the founders of TCFV. Their commitment to peer support was trailblazing and TCFV has honoured them by growing the network into a significant state-wide resource helping thousands to help themselves. It is with sadness that I note the loss of my co-patron Margaret. I miss her knowledge, her experience, her humour and most particularly her wisdom.

**Dr. Rhonda Galbally A.C.**  
**Patron**

# Contents

|       |                               |
|-------|-------------------------------|
| 3-4   | Board Report                  |
| 5     | Creating Hope, 2023 Gala Ball |
| 6-7   | CEO Report                    |
| 8-10  | Our Board                     |
| 11    | Rhys Harmer Award             |
| 12-13 | Treasurer's Report            |
| 14    | IT Report                     |
| 15-17 | Support Groups                |
| 18-19 | Events                        |
| 20    | Communications                |
| 21    | Comm Ed                       |
| 22    | Sibling Support               |
| 23    | By The Numbers                |
| 24    | Grieve Heal Grow              |
| 25    | Gathering 2022 Report         |
| 26    | Time Out Report               |
| 27    | Our Supporters                |



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# Board Report

These past twelve months have been a period of great change and development in the Victorian branch of The Compassionate Friends. As we have reflected in recent years, the organisation has carefully navigated the journey through significant challenging and quite tumultuous times. The restructuring of our staffing arrangements in 2020 coincided with the "COVID-19 years", with both experiences bringing their own demands and opportunities.

The Board and Staff have worked closely together in these times. We have noted in past reports the contribution of our staff and you will read about their activities from this year in other parts of the Annual Report. We have also commented upon the important contribution of key people in the administration of TCFV following the staffing restructuring. Theresa Yeo and Dorothy Ford made generous contributions of time and effort in this period.

It was with great anticipation that we sought to fill the position of CEO late in 2022. An initial internal search from among our membership reflected our strong desire to appoint someone with the lived experience of bereavement that is a cornerstone of TCFV. The lived experience and peer-to-peer nature of the services provided by TCFV is one of the great and unique features of our work, a real point of difference in the mental health sector in which we operate.

From the relatively small pool of expressions of interest within our membership, the Board were delighted when a standout applicant for the CEO position was identified. Alexandra Hamilton had been involved with TCFV since the death of her young son River back in 2011. Her professional background in commercial and community-based organisations, combined with her personal experiences and empathetic nature, made her an excellent choice.

Alex began her leadership role with TCFV in April 2023 and has quickly settled into the task. She was

familiar with some of the activities of the organisation, most recently from her involvement in the Night of Hope Gala event in 2022, which was conducted in collaboration with her employer at the time, Kidsafe Victoria. Her good work in establishing positive relationships with the staff, volunteers, Board members and within the mental health sector have seen her begin this new role in a highly effective manner. As a Board, we are looking forward with great anticipation to the developments that will happen under her leadership in the next years.

The Board of TCFV has continued to meet largely on the digital platform of Zoom, an initiative that grew from the restrictions of the lockdown times. It is a convenient and efficient method of meeting. We have also enjoyed the occasional gathering in person and interactions around the Canterbury office activities. We welcomed both Claire Kuhnell and Sonia Aberl into casual Board vacancies, Claire in late 2022 and Sonia in 2023 and look forward to their nominations for an on-going Board position at the AGM this year. Claire has had a long association with the sibling support group and Sonia has also had a close relationship with TCFV as a volunteer and former part-time staff member, which grew out of her involvement with the sibling group.

At the AGM last year, we recognized the important contribution of retiring Vice President, Lisa Gelbart. It was a delight to have Lisa as a key speaker at the Gathering event last year. It has been great to have Amanda Bond step into the Vice President role this year. With her wide leadership experience in the community services sector, Amanda has brought great wisdom to her role.

We also farewelled longtime volunteer Jo Knoll from her Board position this year. Jo made it her mission to represent the voice of members and volunteers on the Board and we highly valued her contributions. A former Board member, Bruce Houghton, has stepped

back into a Board role and brings a great voice of experience to the Board. Harriet Clegg and Robyn Reeve have continued to make good contributions to the Board, with their sibling and regional perspectives. Within the Board executive, I have worked closely with VP Amanda, Secretary Theresa Yeo and Treasurer Vincent Wai in managing the matters arising for the Board on a regular basis. Dorothy Ford also made crucial contributions in the role before her employment contract was completed earlier in 2023.

An important part of the Board's role is in setting the strategic direction of the organisation. Following on from the strategic planning process facilitated by Marion Stanway in 2021, we continue to work towards the three identified strategic goals:

- i. Develop and maintain a financially sustainable organisation to continue providing vital services.**
- ii. Improve technological capabilities to be responsive to emerging opportunities and needs of the bereaved.**
- iii. Grow services in balance with resource capacity to be responsive to needs and contribute to community mental health and well-being.**

Working now in close collaboration with CEO Alex Hamilton, the achievement of these goals is being facilitated in a range of creative ways. Alex has brought a considerable skill set in responding to each of these goals and is expanding the way we approach them. Financial sustainability is being secured in the consolidation of our relationship with our main funding source, the Department of Health, at the same time as wider horizons for funding are examined. Improved technological capabilities are being developed, often with the input of key members of our sibling group, who bring a refreshing familiarity with that space. Services have grown in many respects in recent years and the training of new volunteers and the development of new models of service are a

continual area of growth for TCFV. Relationships and contributions to the wider community mental health space are being fostered as networks are developed with our companion organisations.

The feeling, the "vibe", around TCFV at the moment is a very positive one. We are poised to both continue the deeply important traditional bereavement support work that has been our cornerstone for nearly fifty years, and we are poised to pursue the development of new and creative ways to provide this support. Our leadership is stable and will form the solid foundation for moving TCFV forward into the challenges and opportunities of the next chapter of our story. The vision inspired by our founders here in Victoria and Australia, Lindsay and Margaret Harmer, that bereaved people "Need Never Walk Alone", is alive and well!

**Kevin Purvis**  
**TCFV Board President**





# Creating Hope, 2023 Gala Ball

The 2023 Gala Ball, hosted at the Hawthorn Arts Centre on April 29th, was a remarkable highlight. With 130 attendees, we raised over \$26,000. We extend our gratitude to Theresa, Dianne, Sharon, and Annabelle, the Gala committee, for their exceptional efforts in ensuring the event's resounding success.

We'd like to express our thanks to the staff at the Hawthorn Arts Centre for their pivotal role in making the event a success. Special appreciation goes out to MC Jeff Richardson, guest artist Greg Champion, The Melbourne Club Band, and Pete the Piano Man for their entertaining contributions.

To our generous Auction Prize donors, we deeply appreciate your contributions of wonderful items.

This event would not have been possible without the dedication and assistance of the TCFV staff and numerous volunteers.





# CEO Report

A message from our CEO

I am honoured to share with you the impactful journey of The Compassionate Friends Victoria (TCFV) throughout the past year. Having joined the organisation in April 2023, I am extremely thankful to our previous CEOs, Dorothy Ford and Theresa Yeo, who did an incredible job at a time of so much uncertainty in the world.

As we reflect on our accomplishments and look forward to the future, I want to highlight the remarkable strides we've made in promoting sustainable growth, expanding our support services, and enhancing our outreach efforts.

## Promoting Sustainable Statewide Growth

Our commitment to providing grief support is at the very heart of TCFV, and this year we've taken significant steps to ensure that support reaches every corner of Victoria. We've focused on:

- **Online Training Platforms:** We've invested in accessible training platforms, including online training, to increase the availability of grief support, particularly in regional areas.
- **Regional Engagement:** We've engaged with regional membership and local networks to co-design regional support groups, with a special focus on the Gippsland region.
- **Collaboration:** We've explored collaborative support group opportunities with other mental health and well-being organisations, enhancing cross-referral processes to ensure comprehensive support for our members.

## Volunteer Engagement, Training, and Professional Development

Our dedicated mutual support volunteers are the backbone of our organisation. We have prioritised their support, supervision, and training:

- **Support and Supervision:** We've continued to provide support and supervision to our group leaders, ensuring they receive the guidance and assistance needed to deliver effective support to our members.
- **Training Standards:** We've maintained Lifeline Grief Support Group Standards across all TCFV groups, ensuring consistent quality of service.

- **Trauma-Informed Training:** We've integrated trauma-informed principles and psychosocial regulations into our training streams, equipping our volunteers with the tools to provide compassionate support.

## Effective Communication with Volunteers

We recognise the importance of clear and ongoing communication with our volunteers:

- **Regular Updates:** We've maintained regular communication with our group leaders and members, keeping them informed about our activities, events, and resources.
- **Enhanced Training:** We've invested in the development of training materials with audio-visual tools to supplement training and provide ongoing skill refreshers for our volunteers.

## Specialised Programs to Meet Specific Needs

Our commitment to serving our members' unique needs remains resolute:

- **Newly Bereaved Program:** We've expanded the delivery of our Newly Bereaved program to provide support twice a year.
- **Online Support Groups:** We've developed and resourced an online support group for parents, siblings, and grandparents bereaved through any means, making our support accessible to those facing social, geographical, or mobility challenges.
- **Multiple Bereavements:** We're exploring the creation of a specialized support group for those who have experienced more than one bereavement, recognizing the unique challenges they face.

## Policy and Procedural Excellence

We continue to ensure that our policies and procedures are up-to-date and aligned with our mission:

- **Policy Updates:** We've been diligent in updating our group and education processes into existing policy and procedural manuals, ensuring clarity and consistency.



### Promotion of Services and Increased Visibility

We've worked tirelessly to raise awareness of our services and the importance of grief support:

- **Community Engagement:** We've engaged with various community groups, mental health services, and local organizations to promote our services through trained volunteer speakers.
- **Philanthropic and Government Engagement:** We've directly engaged with philanthropic and government funders, participating in consultations and conferences organized by Mental Health Victoria and the Mental Health Division of the Department of Health to raise awareness of our mutual support model.
- **Online Presence:** We've enhanced our online presence through social media, and we're exploring the use of short video presentations and new community promotional streams.

### Effective Use of Technology

We've embraced technology to improve efficiency and communication:

- **Text Messages:** We're exploring the use of text messages through our CRM for group meeting reminders, streamlining our communication process.

### Focus on Financial Sustainability

This year we continued to put great efforts into tight financial management and fundraising, which is highlighted in our financial reports. Revenue income improved by more than 20% over the year because of fundraising and donations from events such as our Gala, The Gathering raffle, Memorial Trust grants, the Tax Appeal and Run Melbourne. Post-COVID has seen increased services and event activities, but cost controls have been achieved through careful spending and invaluable pro bono volunteer efforts.

As we move into the future, we remain steadfast in our commitment to provide essential grief support services to bereaved families across Victoria. Our aims for 2023/2024 are ambitious and reflect our dedication to continuous growth:

- Expanding grief support groups, particularly in regional areas, and strengthening our network of support.
- Elevating volunteer engagement, training, and support to maintain the highest professional standards.
- Ensuring effective communication with volunteers and members, keeping them informed and engaged.
- Developing specialised programs to meet unique needs, such as within the palliative care and multicultural space.
- Promoting our services extensively through community engagement and strategic partnerships.
- Leveraging technology to improve efficiency and enhance our online presence.
- Increasing our partnerships, corporate allegiances and financial support to ensure our services can be delivered to our ever-growing community of bereaved families.

Thank you for your unwavering support, dedication, and commitment to our mission.

With gratitude and excitement for the future,

**Alex Hamilton**





# Our Board



## KEVIN PURVIS – President

**Kevin** has been a member of the TCFV Board since 2019, serving in the last couple of years as President. His background in teaching and church ministry provides a valuable foundation for this role.

After the death of his 15-year-old son Stephen, by suicide, in 2001, The Compassionate Friends support group run by Sue and Jon Stebbins was a great help. After a break of some years, Kevin and his wife Jenny reconnected with TCFV. Jenny did leadership training and currently convenes the Bereaved by Suicide support group.

Kevin is on the Helpline phone roster and enjoys several of the social groups for bereaved members.

He is looking forward to continuing the collaborative work of the Board as we move forward with new CEO Alex Hamilton.



## AMANDA BOND - Vice President

**Amanda** is an executive leader with more than 25 years of experience in health, aged care, disability services, out of home care and health insurance.

She is currently the CEO of CareChoice, a specialist disability, youth, and private aged care service provider, supporting people with multiple and complex needs with around the clock care, support coordination and behaviour support services. Amanda has also held many executive roles within healthcare at Peninsula Health and private health insurance sectors with Australian Unity and Medibank Private.

As a values-driven leader, Amanda is motivated by social equality and strives to ensure people have access to quality support services in line with their specific needs, at their time of need. Amanda has volunteered as a peer support phone worker with TCFV since 2021 and is passionate about helping others in their grief journey.

Amanda is also a Non-Executive Board Director for Mental Health Victoria, holds a Bachelor of Social Science (Psychology) and completed an EMBA and the AICD Company Directors Course. Amanda is the bereaved mother of Matthew (2). She also has two daughters and enjoys travelling, sailing and spending time with her family and friends.



## VINCENT WAI - Treasurer

**Vincent** has been a professional accountant for more than 27 years. He returned to Australia in March 2020 for good, not long after the pandemic started in Hong Kong.

After working in the commercial field for many years, Vincent felt it was time to volunteer and utilize his expertise for non-profit making organisations. He joined TCFV in Feb 2021 and has been working actively with our retired Treasurer, Daniel Bendel.



## Theresa YEO – Secretary

**Theresa** migrated to Melbourne in 2001, soon after the death of her daughter, Clara, 7.

She had been a community worker in church and an auditor in banking, before leaving her career to start a Fair-Trade shop. After Clara's death, she has focused on volunteering with TCFV, where she found a lifeline community for her grief support, meaningful use of her skills, and continued learning.

Volunteering in TCFV since 2003, she was on the TCFV Board from 2005-2012, mostly as Treasurer. She returned to the Board in 2019 to facilitate the leadership needs of TCFV as President and pro bono CEO. She is currently the Board Secretary and has stepped down from her CEO position since April 2023.

She continues to be inspired by the dedicated TCFV community who work tirelessly to support our bereaved membership in honour of the memory of our loved ones.



## HARRIET CLEGG – Sibling Representative

**Harriet** is the Sibling Board Representative at The Compassionate Friends Victoria and after completing a Master of Social Work degree works in assisting children, young people, and their families.

Harriet enjoys supporting the organisation as a part of a cohesive team and her role is mostly centred around aiding the development of the siblings' services offerings. Harriet helped shape the initial online chat responder platform and undertook Telephone Listening Skills and Chat Responder training to help others in their grief journey. Recently, Harriet collaborated with TCFV stakeholders on a new sibling specific website which, excitingly, has now been launched.

In her spare time, Harriet likes getting outside and trying new places for a hike and painting.



## BRUCE HOUGHTON – Member

**Bruce** and his wife Catrina are parents of three sons, Liam, Rylie and Nick. They tragically lost Liam in 2011 due to a catastrophic cardiac event. They connected with TCFV shortly after and have remained passionate supporters of the organisation ever since.

Bruce is currently a Group Leader at the TCFV Bayside Support Group. He also assists with oversight of the Group Leader role and helps with incidental tasks such as writing magazine articles under the banner of 'Group Leaders in Focus' and running spirituality seminars/workshops.

Bruce has previously been on the Board of TCFV and returns to the Board in 2022 with renewed vigour and zest.

Away from TCFV, Bruce is a semi-retired Company Director, a member of the Glen Huntly U3A Recorder Ensemble, an average pianist, and a very average golfer.



# Our Board



## Claire Kuhnell – Member

**Claire** has completed a Bachelor of Counselling and works in the mental health and disability field with EACH. Claire is a bereaved sibling of Benoît (d. 1985) and François (d. 2019), who both died by suicide. Born in France, she migrated to Australia, and has been a member of The Compassionate Friends Victoria since 1995.

Claire completed the TCFV telephone counselling and group leader training and was a support person for the Glen Waverley bereaved by suicide support group. After a break from TCFV due to moving back to France for a couple of years and raising a young family, Claire rejoined TCFV and has been co-facilitating the siblings support group since June 2010.

She has participated in various projects including an art exhibition on the aftermath of suicide and an outreach peer-to-peer suicide support program led by TCFV and "Life Is... Foundation".

She has recently co-facilitated an early bereavement 4-week program for parents and siblings.



## Robyn Reeve – Board Regional Representative

**Robyn** works as an Employment Consultant in Ballarat. Robyn was introduced to TCFV by the then group leader of Ballarat, after the death of her son Jacob.

Robyn did the Group Leader Training in 2009 to step in and take over leadership of the Ballarat Group and has been in that role ever since.

Robyn has a community spirit both in Australia and in Africa where she has volunteered on many occasions in the remote communities of Zambia and South Africa.

Robyn is compassionate in supporting people from all walks of life and is a support person for the Online Suicide Support Group with TCFV. Robyn is excited to see where this next journey with TCFV takes her in supporting bereaved families in times of need.

Robyn is the bereaved mother of:

- Jacob aged 16, died by suicide August 2002
- Kate aged 22, murdered October 2002

# Rhys Harmer Volunteer Awards 2022

The Annual General Meeting of 2022 was the venue for the Rhys Harmer Awards presentations. Many will know that Rhys Harmer was the son of our TCFV founders, Lindsay and Margaret Harmer. Following the car accident that took Rhys's life 50 years ago, Lindsay and Margaret volunteered countless hours and a great range of professional and personal expertise in establishing The Compassionate Friends, here in Victoria and then around Australia.

The Rhys Harmer Award is named in honour of their son and the volunteering they did in his name. It is awarded each year to people who have made significant voluntary contributions to TCFV and have now retired from their voluntary work. Many people in this situation retain close and positive links with the organization.

The award nominees in 2022 reflect the very diverse nature of volunteering within our organization. Each person who works in these various voluntary roles is bound together by the common experience of the death of their child, grandchild, or sibling. While there are many common experiences in these grief journeys, they are also very specific and particular experiences of loss. The contributions that volunteers make also share a common goal of supporting other bereaved people, while being shaped by unique experiences and skills.

## **The 2022 Rhys Harmer Award recipients were:**

**Aileen Kerr:** Aileen contributed as a support group team member for the Bereaved by Suicide support group. She was a regular volunteer at the Drop-in Centre and stood in as manager when the regular staff were not available. She answered calls on the telephone Helpline, sharing with bereaved people in their time of need. She was a willing volunteer at many events, taking on any role that needed attention as required.

**Barbara Beames:** Barbara was a volunteer in the office and Drop-in Centre, where she gradually moved towards the magazine team. She volunteered in various roles in magazine production and distribution, taking on the roles of Sub Editor and Editor over time. She made significant contributions to the scope and style of the magazine, improving and developing it in many ways.

**Trish and Trevor Ronalds:** Trish and Trevor were heavily involved in the facilitation of regional support groups in the Gippsland area where they lived, undertaking group leader training and working in several locations. They were also involved in supporting many of the regular TCFV events with their presence and their work. Contributions to leadership training courses and various retreat programs were also much appreciated.

Each of these volunteers, like Lindsay and Margaret following Rhys's death, contributed to honour their children. Aileen honours Ian, Barbara honours Ben, Trish and Trevor honour Suzanne.

We thank them, as we thank all our volunteers, for their generous support of our important work.

**Kevin Purvis**





# Treasurer's Report

## TCFV Financial Report for Fiscal Year 2022/2023

We are pleased to report a modest surplus position for the year ended 30 June 2023 compared to last year's deficit of \$15,800.

The return to normality after the COVID crisis has enabled fundraising opportunities and engagement to raise donation levels. Accolades to staff, volunteers and members who worked tirelessly for

- Gala2023 which made a net profit of \$27,000,
- Tax appeal campaign which raised \$11,000
- Community Fundraising events where members raised \$16,000.
- Gathering 2023 which contributed a surplus result of \$13,000 from its successful Raffle fundraising exercise and donations drive

## Revenue

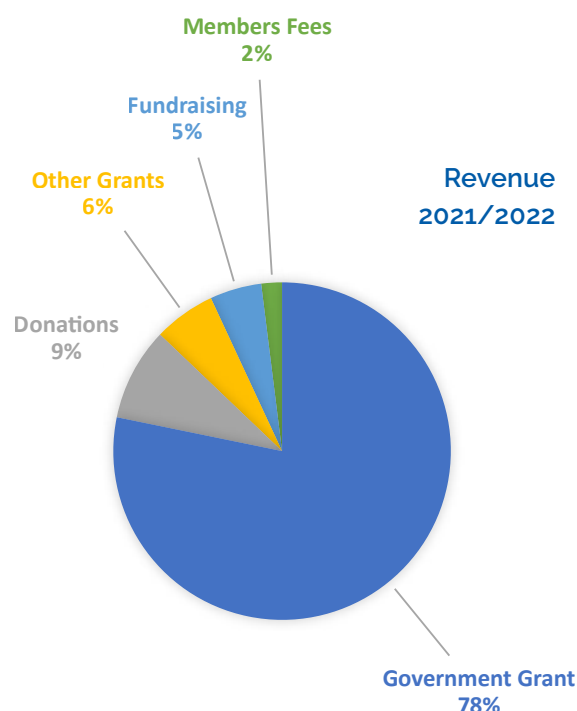
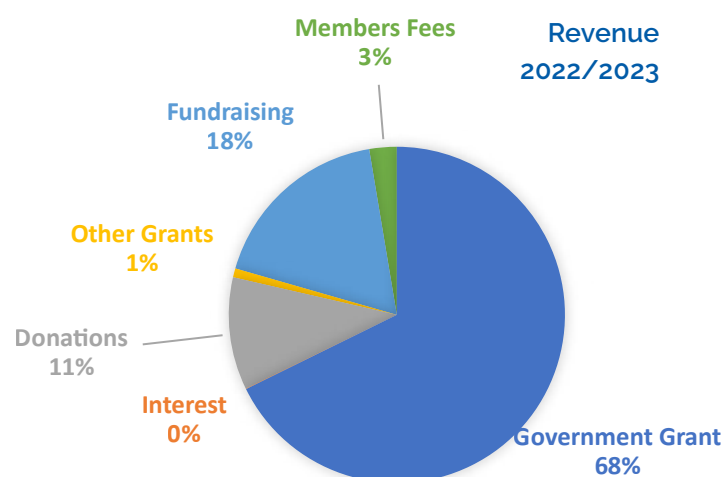
TCFV's total income increased by \$116,500 to \$654,000 mainly due to increase in donations and fundraising.

We have received continued stable support from the Victorian State Government and are confident of another 3 year contract renewal when our existing contract ends on 30 June 2024.

The City of Boroondara and the Yarra Ranges Council continue to support us with small grants for equipment purchase and for Gathering 2023 respectively. Our Federal member also nominated us for a small Federal grant to support our volunteer expenses.

We also are grateful for major support received this year from non-government and corporate organisations:

1. Geelong Cemetery Trusts for their ongoing donations towards bereavement support
2. The Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation for their annual distribution of Memorial Trust Fund income and support for our Gala fundraising
3. Endress & Hauser for our Gala fundraising.



## Expenditure

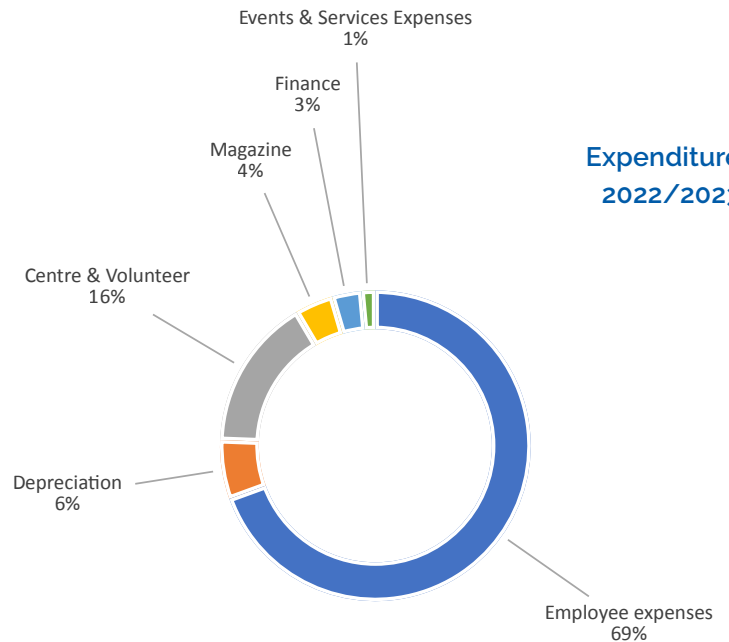
Total expenditure for the year was \$651,174, up \$98,000 mainly due to increased activities.

Employment expenses increased with the appointment of a paid CEO and for casual staff hire for programs.

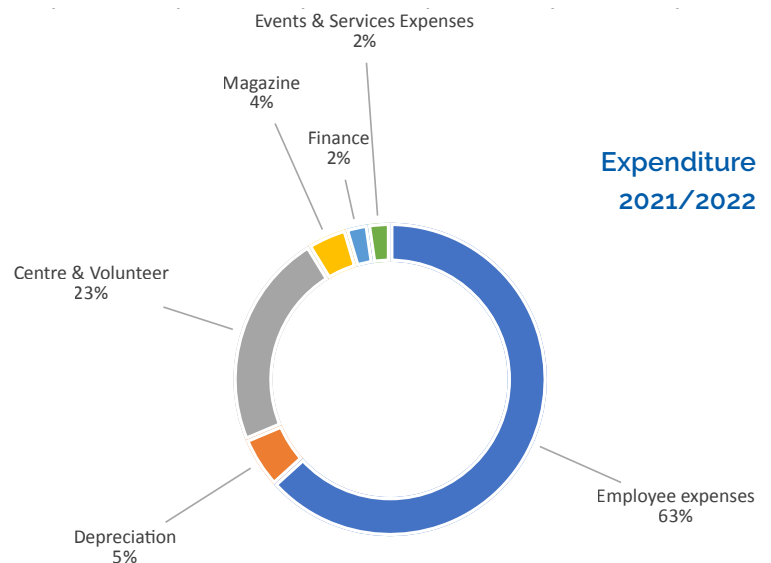
Financial management remains tightly controlled with volunteering efforts utilized where feasible. In order to ensure financial viability, funding strategies are undertaken to match costs of any new initiatives or event planned.

In the light of rising interest rates, we have negotiated with the bank to transfer more than \$215,000 of our surplus cash as an offset. This has reduced our interest payments by \$2,500 and increased capital repayments.

**Expenditure  
2022/2023**



**Expenditure  
2021/2022**



## Budget

As in previous years, budget 2023/2024 has been conservatively prepared to project a \$8,000 deficit. We will continue our efforts to explore cost controls in order to combat rising cost pressures as well as seeking funding opportunities for improving service delivery.

**Prepared by Theresa Yeo**





# IT Annual Report

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Over the past few years, our IT systems have undergone significant changes. In the year 2023 our focus has been on consolidation and stability.

## System Review

We've conducted a comprehensive review of our various systems, including Office 365, Zoho Customer Relationship Management (CRM), as well as our web and commerce platforms. Based on our evaluation, we have decided to continue using these systems as they have proven their value.

However, we remain vigilant for potential improvements and cost-effective solutions, as the technology landscape is always evolving.

## Hardware Upgrades

To ensure that our staff and volunteers have access to up-to-date hardware, we've acquired and replaced laptops as needed.

## General IT Support

A critical aspect of our IT function is to maintain the security of our systems and to ensure that upgrades are implemented correctly. Our IT support also extends to content creation and providing standard IT advice and assistance.

## Cybersecurity

In recent months, we've made important changes to enhance our cybersecurity. This includes modifying our email filters and updating our anti-virus software.

## Zoho Management and Enhancements

We've refined the transition process for our membership system, addressing previous inefficiencies. Additionally, we've introduced new features, such as minor improvements to our memory jogger tool. Ongoing maintenance tasks, like merging duplicate contacts and rectifying membership errors, continue to be carried out.

## IT Lessons and Training

A key focus area is the continuous training of our extensive volunteer network. We've expanded our lesson offerings within our database. As volunteers are the backbone of our organisation, providing clear instructions on system usage is paramount. Training takes place through both one-on-one sessions and instructional emails.

Jesse Bendel

# Support Groups

The 2022/2023 year has been one of “return” – a return from periodic on-site meetings to regular on-site meetings. A post-restrictions online presence remains via our art therapy sessions, regional suicide bereavement meetings, and our collaboration with KIDSAFE, ‘Bereaved of a Child 14 years and under’. And we have recently established a private Facebook page to further solidify a group leader support community, as well as to provide another forum for knowledge sharing.

A year of greater service stability has assisted the establishment of a new regional group, the Warrnambool Support Group, led by two bereaved mothers: one a social worker by profession, the other a business manager in the education system. We have 31 groups operating presently: 9 metro, 10 regional, 11 special focus. We also provide outreach support to a Darwin-based TCF support group.

Another exciting development has been the introduction of a book club. It provides social interaction, rich discussion and, most interestingly, an entry-point to new knowledge and insights relating to grief, coping and eventually re-locating meaning in life.

The group leader training program continues to bring in members for either succession of existing groups or establishment of new groups. Trainees displayed principles of empathic support and sensitive management of group dynamics. Oftentimes, trainees discover that skills they have developed in other fields and professions (e.g., active listening, program management) have application within TCFV, but what the training also emphasises is the importance of being a “cultural fit” within an environment of traumatic bereavement.

One sad development has been the closure of The Gianna Centre in Bendigo, which provided a cross-referral platform and supplied our local support group a most appropriate venue. Gianna has been an excellent partner, and we are delighted that Gianna contact, Di Halls, will continue her association with leader Cathy Smith and the Bendigo group via a voluntary involvement with TCFV. We also wish to commend the work and support of Gianna CEO Catherine Holmes. We remember with great warmth Catherine and Di's participation in our group leader training program back in 2015.







A principal benefit of our return to “business as usual” has been the opportunity to undertake the visits to group meetings that forms one part of our group leader outreach support program. We have included excerpts below from the subsequent outreach reports – written by me and long-term volunteers Jon and Sue Stebbins – to illustrate the nuanced work that TCFV group leaders and support leaders undertake. It is concentrated work that requires care (in both the philosophical and practical sense), flexibility, and often subtle variations in delivery, based on the individual-by-individual needs within a given group.



“The group leader then went systematically around the group and each attendee spoke more fully on where they were with their journey. This gave the longer-term bereaved an opportunity to share with those more recently bereaved information and strategies picked up on their longer journey.”

“As stories unfolded, it was clear that most of the attending members were quite recently bereaved, and the group were thus dealing with raw, multiple and difficult issues. It was quite moving, then, to see pale faces gain some colour as the group leader gently helped members tell their stories and express the issues they were facing.”



“Issues that were raised in the meeting we attended included the complexity of each person’s experiences, especially how other life-issues commonly compound our grief. Also, the expectation we have for support from family and friends, and how we are often disappointed. Further discussion then brought out that often our beliefs are challenged; one member, raised in a strong traditional Jewish culture, spoke of the Jewish traditions surrounding loss of a loved one. Finally, the group leader introduced a sharing discussion on ways we have dealt with special days such as anniversaries and birthdays, which was especially helpful for those early in their grief.”

“[The group leader] led a carefully structured meeting, managed time very well, yet was very focused on giving attendees full opportunity to speak, be heard, and gain ideas from how others were handling their grief.”





"The group leader also evidently gives grief-related issues and experience a great deal of reflection. There was much shared insight within the meeting, a quality the attendees reported made the group especially valuable for them."

"During the meeting [the group leader] very gently invited each person to share where they are in their grief, and expertly reflected back the main points of their story allowing members to feel heard and their story validated."

"There was a heaviness in proceedings, with two participants in particular emphasising their experience of grief worsening and acute disappointments relating to friends and families. A balance was found when participants talked about some of the funny and touching things their children did over their lives."

### Andrew McNess





# Events & Volunteer Report

Over the past year, our community has grown, our support network has expanded, and we have come together to remember, heal, and share our stories.

**New Volunteers and Families:** In the year 2022/2023, TCFV welcomed 22 new dedicated volunteers who have generously given their time and heart to support our cause. This infusion of fresh perspectives and commitment will undoubtedly enrich our services and outreach. Additionally, our family network has continued to expand. We saw a remarkable increase from 139 new families in 2021/2022 to 200 new families in 2022/2023 – a testament to the trust and bonds that our organisation nurtures, and our ability to further promote the benefit of our services.

**Events that nurtured connection:** Throughout the year, TCFV organised a series of events aimed at fostering connection, healing, and commemoration within our community.

- **Special Morning Tea in Memory of Margaret Harmer:** On 15th June 2022, we gathered at the TCFV Centre to honour the memory of Margaret Harmer. This event provided a space for members to share stories and find solace in each other's company.
- **Men's Cook & Chat BBQ:** The TCFV Centre hosted a heartwarming gathering on 2nd September 2022. This event offered an opportunity for our male members to come together, share experiences, and build lasting connections.
- **Family Art Unveiling in Memory of Margaret Harmer:** On 10th September 2022, we celebrated the creative spirit of Margaret Harmer with a family art unveiling at the TCFV Centre. This event beautifully combined remembrance and artistic expression.
- **TCFV 2022 Gathering:** From 21st to 23rd October, we convened at The Foothills Conference Centre, Mooroolbark, for the TCFV 2022 Gathering. It was a weekend filled with shared stories, workshops, and mutual support.





- **Candlelight Service:** On 11th December 2022, the Christadelphian Hall in Canterbury was illuminated with the warm glow of candles as we came together to remember our loved ones.
- **Walk To Remember:** Princes Park, Carlton North, was the backdrop for our Walk To Remember on 16th April 2023. This event was a powerful symbol of our collective journey towards healing.
- **Bereaved Grandparents Connect Morning Tea:** In an important step forward, we hosted our first Bereaved Grandparents Connect Morning Tea on 19th April 2023, at the TCFV Centre. This gathering recognised the unique experiences of bereaved grandparents and their need for understanding and connection.
- **Mother's High Tea:** On 10th May 2023, at Christadelphian Hall, Canterbury, we celebrated the strength and resilience of mothers who have experienced loss.
- **Winter Solstice Gathering:** As the seasons shifted, we came together on 23rd June 2023, at the TCFV Centre to mark the Winter Solstice. This event was a reminder that even in the coldest moments, warmth and connection can be found.

**A Growing Circle of Compassion:** With every event, gathering, and moment of connection, The Compassionate Friends Victoria continues to evolve into a vibrant community of support. As we reflect on the past year, we are filled with gratitude for the unwavering dedication of our volunteers, the courage of our members, and the resilience that binds us all together.

**Jenny Galati**  
Centre Coordinator





# Communications

## Between Friends Email Newsletter

In the past year our commitment to effective communication has seen the Between Friends email newsletter move from bi-monthly to monthly. The newsletter is emailed to around 1,000 people and keeps members engaged and up to date on TCFV news, initiatives, and events. Moving into 2023/2024 we plan to include more educational and helpful "coping with grief" content.

## Social Media

Our active presence on social media platforms has expanded our reach, allowing us to connect with our members and audience on a broader scale.



### Facebook

During the 2022/2023 year the number of followers on Facebook has increased from 4,269 to 4,614 an increase of 345. 12.20% of followers are male and 87.80% female with the 55-64 age group being the biggest percent of followers, closely followed by the 45-54 age group. A series of, "Meet the Team Monday" posts have been extremely popular, as these have introduced TCFV staff, board and volunteers to our audience.



### Instagram

The TCFV Instagram account opened in August 2022 and by the end of June 2023 there were over 1,300 followers. Posts go up 3-5 times a week with many posts receiving over one hundred or more responses.



### LinkedIn

Growth has been slow but between April and June 2023 there has been a surge of followers across the business community.

## Summary

We continue to explore innovative communication tools and technologies and, in the year ahead, we remain committed to enhancing our communication strategies, adapting to emerging trends and maintaining our core values of compassion, support, and inclusivity. The aim is to have Between Friends sent out to 2,000 people and to increase our following on all the social media platforms. TCFV plan to open a Threads account and use Linktree for our social media platforms.

Jane Moschetti

Community Education and Communications Co-ordinator



# Community Education

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Community Education plays a pivotal role in fostering awareness both within the workplace and in the larger community, on the importance of supporting the bereaved in both their return to work and in their everyday life. The multifaceted approach to education not only enhances individual knowledge on grief but also contributes to the overall development of the treatment and support of the bereaved person in society.

## Community Education Speaker Training Sessions

Five training sessions have been held over the 2022/2023 financial year, with between 7 and 12 TCFV members attending each one, with some ready to join the speaking team. The Community Education program provides members with opportunities to acquire new skills and improve existing ones. The continuous learning also helps members with their self-confidence and esteem, even if they decide not to join the team of speakers.

The relaunch of this training program is set for later in 2023. A four-day standard training session, consistent with the programs provided to group leaders and telephone responders within the organization, is currently in the planning stages.

## Community Speaking Engagements

There have been twenty-four community education sessions in this financial year, 16 more than the previous year. These presentations have reached over 900 people in the community. Over the next financial year, it's the perfect time to elevate our ambitions and set our sights higher and refine our targets. Plans are already underway to launch a new Community Education website and a printed brochure for emailing and posting out to prospective community groups and businesses across Victoria.

## New Service

The new service provides TCFV members the opportunity to have a trained community education speaker by their side as they meet with management and colleagues and discuss the effects of grief and how they can best work together to negotiate their return to work.

**Jane Moschetti**

**Community Education and Communications Co-ordinator**



# Sibling Support Services

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A strong sense of community has continued to grow in our TCFV sibling support services over the last 12 months.

Our monthly support groups and social events are consistently well attended with a high point being our Trivia Night.

I would like to extend a big thank you to all our dedicated volunteers and staff who have worked so hard to make the Sibling Service the supportive, compassionate, safe space that we see today.

We recently conducted a bereaved sibling survey and a subsequent hybrid (online and on-site) sibling focus group. The purpose was to get some feedback and ideas as to how our services are used, if they are effective and where we could improve/add to/refine what we offer. Informed by the results, we have or will be:

- Investigating staff and volunteer resources for the purpose of creating an online support group for bereaved siblings. This will be separate to our existing in-house Canterbury group.
- Scheduling specific social group events for the 18-30 age group as the feedback indicates that participation by this cohort is more likely via social events rather than our existing support service offerings.
- Investigating resources for a "specific issue" style of workshop for bereaved siblings. Topics such as "Sibling grief, navigating the early days," "Getting unstuck," "Dealing with sibling suicide" were among the possible topics suggested.
- Continually reviewing the chat service in terms of integrating it into a more accessible platform.
- Integrating the Sibling Memorial Website as part of the main TCFV website, which has led to some new subscribers.

A strong following continues for the sibling connections FB group. Many thanks to Louise Rees for her support.

Warm regards,

**John Brown**

**Sibling Volunteer Co-ordinator**



# By The Numbers

## SUPPORT

| TOTAL GROUPS | SUPPORT MEETINGS | PARTICIPANTS | GRIEF SUPPORT CALLS | OTHER CALLS |
|--------------|------------------|--------------|---------------------|-------------|
| 31           | 302              | 1803         | 1,268               | 2,135       |



## MATERIAL SENT

| TCFV MAGAZINE | INFORMATION PACKAGES | ANNIVERSARY CARDS | E-NEWSLETTERS DISTRIBUTED |
|---------------|----------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| 7,084         | 197                  | 1,332             | 9,211                     |

## EVENTS

| MEMBER EVENTS | PARTICIPANTS | TOTAL VOLUNTEER HOURS |
|---------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| 86            | 1,255        | 27,613                |

## SOCIAL MEDIA

| WEBSITE USERS |  INSTAGRAM FOLLOWERS |  FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS | SIBLING MEMORIAL WEBSITE USERS |
|---------------|---|--|--------------------------------|
| 2,700         | 1,372   | 4,600  | 507                            |



# Grieve • Heal • Grow

## Magazine of The Compassionate Friends Victoria

Grieve Heal Grow is a bi-monthly glossy magazine posted or emailed out to members and associate organisations.

The editor is assisted by a regular volunteer and ex-librarian Joanna, who comes into the Centre one day every week.

Regular pages in the magazine include a CEO or Board member report, news on upcoming events, the latest support and social support group dates and times as well as a community noticeboard.

Over the past twelve months the magazine has grown from a 28-page edition to a regular 36-page edition. For the February-March 2023 magazine there was a move to a new printing company, who helped to redesign and modernize the magazine. Overall, this has been extremely well received by members. The December 2022-January 2023 and the June-July 2023 edition have both had 4 centre pages in full colour. Again, this has been very popular with members.

The June-July edition last year was posted or emailed out to 1,045 members and associates, while the same edition this year was posted or emailed out to 1,230, an increase of 185. From the June-July 2021 edition to the same edition in 2022 there was an increase of 80.

On an environmental note, we have recently moved over to using recycled paper. We ask members to consider receiving the magazine via email instead of post and we hope to source alternative compostable packaging to replace the conventional plastic envelopes.

**Jane Moschetti**  
Volunteer Editor



# Gathering Alone Together

After a hiatus of 5 years, TCFV once again held a weekend Gathering in the serene setting of the 'Foothills Convention Centre'. Tucked away from the hustle and bustle of suburban life, this excellent convention centre is nestled among the gum trees at the foot of Mount Dandenong. It was by popular demand that we returned to Foothills for this weekend of workshops, self-care activities, discussion & information sessions, socialising, meeting old friends and making new friends with those who were attending a Gathering for the first time. The warmth and friendly atmosphere that was evident from the time we arrived until we left ensured that as bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents, we need not walk alone.

Over 70 people attended the gathering which started off on Friday evening with a 'Gathering Welcome,' which was offered for the first time. 50% of those who attended this session rated it with four stars.

***"A positive new addition to the Gatherings" \*\****

Over the whole weekend, there were many workshops and self-care sessions available for participants to choose from.

85% (39 of 46) of participants' expectations were very good or excellent.

88% (38 of 46) expressed satisfaction with the workshops they attended.

11 workshops were offered and rated very good or excellent.

36 of the 46 respondents attended the 6 workshops held on Saturday.

3 workshops were held on Sunday.

18 of 32 participants attended the 'Spirituality' workshop.

9 self-care activities were held over the weekend and were very much enjoyed by those who participated.

In addition to the above workshops, there were two siblings-only sessions.

***"Brilliant! I came out feeling so uplifted" \*\****

The relaxed atmosphere and beautiful surroundings of Foothills set the tone for the weekend. For some, just mixing and relaxing with other bereaved parents and siblings was cathartic.

For the newly bereaved and those further along in their grief, this was a huge success, a safe place in

which to grieve, heal and grow. We who have the lived experience of being a bereaved parent or sibling, understand as perhaps few others can, how uplifting it can be mixing and talking with others who may have arrived as strangers but left as friends.

The importance of events like this is obvious from the positive responses received from those who attended this Gathering. The floral display surrounding the photos of our loved ones was so lovingly created and provided a space for reflection & remembering.

***"I would like to say a thank you to the organisers of the weekend. It was a fantastic achievement to coordinate such a range of activities in such a caring and loving way" \*\****

Organising an event like this took 12 months of planning and organising: so much was achieved by many volunteers. A big thank you to all who participated (from the newly bereaved to the presenters) in making this a Gathering to remember. A special thanks must go to the organising committee led by the dedicated Jo Wade. Her leadership, commitment and attention to detail were second to none.

***"Congratulations to the team who put this together. Everywhere I turned there was someone willing to help. A true testament to a good conference is the ability to sit beside anyone and feel you matter, and you belong. Thank you" \*\****

***\*\* from evaluation forms***

**John Bradley**  
**Gathering**  
**Committee**  
**Member**





# "Time Out" Program

This program provides accommodation at a much-reduced rate for TCFV members who need an escape from their day-to-day grief. TCFV collaborates with a series of property owners who provide low-cost stays to TCFV members during off-peak periods.

We thank Nic & Kerilee Bolto of The Retreat at Mt Cathedral, and Pam and Max Williams of Magpie and Milnedale Cottages in Glen Forbes, for their ongoing support for TCFV members. We are also delighted that Sheree and Hayden Ballinger have offered their Forever Held retreat, just outside of Warrnambool, to parents bereaved of children aged from conception to 18 years of age.

TCFV is presently investigating an extension to the 'Time Out' program, via The Collingwood Childrens' Farm's farm therapy service.



Courtesy of KNELLY PHOTO [www.foreverheld.org.au](http://www.foreverheld.org.au)



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## The Compassionate Friends Victoria

229 Canterbury Road, Canterbury, Vic, 3126

P O Box 171, Canterbury, Vic, 3126

27/7 Grief Support Line: (03) 9888 4944

Freecall (Regional Callers): 1300 064 068

Administration Line: (03) 9888 4034

Email: [support@tcfv.org.au](mailto:support@tcfv.org.au)

Website: [www.tcfv.org.au](http://www.tcfv.org.au)