



It's Time to Talk says new Child Funeral Charity

More than 100 bereavement professionals attended the launch of the new Child Funeral Charity (CFC) at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire on July 23.

The event, which was combined with an educational seminar on child bereavement called **It's Time to Talk**, was declared a "resounding success" by charity chief executive Roger Gale, who said the support "far exceeded" his expectations.

One of the highlights of the day was an opening speech by Bel Mooney, one of the charity's patrons. The author and national newspaper advice columnist spoke movingly of her own experiences of losing a baby and the shortfall in support and care that she experienced. This had, she said, led her to become a key figure in the development of child bereavement support charities in order to help other parents.

Together with Roger, the charity's trustees, Kevin and Mary Tomes from Colourful Coffins and Anne Barber from Civil Ceremonies, were keen for the programme of events to be packed with a variety of speakers, representative of those professionals who have contact with families before, during or after the death of their baby or child.

Among them were Tim Morris, chief executive of the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management; Alison Kirkham, a funeral celebrant and nurse from Staffordshire; and Karen Brombley from Helen & Douglas House Hospice, which provides care for children and young adults.

Other speakers included John Harris from T Cribb & Sons, who talked about the funeral directors' perspective on child and baby funerals and promoted much lively debate among the audience, which included nurses, midwives, bereavement specialists, managers of crematorium, cemetery and woodland burial grounds and fellow funeral directors.

Paul Nash, chaplain at Birmingham Children's Hospitals, reinforced the important work that the Child Funeral Charity is about to embark on, saying it would provide a "key cornerstone" in what needs to be done to make things better for parents when a child dies.

Currently on a fundraising drive to raise much needed funds, from October 1, CFC will take referrals from professionals within the bereavement industry who will be able to put forward details of any family who they believe needs help to cover the costs of a baby or child's funeral.

Once approved by the trustees, CFC will donate up to £700 per family, with the money being paid directly to the relevant suppliers.

A recurring theme throughout the day was the constant difficulty experienced by parents who apply for financial help through the Government's Social Fund Payment system and Roger continued: "The Child Funeral Charity was created because we saw how challenging parents often found it to successfully apply for the Government's social fund, to allow low income families assistance to pay for funeral costs. We do not think it is right, that when faced with the loss of a child, a family suddenly has to worry about how to pay for the funeral.

"We were overwhelmed with the support and feedback we received on the day, which only goes to show just how badly this charity is needed. If we can build on that momentum to create change, then we hope we will be able to move forward quickly and help each parent during their personal journey of grief. Bel captured the essence of what we wanted this day to be about and as she so eloquently put it, 'the good work starts here'."

A referral form is already on the CFC website, and Roger thanked those suppliers who have already pledged goods and services to make it possible for the charity to source cost price or free items.

Running alongside the seminar was an exhibition of relevant products and services, with exhibitors including leading funeral trade associations, coffin suppliers, funeral stationery suppliers, child bereavement charities and bereavement support charities, faith organisations and grief counsellors.



L-R: Kevin Tomes, Anne Barber, Bel Mooney, Mary Tomes, Roger Gale