life

Issue 9 | Summer 2020

in the community with Funeral Partners

Planting sunflowers to brighten children's day

PAGE 9

Lockdown shave supports hospice

PAGE 8

In this issue...

One man went to mow

PAGE 3

Showing support for key workers

PAGE 11

Sam Kershaw
Chief Executive Officer

Two years ago, Sam Kershaw took over as Chief Executive Officer of Funeral Partners, having joined the business in 2016 as Chief Operating Officer. Sam has over 35 years' experience in the funeral profession, having worked his way up from Trainee Funeral Director to senior management.

The past four months has seen the UK and, indeed, most of the world face unprecedented and deeply worrying times as the coronavirus pandemic has impacted on all our lives.

Our funeral teams across the UK mainland and in Northern Ireland have truly been on the front line, playing a vital role in supporting bereaved families and their local communities.

I cannot thank them enough for the way they have gone above and beyond the call of duty, even though many have been affected personally, through illness in the family or bereavement.

I could not be more proud of the way they have pulled together and worked together. This individual and collective strength has been a huge reassurance for the families we have served during the pandemic.

Most of all, I am proud that they have done everything possible to provide personal and meaningful funerals to families, despite social distancing restrictions. This is so important for those who are grieving for a loved one.

This issue of Life in the community features many heart-warming examples of how our teams have gone the extra mile to support families, from driving past the deceased's home or workplace to enable friends and colleagues to applaud the cortege at safe distances, to arranging live webcasts for those unable to be at the funeral.

I have been touched by the kind words and gestures of thanks we have received from families, who have been so understanding of the restrictions and safety guidelines we have been working within. The support we have received from families and our communities has greatly helped our teams through this challenging period.

Sadly, Covid-19 will continue to affect our lives for the foreseeable future and our focus remains on keeping our families and teams safe, while continuing to provide the very best care for the deceased. The introduction of protective screens between the driver and passengers in our limousines (see back page) will enable us to offer this transport option again, and we are completing risk assessments on all locations and working practices to ensure the safety of our teams and the families we support.

As lockdown eases, we aim to restore as much choice as possible for families, while continuing to comply with the latest guidance from government and health protection organisations in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

> *We will offer families our support to arrange celebrations of life and remembrance events where they have been unable to give their loved one the send-off they wanted.*

Despite the loss of life and financial hardship caused by this crisis, we have seen wonderful examples of communities coming together to support each other. It has shown what is possible when individuals, communities, and businesses work together for a common cause.

As we emerge from lockdown, we will do even more to help individuals and communities to get back on their feet again. This is in the DNA of our long-established funeral businesses and we will support them to redouble their efforts.

In this issue...

08 Providing 'pots of love' for the bereaved

10 Supporting families and communities through unprecedented times

16 Limousines are back on the road

Superhero Tami juggles two vital roles supporting the community

Tami (left) with Sr Aideen Farren, who runs the out-of-hours District Nursing team

Funeral Arranger Tami Peel has been juggling two vital key worker roles to support her community during the Covid-19 crisis.

As well as her full-time job at **Elizabeth Way Funeral Directors** in Mossley, Greater Manchester, Tami works evening shifts as a district nurse.

Since the coronavirus pandemic started, she has been supporting the out-of-hours District Nursing team to nurse Covid-19 patients in their own homes.

Tami, who has two daughters aged four and 14, said: "It's been a juggling act and it's been emotionally draining. My children have coped really well, with my eldest helping out and being like a second mum to my younger daughter. She's great and has accepted the challenge."

Fortunately, Tami works with her partner Anthony Barton, who is the Funeral Director at Elizabeth Way, which became part of the Funeral Partners family a year ago. "We wouldn't have seen much of each other otherwise" she said!

"My youngest asked me what we were clapping for on a Thursday evening. So Anthony took them both to the Tameside hospital so they could see me in my uniform with all the hospital staff, paramedics, firefighters and emergency services congregated outside the hospital."

Tami's daughters even received personalised letters from the CEO of Tameside & Glossop Integrated Care NHS foundation Trust thanking them for allowing mum to be a hero.

Phil Barr, Regional Development Director for Funeral Partners, said:

> *Tami is doing an amazing job whilst juggling her role with us. She is truly engaged with the local community.*

Anthony and Tami have also managed to deliver food supplies to their local food bank and create a superhero window display at their funeral home with children's pictures of key workers, compiling a video of the pictures backed by a local singer singing 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow'. It can be viewed on their website news blog at www.elizabeth-way.co.uk/thank-you-keyworkers/

For more information about how our teams are supporting families and communities during the coronavirus pandemic, see pages 10 & 11.

One man went to mow

Funeral Director Ian Brown wanted to keep his village green in good shape after the coronavirus lockdown meant the local council postponed grass cutting services.

Ian, who works at the formerly family-owned **Ian Brown Funeral Director** in Carstairs, near Lanark in Scotland, started cutting the grass fortnightly to enable local families to use the village green for their daily exercise.

When he was called on to arrange a funeral in the village cemetery, he decided to tidy up around the grave beforehand.

His wife Linda, who also works in the business, explained: "He realised that looked worse – so he decided to cut the grass in the whole cemetery. Ian has always been actively involved in village life so grass cutting has allowed him to continue that during lockdown."

Realising that many elderly residents also needed their grass cutting, he added them to his schedule.

Ian Brown keeps the village green in shape

Long-serving funeral directors reflect on joining Funeral Partners

Funeral Partners continues to welcome respected funeral businesses into its growing family, with its total number of funeral homes across the UK having grown to more than 200.

In March, just before the lockdown took effect, Burnham Funeral Services in Somerset became the latest business to join the network. *Life in the community* talks to businesses and former owners who have recently joined the Funeral Partners family.

Serving Merseyside for 110 years

Kieron Dooley

Frank Dooley & Son Funeral Directors joined Funeral Partners at the end of 2019 after 110 years serving Merseyside.

Established in 1910 and run by four generations of the Dooley family, Frank Dooley & Son now operates four funeral homes: two in St Helens and branches in Haydock and Widnes.

Kieron Dooley, who remains working in the business as a Funeral Director, describes his great grandfather and founder as the adventurous Peter Dooley, originally a carpenter who left Ireland to help rebuild San Francisco after the earthquake in 1906.

"He returned to Britain a few years later and found many carpenters used their skills to become undertakers and funeral directors."

Peter founded the business, which now bears his son Frank's name. Frank's son Kevin joined his father in the family business - just as his son Kieron would.

Kieron admitted that choosing to become part of Funeral Partners wasn't an easy decision: "We all find change a challenge at times. However, our first impressions were based on meeting the people of Funeral Partners and this has been a pleasure.

"It's a collaboration of successfully run businesses with high ideals, a moral compass and the emotional intelligence to serve the families that call on us in dark times. We are immensely proud to be guaranteed seeing our family name live on within the funeral service and continuing to be held in high esteem."

Securing the future in unprecedented times

Richard Marsh is looking forward to the exciting future of **Burnham Funeral Services** and seeing the business' family values being preserved as part of Funeral Partners.

He founded the business in 1991 to give his hometown a family-run funeral directors.

Richard said: "With industry experience behind me, I made an offer for a premises to start my own."

Burnham Funeral Services quickly gained loyal customers by getting involved with the community, helped by Richard's established reputation. Today, this includes sponsoring sports clubs and other charitable organisations.

Richard moved to Southampton for a change of lifestyle. He said: "I wanted the flexibility to still be involved but focus on what I love, which is serving families, without the day-to-day running."

Richard wanted to remain with the business and secure its future for his daughter Danielle and sister Michelle, who work there, along with a fantastic team, and was reassured by Funeral Partners' operational model.

He said: "Funeral Partners come across as very family orientated. In fact, upon meeting CEO Sam Kershaw he said 'Welcome to the family'."

Richard was particularly impressed by how Funeral Partners handled the acquisition as the coronavirus outbreak took hold.

Richard Marsh (left) meets Funeral Partners CEO Sam Kershaw

He said: "They are excellent and always at the end of the phone. We're given daily updates and feel supported all the way through.

"Everything is business as usual and even better with Funeral Partners and we are now planning investments to the mortuary and new offices."

John Hogg Snr (far right) next to partner Claire, John Hogg Jnr and team

Joining Funeral Partners allowed me to focus on community

John Hogg was keen to preserve the good name of his business **John G Hogg Funeral Directors**, Sunderland, when he took the decision to join Funeral Partners 18-months ago.

He said: "I'm relatively young but I suffer from a health condition. I needed to take the weight off my shoulders when it came to the growing admin side of the business."

John was proud of his business' successful practices and family-run reputation and, when approached by Funeral Partners, was quick to stress the need for continuity and maintaining strong community links.

John said: "They listened to my concerns and reassured me they wanted the business to remain successful without any unnecessary changes."

Impressed by Funeral Partners' commitment and proven track record, John agreed to sell the business. He took the role of Business Principal, while his partner Claire and son John continued as Funeral Directors.

John immediately noticed Funeral Partners' support to get more involved with the community, including working with palliative care provider St Benedict's Hospice and mental health charity Mind.

He said Funeral Partners was true to its word in allowing the business to operate in the same way. "We still give a personal service and operate like a family-run business with me, John and Claire at the forefront."

Meet some of our businesses in Northern Ireland

Eighteen respected funeral homes in Northern Ireland joined Funeral Partners in late 2019 as the business expanded beyond the UK mainland for the first time. Life introduced several in our Winter issue, and here we shine the spotlight on two more.

John Gray & Co Funeral Directors

John Gray & Co Funeral Directors, Bangor, was established over 60 years ago by James Gray, who was later joined by his nephew John Gray.

John's daughter Pat became manager of John Gray & Co until local funeral director James Brown bought the business in 1985.

Current Funeral Director Mike Smith has aimed to preserve James Brown's ethos built on trust and confidence, and sees joining Funeral Partners as an opportunity to continue serving the Bangor community with care.

Brandon McKee and Carolyn McCauley at John Gray & Co

He said: "I believe we now have a great opportunity to expand our community connections."

Mulhollands Funeral Directors

Bob Mulholland, founder of **Mulhollands Funeral Directors** over 50 years ago, transformed his business' Carrickfergus premises from a motor dealership into a funeral home, before adding a second funeral home in Larne. Now, joining Funeral Partners has the team excited for the next big step in the business' journey.

Although his son, Peter Mulholland retired three years ago, he has agreed to spend some time assisting Funeral Partners in an advisory role and is looking forward to supporting Mulhollands' work in the community.

Mulhollands of Larne

Funeral Director Rebecca Wilson said: "Funeral Partners listens to staff and we can voice how we feel, which is important."

Contact our specialist acquisitions team in confidence on **07528 970 531** or email: **steve.wilkinson@funeralpartners.co.uk**

Father's Day is a special time for those who work with their dads

Father's Day is special for a number of funeral homes across the Funeral Partners family, where sons and daughters have followed their fathers' footsteps into the funeral profession.

James and Beverley Brown at the Dundonald funeral home

Success of James Brown & Sons lies in family succession

James Brown knew from an early age that he wanted to follow in his father and grandfather's footsteps and work in the family business in Belfast.

But his children, Beverley and James, opted to follow their own paths and established successful careers in London.

James, who at 75 is still the well-known face of **James Brown & Sons Funeral Directors**, said: "I was happy for my own children to follow their own paths as I had a number of brothers and cousins in the business with me."

But he was proud and happy when, some ten years ago, Beverley returned to Belfast and took the opportunity to join the business which had been sold into corporate ownership in 1988.

Beverley explained: "I remember as a wee girl going down the yard and being round the office with dad.

"When I was growing up, I had no inclination that I would end up in the funeral business. But when Dad told me there was an opportunity to join the business, even though I had never worked in it, it was a very familiar environment for me."

Beverley had risen to a commercial sales management role in retail and was soon bringing her forward-looking skills to the business. James explained: "We always get on, although sometimes she is looking forward while I'm at the stage when I still look back."

However, Beverley is full of praise for her father: "I enjoy working with dad. His life is his work and always has been and I really admire him for his capacity to embrace change."

Beverley works as a consultant, supporting the community work of the six James Brown & Sons funeral homes, which extend beyond Belfast to Dunmurry, Dundonald and Newtownabbey and the other Funeral Partners Northern Ireland funeral homes.

Since joining the Funeral Partners family late last year, James Brown & Sons has faced the unprecedented changes brought about by Covid-19.

Having been advised to shield because he is in the vulnerable age group, James Brown spent 10 weeks away from the business for the first time in his working life. Now he is back, working with Beverley and Funeral Partners to support local families, following his own family's traditions since 1904.

> **"As he has got older, his willingness and enthusiasm to help other people and particularly young people in the community in east Belfast is amazing."**

Leslie (seated) and Leonard Bridge and family

Learning valuable lessons - about work and life

At **George Steele & Son Funeral Directors in Ossett,** West Yorkshire, Business Principal Richard and his father David Steele, now a business consultant at Funeral Partners, have worked together for years.

Richard was raised in the family business from an early age, which made the unique experience gained from having a father as a Funeral Director feel normal.

He said: "I got to visit places no other child would have, both in the joinery and funeral side of the business, I didn't really know much different."

Richard took interest in all aspects of joinery and funerals, however there was no pressure from David to follow in his father's footsteps.

David said: "After leaving school Richard went to the University of Huddersfield to study media."

However, Richard kept close to his dad by studying from home and helping out in the business wherever he could.

He explained: "My father just guided and supported me to do as much or as little as I wanted to do."

Richard decided to go full-time after graduating, so David gave him invaluable lessons about supporting the community, families and their loved ones and introduced him to industry experts.

Richard described: "Over the years my dad has taught me many valuable lessons, but one motto he stands by is 'Make haste slowly'. It means act quickly, but not so quickly that you make careless mistakes."

However, David admits the tables turned when Richard began teaching him. He said: "Richard introduced me to new methods of working and moving with the times while still keeping our basic traditions alive. This includes information technology and improved premises for both ourselves and our clients.

"Our father-son relationship hasn't changed, except instead of me guiding Richard, it's now Richard guiding me."

Following in the footsteps of his father was the first port of call for Leonard Bridge, Funeral Director at **Frank Dooley & Son Funeral Directors** in Merseyside, four weeks after leaving school.

Leonard's father Leslie Bridge decided to join Frank Dooley & Son shortly after losing his own dad, leaving a long career as a self-employed electrician to care for those going through similar situations.

Leonard joined the business soon after, however Leslie didn't let the close relationship with his son get in the way of Leonard's development in the funeral industry. Leonard explained: "Right from day one Dad guided me from a distance. He was very keen for me to learn and stand on my own two feet. He felt with this approach, I would gain a whole lot more experience."

The pair have found their fair share of challenges while working together.

Leonard said: "One big challenge was working and living together as most fathers and sons don't always agree.

David, Richard and Christine Steele

"I soon learned the best way forward was to draw the line between our working life and home life."

Leonard and Leslie's relationship has strengthened as a result of their professional respect and the nature of their work. Leonard described:

> **"Our relationship has grown stronger and stronger throughout the many years of caring for families and working together. We have a very strong relationship as father and son.**

"The valuable lessons I have learned from working with my father are about life, and how much we can take for granted simple things such as going home to your family at the end of the day."

Community pinboard

Providing 'Pots of Love' for the bereaved

E Sargeant & Son Funeral Directors appealed to the Slough community for spare garden pots or plants and children's creative drawings to support people who had lost loved ones during the COVID-19 outbreak.

The Funeral Directors joined Slough Mutual Aid to turn donations into beautiful cards and flowerpots and delivered them to the bereaved during these difficult times.

Mark Clements, South Regional Support Manager for Funeral Partners, said: "No one should feel alone in this outbreak, so we want to show those who have recently lost loved ones that Slough is thinking of them by delivering these cards and pots of love to their door."

Children aged 14 and under were asked to create the drawings and include things that would make people smile, be it rainbows, hearts or flowers, as well as the words 'Thinking of you'.

The teams turned the garden supplies donated to them by the community into 'pots of love', which E Sargeant & Son delivered to doorsteps with the printed cards.

Mark Clements with Julie Siddiqi of Slough Mutual Aid

Lockdown head shave supports hospice

Lee Howard, Area Development Manager of Funeral Partners in Sussex, got the most out of his overdue haircut in lockdown by having a complete head shave, raising hundreds of pounds for St Wilfrid's Hospice in Eastbourne.

Lee livestreamed going under his fiancé's clippers after reaching his £600 fundraising target for the Hospice, which provides support for those in the final stages of their life.

Lee, who is based at Payne & Sons Funeral Directors in Eastbourne, said: "St Wilfrid's Hospice provides invaluable care for people in the last phase of their lives and their families, which is more important now than ever."

Lee reached his fundraising target through JustGiving, the online fundraising platform, which has already paid for a nurse in St Wilfrid's in-patient unit for two days.

200 miles to Walk All Over Cancer

Tracey Still, Bexley Hub Manager

Kelly Smith from Ashdown Funeral Services in Belvedere, Kent, walked 200 miles in a month for Walk All Over Cancer by Cancer Research, doubling the challenge's requirements.

Kelly raised £740, more than double her original target, for the initiative in memory of her brother Leo, who passed away due to liver cancer in 2016.

Kelly and Tracey Still, Funeral Partners' Bexley Hub Manager, created the Cancer Research fundraising team after Clare Cornwall and Jade Walker, Funeral Arrangers at Ashdown's Sidcup and Bexley branches respectively, joined the challenge.

Kelly changed her daily life by walking to and from work, taking one hour and 15 minutes each way, and previously walked to see colleagues and friends instead of calling them, to reach her personal target.

She said: "I walk a lot in my day-to-day life so thought 10,000 steps wouldn't be challenging enough for me. I therefore pushed myself to walk roughly 20,000 steps per day to reach 200 miles in total."

To find your local branch visit www.funeralpartners.co.uk

Planting sunflowers to brighten children's day

To support children struggling through the coronavirus lockdown, Funeral Arranger Liz Doherty at James Brown & Sons Funeral Directors in Belfast created planting kits containing sunflower seeds and compost for a local school to deliver to pupils to grow at home.

Liz, who delivered 50 kits to Fane Street Primary School, said the idea came after her local community centre organised a children's sunflower growing competition: "I thought it would be a great idea to spread this example of community work further afield.

"The idea is for children to grow sunflowers or rainbow coloured Nasturtium flowers from seed and put them in a place where people passing can see them, creating a bright colourful environment.

"Some may think children are having an easy ride at the moment but with the restrictions in place within our society, a lot of children are struggling.

"Through personal experience, my son is one who is really missing his friends and family. Recently he said to me 'You're the only person I can hug right now'. Many children will probably be feeling this way. Some have even been separated from the people they love most."

Liz Doherty prepares the planting kits

Keeping NHS staff comfortable

The communities of Enfield and Barnet have been donating knitting materials to help create comfortable face masks for NHS staff on the frontline during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lorraine Gould, Funeral Arranger and Administrator at M M Broad & Son Funeral Directors in Barnet, has been collecting buttons and bought nearly a hundred herself.

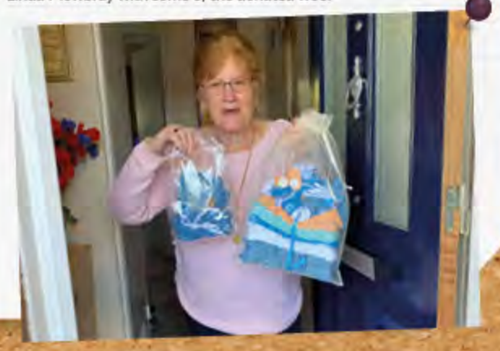
She provided them to Enfield resident Linda Mowbray, who is creating cotton mask mates and headbands to hold face masks in place and save frontline workers from sore ears.

Lorraine has been working at M M Broad & Sons for six months and relishes getting involved with the community, so placed a sign in her branch's window asking visitors and passers-by for donations.

Lorraine said: "Face masks can be very uncomfortable when worn for long periods of time like many NHS staff need to at the moment.

"Linda is making it more bearable for those on the frontline with beautifully knitted mask mates and headbands that hold masks in place without rubbing against the ears."

Linda Mowbray with some of the donated wool



Singing for veterans on VE Day

Kayleigh Hughes

A Funeral Arranger at Thomas Bragg & Sons, Knowle, in the West Midlands, performed wartime songs for veterans celebrating VE Day.

Kayleigh Hughes sang patriotic anthems such as I Vow to Thee My Country, Land of Hope and Glory, Rule Britannia and God Save the Queen to two Knowle residents and Robert, who lived outside Solihull.

Kayleigh, who has achieved a music degree and Grade 8 in singing, said: "Robert went knocking on all his neighbours' doors to get them to come and listen from their front gardens. He was so excited."

The request to entertain the veterans came from the B93 VE Day Facebook group, which organised socially-distanced VE Day celebrations in Solihull amid the COVID-19 outbreak.

Kayleigh drove to the veterans' homes with a microphone and speaker lent to her by Suzi Lauder, a civil celebrant who works with Thomas Bragg & Sons. She said: "People along the street were joining in and it really lifted their spirits."

Supporting families and communities through unprecedented times

One of the hardest things bereaved families have had to face during the coronavirus crisis is not being allowed to say their final goodbyes to their loved one in the way they would wish.

Our Funeral Directors across the UK have been going the extra mile, trying to add small personal touches to support families through this distressing time.

Anthony Barton with the key worker window display at Elizabeth Way Funeral Directors

A chance to say goodbye

At **Elizabeth Way Funeral Directors** in Greater Manchester, Funeral Director Anthony Barton explained the importance of allowing family members to say their final goodbye to their loved one in the Chapel of Rest.

Anthony said: "The ways things have been is particularly sad. If the person died of Covid-19, their loved ones may have been self-isolating and unable to see them for weeks.

"One elderly man who lost his wife had been married for 67 years. She died in hospital and he hadn't been allowed to see her. He was so grateful when we said he could come to see her in our Chapel of Rest.

"He was a different person afterwards, he couldn't thank us enough for allowing him to say his final goodbyes."

Anthony said, with only ten people allowed to attend a service, families also greatly appreciated the offer to page the funeral cortege outside the deceased person's home.

"It gave people the chance to pay their respects on the street before the funeral. When we arrived, family, friends and neighbours came out and the whole street started clapping."

Anthony said the team was humbled by the heartwarming feedback received from families thanking them for helping to make arrangements go as smoothly as possible despite the restrictions.

During lockdown, Anthony and Funeral Arranger Tami Peel ran a children's rainbow drawing competition, judged by a local church minister, following it up with a superhero window display. Anthony said they had been doing everything they could to support their community.

Families take comfort from the personal touch

At **Torbay & District Funeral Service** in Torquay, Funeral Director Sarah Lockton has tried to ensure families can give their loved one a fitting send-off.

"It's terribly sad to see only ten people in the chapel, sitting apart in order to be socially distanced," she said. Sarah has helped some families by facetiming them from her phone so they can follow the funeral service.

"There are a lot of elderly and retired people in the area without family nearby. It helps their relatives to see that someone is attending their funeral."

Sarah has gone out of her way to add small touches, for example, one deceased person liked pink and she arranged for the pall bearers to wear pink ties and, at no extra cost, she ordered pink buttonholes for the team.

"People notice the little things we do for them," she said. "We have had lovely feedback, families have been really understanding."

One family sent Sarah a note which said: "I cannot tell you how happy I was with everything you did. I noticed and appreciated the personal touches and I was touched and pleased. Dad would have been too.

"I would add that there are good funeral directors and very good funeral directors, but you are in a class of your own and should be very proud of the way you look after people."

Sarah and Funeral Director Mark Carr have also connected with their local communities by decorating the funeral home windows with children's pictures, showing their support for the NHS and key workers.

After posting on Facebook asking for children's pictures, Sarah received nearly 80 - she had to supplement the window display with a noticeboard inside the branch.

The rainbow window display at Torbay & District Funeral Service.

A show of support

Across the UK, teams at our funeral homes have been showing their support for the NHS, key workers and their communities. **John Blenkiron and Sons Funeral Directors** in Richmond, North Yorkshire, displayed 'Real Life Superheroes' banners on the railings outside their funeral home to thank the NHS.

At **Ian Brown Funeral Director** in Lanark, Scotland, the funeral home was lit up in blue to support the NHS, and at **James and Thomas Funeral Directors** in Cobham, Surrey, the team created a rainbow memory garden in front of their branch.

In memory of those who lost their fight against the coronavirus, Karen Rattigan from **Pinks Funeral Directors** in Hamsey Green, Surrey, placed an artificial candle in the window of her branch, decorating the candle holder with a rainbow.

Finding new ways to pay respects

Funeral Directors Pauline Lawrence and Yvonne Holden at **Michael Kennedy Funeral Services** in Blackley, Manchester, made special arrangements to allow former colleagues to provide a memorable send-off.

They conducted a funeral for a man who had worked for a local firm for most of his life. Because Covid-19 restrictions prevented his former colleagues from attending the service, they arranged for the cortege to drive to his former workplace.

His lorry took centre stage in the yard and 200 fellow workers turned out to clap and cheer. Pauline and Yvonne explained: "We paged his hearse around their yard and paused to allow the family to thank all those in attendance. It was a very special moment."

Michael Kennedy Funeral Services also arranged a funeral service for a train driver and were asked to make the day special. Pauline and Yvonne said: "We arranged for staff from his care home to open their gates and line the driveway with some of the residents to show their respect.

"We then visited the local railway station where there was a long line of train drivers clapping our cortege and the trains tooted their horns too. It made us all feel proud to support our family's wishes."

Superheroes banner at John Blenkiron and Sons in North Yorkshire
Funeral Arranger Liz Bayliss with her rainbow memory garden at James and Thomas in Surrey
Rainbow window display at JH Way Funeral Services in Dawlish
Ian Brown Funeral Director lit up blue for the NHS

Putting our hearts into bereavement support

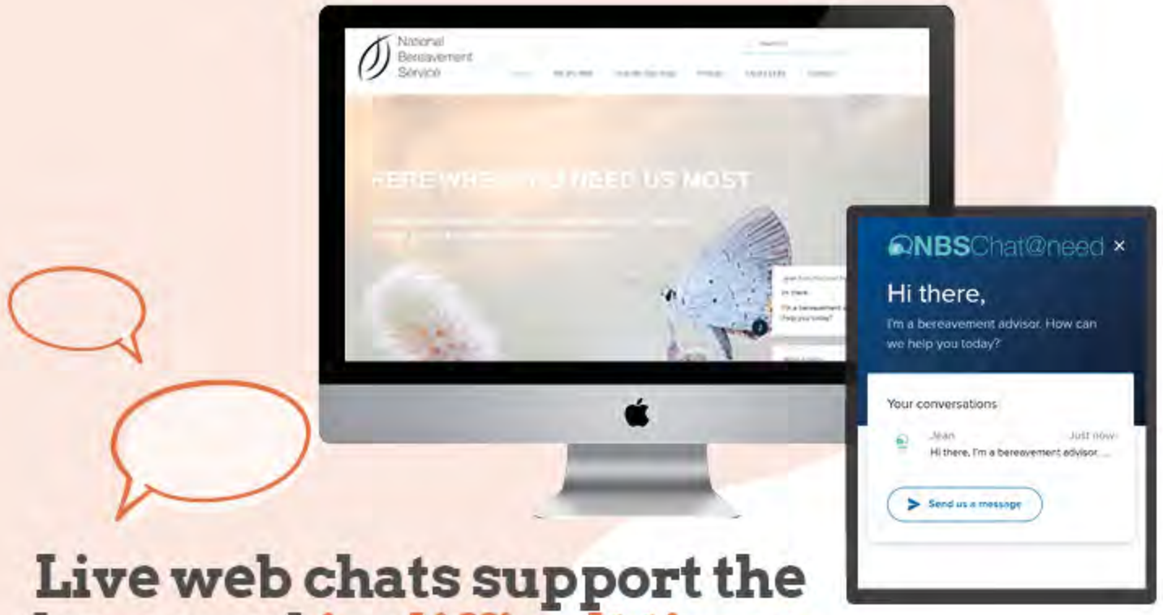
Funeral Partners teams have supported families through the COVID-19 pandemic by putting love and care into memory boxes.

Suzanne Bremner, at **Daren Persson Funeral Services** in Tyne and Wear, has knitted pairs of hearts, placing one in a memory box with a poem for families and the other with their loved ones.

She said: "I make each one individual to each deceased. They started as a one-off during the peak of the coronavirus, but we've decided this is a service we will continue to give to our families."

Judi Edwards, Area Development Manager in the Midlands, ordered 500 colourful wooden hearts to give families and their loved ones, along with an adapted poem about coronavirus bereavement.

Judi said: "We don't know anyone who can knit so have opted for beautiful wooden ones to show families our support."



Live web chats support the bereaved in difficult times

The National Bereavement Service (NBS) has expanded its emotional support offering with a live chat on its website, allowing the bereaved to anonymously speak with bereavement advisors.

Jean Watkins, Director of NBS, hopes the feature will encourage people less comfortable speaking about their feelings to seek help, including those self-isolating due to COVID-19.

She said: "The live chat gives bereaved families another method for communication, as not everybody feels comfortable picking up the phone and talking to someone.

"People can choose to chat with our advisors anonymously or give their email address for more long-term communication."

The live chat is one of three services recently launched by the NBS to increase its emotional support for the bereaved.

Jean said: "For a long time we have provided practical guidance on what to do when a loved one dies and have always wanted to offer emotional support as well.

"In addition to our helpline and virtual counselling, the live chat is part of the triage of services we have launched to be there for bereaved families wherever possible."

The live chat is in the process of being added to all Funeral Partners websites. Funeral directors can refer families to it, and it allows the NBS to track feedback and engagement rates to improve its service.

Kelly Hailou, Marketing Director at Funeral Partners, said: "This is an exciting new development for our counselling and support services which we welcome.

"We hope that by introducing new ways of contacting the counsellors we can reach those people that struggle with talking and find it much easier to reach out for help through online channels."

Addressing funeral poverty in Scotland

Extra support has been made available for people on low incomes in Scotland to meet the costs of a funeral.

The Funeral Support Payment's rate for 'other expenses' such as funeral director fees, coffin, flowers and a celebrant, has been increased from £700 to £1,000, the first increase since 2003. Funeral Support Payments already cover burial or cremation fees in full.

The increase brings Scotland in line with England and Wales, although the Scottish Government has additionally committed to linking the increase to inflation.

For more information, see www.mygov.scot/funeral-support-payment/

A similar Funeral Expenses Payment applies in Northern Ireland, see www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/funeral-expenses-payment.

Support for parents who lose a child

A new law giving grieving parents paid time off work if they lose a child under the age of 18 took effect in England, Scotland and Wales in April.

All employed parents now have the right to two weeks' leave if they lose a child or suffer a stillbirth after 24 weeks of pregnancy, irrespective of their length of service.

Parents who have been employed continuously by their current employer for six months or more will also be entitled to Statutory Parental Bereavement Pay.

Promoted as a world first, the new law follows a ten-year campaign by Lucy Herd, whose son Jack drowned at 23 months old.

It gives parents, including adoptive parents and those becoming parents through surrogacy, plus partners who live with the parent, the right to take the leave in the 56 weeks following the child's death.

Ministers in Northern Ireland have pledged to bring their laws in line with the rest of the UK.

For more information about Parental Bereavement Leave, see www.gov.uk/parental-bereavement-pay-leave.

Campaigning for crisis funeral loans

With many families losing loved ones during the coronavirus pandemic, the National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD) has urged the Government to introduce Crisis Funeral Loans.

The Association, which represents thousands of funeral businesses across the UK including Funeral Partners' funeral homes, wants grieving families to be spared the additional anxiety caused by struggling to meet funeral costs.

Funeral Partners branches have supported this initiative, contacting local politicians and influencers.

Funerals have increased by around 30% since the COVID-19 crisis began, while many families have been hit hard by the economic impact of the lockdown.

Jon Levett, Chief Executive of the National Association of Funeral Directors, said: "It is a desperately hard time for those losing loved ones during this pandemic.

"The Government has sought to help people through these difficult times, and the introduction of the Crisis Funeral Loan would show a proactive and compassionate approach."

Plan Now & Save
with our pre-paid funeral plan

Why buy a funeral plan?

- Guarantees Funeral Directors' costs at today's prices
- Gives you the opportunity to express your personal wishes
- Eases the emotional and financial burden on your family

Check online or in your local funeral home for details of any special offers.

Now's the time to buy a Choice funeral plan for peace of mind for you and your family, no matter how large or small you want your funeral to be.

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For more information call the Choice team direct or buy online

www.choiceplan.co.uk **01803 298 243**

Thank you messages

Our teams regularly receive messages of thanks from families they have helped. Here is a recent selection.

HAVEN Funeral Services, Hillingdon, London

From the moment we stepped into the Hillingdon branch we felt a real sense of support and care from Jackie and Maggie, who explained the whole process to us at length.

The Funeral Director Brian enabled us to talk with ease, he was warm, understanding and engaging, demonstrating hands-on care. His guidance and insights were very helpful; this was the hallmark of what was a very effective, bespoke and professional service provided to us throughout.

HAVEN played an essential part in making the whole experience memorable for all the right reasons.

We highly recommend Haven to anyone searching for a Funeral Directors who really understand their customers and are price competitive.

S

Ashdown Funeral Services, Sidcup, Kent

Sadly, a family friend lost her father and due to the current COVID-19 pandemic we were unable to attend but we did, however, all visit the property when the car arrived to say our final goodbyes.

The funeral staff were very professional, I would like to thank Clare for the support she provided to my friend and her family by going out of her way to ensure they were able to attend viewings and have personal items brought to him.

When the car arrived, staff were apologetic about the fact that numbers were limited to attend the funeral but suggested a round of applause before the cars left for his final journey, which was an emotional but lovely touch. Thank you to staff for their support and professionalism.

M

Roy Quinton Funeral Directors, Walsall

Excellent service from Dave, Scott & the team. Very professional in all they do. Highly recommended.

JD

Miles & Daughters Funeral Directors, Crowthorne, Berkshire

Great help in organising Mum's funeral. Sally was very compassionate, respectful and nothing was too much trouble for her. She took the stress out of a very stressful and emotional time for my family.

On the day everything went smoothly, and people commented on what a lovely occasion our Celebration of Mum's Life was.

JA

John Blenkiron & Sons Funeral Directors, Richmond

I cannot praise John Blenkiron & Sons Funeral Directors highly enough. They are an amazing group of people who provide exceptional care to families at the most distressing time. Their care of the deceased is also outstanding. Nothing is too much trouble. They operate very professionally in a calm way which supports the bereaved immensely.

CA

W Hodges Funeral Directors, Sevenoaks, Kent

I would not hesitate to recommend Muriel and her team for their empathy, support and help with the repatriation to Scotland and burial of my Father.

When the going got tough, Muriel was by my, and my family's side, emotionally and practically. I cannot thank her enough for fulfilling my father's last wishes and making a very sad situation bearable.

AC

★★★★★

Our teams also regularly receive five-star Google reviews for their service, here are some recent ones.

Banfield & Pomphrey Funeral Directors, Hastings

We chose to go here as I wanted my mum to be close, it was the best choice ever. Tony made me feel at ease straight away just by a call, then I popped in to speak to him and he is the best person for the job, I was probably in there every other day, asking questions, giving bits to be put with my mum and they were always there for you.

I'd like to say an amazing big thank you to Tony, Trevor and Nick for making the hardest day of my life the best send-off for my mum and amazing day that anyone could ever have. Thank you all, you guys are amazing.

Heather and family

Darlford Funeral Service, Kent

First of all, I just want to say a huge thank you to Debi for everything she did for us when my dad passed away. My step mum and I were going along getting quotes, but after speaking with Debi we made the decision there and then to go with her because of how lovely and caring she was.

Nothing was too much for her from beginning to end. A first-class service. Highly recommended. Thank you, Debi, from myself and Teresa.

James Brown & Sons Funeral Directors, Lisburn Road, Belfast

I have just recently lost my beautiful Mother. My sister and I were floundering, never having had to arrange a funeral before, but Lisa at the Lisburn Road branch was incredible.

She just took all the stress and worry out of our hands and sorted it all out. NOTHING was too much trouble. They made my Mother look beautiful. Every single member of staff that we dealt with was professional, sincere and sympathetic. We could not have asked for better. I would highly recommend them. I cannot praise this firm highly enough.

Daren Persson Funeral Services, North Shields, Tyne & Wear

A huge thank you to everyone connected with Daren Persson Funeral Services. At a time of sadness, my family were supported 100% of the way. Nothing was too much trouble and staff were both friendly and professional.

Mr Bremner talked us through every step and his choice of celebrant, Mr Brown, was perfect. I would recommend this funeral service to everyone, knowing that friends and loved ones would be treated with respect and dignity.

Huddersfield Funeral Home

Just a few words to congratulate the Huddersfield Funeral Home on their exemplary service provided for my mother's funeral. Paul Rayner and the team were respectful, compassionate and efficient in providing a great send-off for her.

It was a long day and the team worked very hard and were diligent. They were instrumental in ensuring the day went smoothly, and that the funeral in its entirety was a great success.

High Street Funeral Directors, Erdington, Birmingham

We cannot thank Stephanie and her colleagues enough for assisting us in arranging my father's funeral. The help and support that the team gave our family, including young children, was above and beyond what we expected.

We would thoroughly recommend their services to anyone following a bereavement.

Chris White Funeral Directors, Salisbury

Chris White Funeral Directors provided such care and attention to detail at the funeral of Dad, especially Helen and Amy, who provided such professionalism, knowledge, sympathy and support.

The ceremony was faultless and so was the service that all the staff provided. It was a difficult time for the family and friends of David, but their kindness and gentleness allowed a lasting moment.

Limousines are back on the road

Funeral Service Operative Christopher Hudson drives one of the first limousines to have a protective screen fitted

Funeral homes in Slough and Woking were the first Funeral Partners branches to re-introduce limousines with protective screens to allow families to book processions again while maintaining safe distancing.

The five vehicles have a barrier between the driver and a maximum of four passengers from the same household to reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19.

James Ray, Deputy Regional Development Director of Funeral Partners South Region, said: "I'm extremely pleased that we can offer families limousines and once again become the master of ceremony as funerals are all about choices, the last three months have seen us reduce the level of choices available to families."

Slough and Woking served as trials ahead of the fitting of screens to limousines across the Funeral Partners network.

A guidance document has also been written for funeral teams to follow, which includes cleaning the vehicles between use and wearing face masks and PPE while in them.

James concluded: "Ensuring that we are offering families the option to choose the best funeral package available for them, based on budget, local custom and the deceased's own final wishes is important to all funeral directors because it forms part of our local heritage. For families, knowing they have been able to give their loved one the best funeral available aids the grieving process."

Webcasting a funeral for a family overseas

Diane Jones

Abbotsfield & Dawe Brothers Funeral Directors arranged to webcast a funeral service for a family in Canada who were unable to attend in person.

Diane Jones, Funeral Arranger and Administrator at Abbotsfield & Dawe Brothers in Ross on Wye, worked closely with The Forest of Dean Crematorium and its service provider Wesley Media to live-stream the funeral for cousins, nieces and nephews on the other side of the pond.

Diane said: "The family unable to attend felt included and those who could attend were pleased to be able to watch it later, as mourners aren't always able take in everything happening at once."

Diane had not been asked to arrange a live-streamed funeral until the COVID-19 outbreak and, like many Funeral Partners colleagues, has now worked on several for families maintaining social distancing.

She said: "Setting up a webcast is very easy. We book it all online and it's a matter of clicking on an icon to order music.

"A unique ID and password is then sent for friends and family to log in when the service is about to begin."

Diane believes live-streamed funeral services will increase in popularity beyond the coronavirus pandemic. She concluded: "Families like to have the recordings as a keepsake so I think they have a lot of value."

For more information about all the funeral homes in the Funeral Partners family visit **www.funeralpartners.co.uk** or contact Marketing Director Kelly Hallou: **Kelly.Hallou@funeralpartners.co.uk**
We welcome your feedback and comments about this issue of Life magazine, or if you would like to contribute, please get in touch with Gemma Taylor, Community & Communications Manager: **Gemma.Taylor@funeralpartners.co.uk**
Please note: Handshaking and group photos in this issue were taken before the Covid-19 outbreak and social distancing requirements.