

COVID-19

MAKING RESTRICTED FUNERALS MEANINGFUL

How NAFD members are working hard to support families

NAFD member Paul Cuthell, whose family firm Thomas Cuthell & Sons is based in Falkirk, Scotland, recently described to a journalist how he stood at a graveside and said a few prayers for a 90-year-old COVID-19 victim, because the man's only living relatives were two cousins in their 70s who were self-isolating.

"The only people in attendance were myself, a colleague and three cemetery staff," said Paul. "I felt I couldn't walk away without saying a few words and a prayer in thanks for his life."

All across the UK, NAFD member firms are making sure that, despite the ongoing restrictions, they don't lose the personal touch - and are innovating to support families and local communities who lose a loved one during the pandemic.

AW Lymn - the Family Funeral Service in Nottingham is another firm that has paid respects on behalf of a family

unable to attend. The service was streamed online to relatives who were self-isolating.

Chairman Nigel Lymn Rose said: "We are also making detours in the hearse to streets where the deceased person lived and was known so locals can line the streets and say their farewells."

AJ Adkinson in Leicestershire is another firm visiting local communities, where possible, for the final journey. The firm recently reversed two hearses into the driveway of a family home to enable relatives to say prayers for a father and son, both of whom had died of COVID-19.

"The father was in his 80s and the son in his 50s," said Jenny Gilbert-Trigg. "The family were Hindu and weren't able to undertake the ritual washing, so we laid out their clothes anatomically inside the coffin and put in items the family requested. On the day of the service we reversed the funeral cars up the drive of their home so the whole

family could say their prayers together from their doorstep.

"We've also sprayed a favourite perfume or aftershave inside the casket and lightly on the outside so, even if mourners cannot see their loved ones, they can smell a familiar smell associated with that person."

CPJ Field, a Sussex-based family firm that is still able to offer embalming, supported a family with some particular requests. "We are trying as hard as we can to do what we can," said Jeremy Field. "For instance, we had one young man who wanted to talk to our embalmer about specific instructions for his mother and so we arranged a zoom call."

A few miles away, Abi Pattenden of Freeman Brothers, which is also based in Sussex, describes how they are trying to meet as many family requests as possible. She said: "When it was chilly a few weeks ago we were being asked to bury people with blankets. We are also being asked to place in more photographs and teddy bears."

Freeman Brothers also supported the family and friends of a former postman in arranging a cortege of Post Office vehicles to follow the hearse to the crematorium.

And Co-op Funeralcare arranged a socially-distanced funeral on a farm - with the deceased gentleman carried to his resting place on his favourite tractor.

As well as working hard to personalise the very simple funeral services, NAFD members have also been reaching out to local communities to offer their support.

Examples include a new suite of videos explaining the new funeral restrictions to bereaved people, by Central England Co-op, E Sargeant & Son Funeral Directors in Slough which is turning unwanted flower pots and children's drawings into beautiful cards and flowerpots for the bereaved, and donations in excess of £100,000 to community organisations supporting those struggling during the pandemic by Southern Co-op.

One thoughtful gesture, by Crake and Mallon Funeral Directors in Teesside ended up going viral on social media!

On the afternoon of 15 May, standing among a pile of boxes, business owner Alison Crake snapped a photo of her delivery of 200 copies of Charlie Mackesy's beautiful, illustrated book



The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse. Two minutes and one short tweet from her phone later, in which she mentioned the intention to create care packages for bereaved families - Alison got on with the rest of her day and thought no more of it.

The following morning, Alison awoke to a mobile phone screen covered in notifications - including one from the book's author Charlie Mackesy. To date, Alison's original tweet has been viewed over 135,000 times and liked more than 2,300 times!

As well as all these individual acts of kindness and support, the NAFD and funeral firms across the UK have joined together to urge the public to show their support for families by bowing their heads, gently applauding or simply pausing when a hearse passes them.

Videos of funeral corteges, flanked by applauding members of the public are regularly popping up on the internet. One which made the news was a funeral for a Hibernian supporting grandfather arranged by Andrew Purves from Edinburgh funeral directors William Purves.

He explained: "The family asked us to go to particular landmarks in the city which were really important to him. We were asked to give a small beep of the horn at a couple of

different landmarks, which is something I don't think we've done before. What was really important was the family felt they were giving him the send-off they wanted him to have. It's what people have started to do because they can't do anything else."

Current NAFD President, David Barrington, describes the emotional impact of seeing members of the public bow their heads and quietly applaud as a hearse passes by. "There are moments of light, when neighbours stand on the street and applaud the hearse as it goes past," he said. "It has left my wife Claire, who is also a funeral director, in tears at times."

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