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EDUCATING TOMORROW'S BEREAVED PEOPLE, *Today*

I WANT TO PRESENT TWO ISSUES TO YOU, ONES THAT WE'VE OFTEN CONSIDERED SEPARATELY BUT WHICH I FIRMLY BELIEVE ARE INEXTRICABLY LINKED – AND WHICH COME TOGETHER TO GIVE THE FUNERAL PROFESSION AND WIDER BEREAVEMENT COMMUNITY A CALL TO ACTION. A CALL THAT THE NAFD IS DETERMINED TO HELP ANSWER.



In recent years we've seen many of the taboos around talking about death and funerals slowly being removed, with increasing numbers of Britons becoming more comfortable in talking about the end of life. However, according to YouGov's research for the NAFD, there's still a percentage of adults in the UK that say they have no intention of thinking ahead to their funeral – and a greater number who will only do so when prompted by serious illness, an accident or the death of someone else.

When YouGov asked Britons, in June, what would prompt them to think about their funeral, 12% said nothing and 9% said they didn't know. Fifty-two per cent of respondents said when someone close to them had died, and 52% of respondents said when someone close to them had died, or only after they had experienced a serious illness or an accident. These figures haven't moved much in the last two years and so either we are educating people too late, or we do not have a strong enough collective voice to make a difference.

We also know that relatively few people have made financial provision for their funeral in the shape of a funeral plan, whether formal or informal.. In YouGov's survey, despite the majority of people (61%) accepting that it is their responsibility to make arrangements for their own future funeral - 59% of respondents in the survey said they had made no plans as yet.

This tells me that the battle is far from won and we still have a hard time confronting our mortality in this country, which leaves our loved ones ill prepared, emotionally, practically and financially, when we do die.

On to the second issue. In this magazine, and as an Association, we've also considered how far to involve children in funerals and how to support them when someone, or something, they love dies.

Increasingly, there are fantastic resources out there to support children, at home or in school, after a bereavement, through the work of charities like Winston's Wish and Child Bereavement UK, books by authors such as Elke Barber and others, including Clare Shaw in this edition, on page 18. But I wonder if that's enough? By the time they are dealing with their first bereavement, we've arguably missed the opportunity to give them an understanding and resources, in advance, that will help them when a loss happens in their life, and will also help them to go on to become better equipped to face loss and the importance of planning for their own death, as adults.

Winston's Wish is currently undertaking some ground-breaking research into the long term effects of bereavement in childhood, working with adults who suffered loss when they were young. I am very much looking forward to learning the results of their study and sharing our own YouGov work with them to see what connections we can make between childhood experience and adult behaviour.

I believe there is a need to help prepare young people, in advance, for the loss they will inevitably face in their lifetime. This will not just help them as young people, but help them as adults too – both in terms of their own emotional wellbeing, and also in their understanding of and willingness to talk more openly about the end of life. This,

I believe, could help to make the significant shift in Britons' willingness to address and prepare for the end of life that we know would be so beneficial to society.

My own experience of arranging funerals for families with young children is that answering their questions honestly, without euphemistic language; encouraging them to share their feelings and sharing your own; and explaining what is happening with clear options for their own choices, can all add to them coping better at a time of bereavement – a view shared by Winston's Wish CEO Fergus Crow. Therefore, getting an early foundation in understanding the issues before someone dies can surely only be a positive thing?

By educating children, it could have a very positive impact both emotionally and practically when they reach adulthood, in terms of how prepared they are for the end of their own life and that of those that they love.

This is a subject that is a real passion for me and I am determined that addressing it will be one of the central legacies of my presidential year.

Working in partnership with Winston's Wish and other key stakeholders, the NAFD will be hosting a round table, in the Autumn, to to propose the development of educational resources and opportunities for school pupils, from age five upwards. This might sound bold - but there are parallels with financial literacy, the Personal, Social and Health Education (PHSE) curriculum and, specifically, in sex and relationships education in which the benefits of having healthy, open and age appropriate conversations are increasingly proving important and valuable for primary school age children.

I'm personally delighted that Winston's Wish has agreed to be involved and we are holding extremely constructive dialogue with other organisations and interested parties to build a coalition of support and expertise around us.

By talking openly about something that is an inevitable part of life and something for which there are no guarantees that they won't be exposed to at an early age, we make it a natural subject to talk about.

I am convinced that if we normalise death as part of the curriculum - as part of the circle of life – for young people, and make it an open topic for discussion, not only will it be easier to support children who go on to become bereaved at an early age, but we will create a generation of young people who have a better understanding of, and emotional vocabulary for, the end of life – which will support them when they become adults too.

52% OF RESPONDENTS

said they would only think about it (their funeral)

**AFTER THEY HAD EXPERIENCED A
SERIOUS ILLNESS OR AN ACCIDENT**