

PE1820/D

Children's Hospices Across Scotland (CHAS) submission of 6 November 2020

CHAS welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Public Petitions Committee of the Scottish Parliament in response to Public Petition PE1820.

CHAS has been providing a full family support and paediatric palliative care and end of life service for almost 30 years. We are the only charity in Scotland that provides hospice services for babies, children and young people with life-shortening conditions. We offer palliative and end of life care and respite stays for the whole family via our two hospices, Rachel House in Kinross and Robin House in Balloch, and our CHAS at Home service supports families in their own homes. In addition we have expanding teams working in hospitals across the whole of Scotland. At the start of the Covid19 pandemic, we set up the UK's first Virtual Hospice, ensuring children and families are supported in a manner they told us mattered to them.

In addition to the statistics from Child Bereavement UK, CHAS-commissioned research has shown there are over 16,700 children aged 0-21 living with life shortening conditions across Scotland (2018/19) and that about three children a week die from a life-shortening condition in Scotland¹.

CHAS offers a wide range of bereavement support to the whole family.

1) Petition call

CHAS is frequently approached by schools looking for support around bereavement. There is a recognition that there are a lot of very good tools available, but the feedback we hear from teachers indicate that they do not feel sufficiently confident to fully utilise these and when they do it is often in response to a bereavement as opposed to proactively opening up conversations around death, dying and bereavement.

We also understand from these conversations that their education and training does not cover death, dying and bereavement. We would recommend that this is formally included in teachers' training and education so that they are better equipped to support pupils and the school community around these very important themes that are a core part of everyone's lives.

In addition to these educational tools, various organisations offer more formal sessions to support teachers and pupils. CHAS too has on request supported in such manner.

It's important that the support is relevant to the age and stage of the children and that both teachers and parents are supported. As is the case for e.g. sex education in schools, we would recommend that schools work in partnership with the parents, ensuring that all are supported to have these conversations. For example, sharing

¹ <https://www.chas.org.uk/about-us/our-vision/our-publications>

the resources with parents before these conversations happen and inviting parents in to learn more ahead of starting.

Good bereavement care is a human right. If we are to become a fully grief educated nation and truly live up to the National Bereavement Charter for Children and Adults in Scotland², then we must provide the opportunity to have these conversations across all generations, and provide appropriate support.

The Charter describes how in Scotland we should support a person or a group of people experiencing bereavement. It's underpinned by a desire to make sure that in Scotland, we do all that we can to support people who might be experiencing difficulties following the death of someone they know or somebody in their community. It is the responsibility of everyone, including our schools. We would therefore recommend that all schools have a proactive Bereavement Policy³ for all staff and pupils, setting out how they will keep communication open also with parents/carers.

CHAS has been running a number of death cafes⁴, where people are invited to speak openly about these issues. Whilst not designed to directly support bereavement, this model allows a wide range of people to engage in discussions, and may provide a helpful way of destigmatising an issue which is often not spoken about.

2) Counsellors in schools

Counseling support is invaluable, especially where bereavement and grief are more complex. While the Scottish Government's commitment is welcome, these services will not directly address the issue of bereavement education for all pupils, although they will be able to provide support to pupils impacted by bereavement. We would recommend that appropriate counselling support also be made available to under 10s.

Their primary role, as we understand it, is to support pupils directly. Counsellors may therefore simply not have the focus or the capacity to provide the bereavement education and support desired in the classroom given the breadth of counselling they will be providing to these pupils, but would be instrumental in supporting and augmenting what is being provided in the classroom.

² National Bereavement Charter for Children and Adults in Scotland: <https://www.chas.org.uk/news-articles/scotlands-first-bereavement-charter-for-children-and-adults-launched>, accessed 02/11/2020.

³ Child Bereavement UK have lots of information and resources available to support: <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/managing-bereavement-a-guide-for-early-years>, including templates for developing a bereavement policy for both primary and secondary schools.

⁴ <https://deathcafe.com/>