



## **ANNUAL REVIEW AND ACCOUNTS FOR 2023-24**

### **Background**

We were established in August 2020 to support bereaved families by maintaining the Ashford Baby Memorial Garden, arranging support events, creating other baby memorial areas, and raising awareness of baby loss. This includes babies who die through miscarriage, stillbirth, perinatal death or as infants. We are there for all families, no matter how or when was their loss.

Being a small, local community charity with no staff, nor regular income allows us total control over what we do and how we spend our money. We continue to work alongside other organisations, signposting people to their services and to their support where appropriate.

### **Volunteers**

Our charity is run, and all our activities are delivered, by a very small team of volunteers, nearly all bereaved parents themselves, who between them give an enormous amount of time and energy. During the year we welcomed Rebecca to our small team of trustees. A big thank you to them and to everyone who has supported us during the year, in any way.

### **Ashford Baby Memorial Garden**

The Baby Memorial Garden continues to thrive and to serve as a lovely place for families to remember their babies, with over 400 baby names recorded forever, and more being added each quarter. Thanks to Aspire, Ashford Council's internal grounds team for maintaining the garden for us, on a repayment basis. At the Garden we held our annual Teddy Bear's Picnic which went well, with quite a few families attending.

### **Faversham, Canterbury and other areas**

Our remit covers the whole of East Kent from Sheerness to Thanet and down to Romney Marsh. We have always been conscious that Ashford is a fair distance from some parts of East Kent and have plans to create small 'satellite' areas in existing parks and gardens where we can install nameboards more locally. We already had a nameboard at Faversham and during the year were able to create a second small area, in Westgate Park in Canterbury, alongside the river. This attracted a lot of interest including a short report on Meridian Television. We currently have 18 nameboards at Faversham and 27 at Canterbury, giving us a total of 447 across the three areas. We are in discussion with Swale Council about the possibility of creating a small area in Sittingbourne, and will look at other potential areas over time.

### **Fundraising Events and Activities**

A major part of our work continues to be around raising awareness of baby loss and encouraging people to talk about this still very taboo subject - just giving people the opportunity to talk about their losses can be so cathartic. This year we again attended a large number of awareness and network events often using our Smiley Face tombolas as a way of engaging with people.

### **Finances**

We started the year with £13,071 in our accounts and ended the year with £12,571. The bulk of our income was from our community fundraising, including tombolas and quiz nights and other events, along with some very welcome donations. A big thank you everyone who helped raised money for us.

A major bone of contention remains the rent we have to pay Ashford Borough Council for the rental of two garages which we use to store our trailer and our equipment. During 2023-4 we paid a total of almost £1,500, a figure which will increase to over £1,600 in 2024-5. We have asked the Council to waive those charges, or at least to reduce them, but to no avail. In July 2023 the Council introduced a new formal policy which allowed it to 'provide any premises for the operation of an organisation at either a low or no rent', but when we asked to be considered under that policy, the Council said it referred only to pre-existing arrangements.

We challenged that interpretation (the policy made no such condition) and are continuing to do so through a local Councillor. This remains a major issue for us, bearing in mind that £1,600 represents five or more full day's fundraising by our small band of volunteers. We have started the process of recording donations eligible for GiftAid and hope to be able to claim this annually from 2024 onwards.

### Financial Reserves

During the year we reassessed our financial reserves. Previously we had allocated a reserve of £10k which would cover our main activities for twelve months and would cover the cost of returning the Ashford Baby Memorial Garden back to its original condition, should the Council decide to terminate the licence for that area. Given the pressure on our funds, not helped by the Council's own position on rent for the two garages, we have taken a pragmatic view that in reality it is extremely unlikely the Council would terminate the licence and require us to return the area to its original (very poor) state. On that basis, we have taken the view that as that was a low risk, we need not retain the £5k in our reserves for that specific purpose. This has allowed us to reduce our financial reserves to £5,000, a more manageable figure and one which will reduce the pressure on our fundraising targets.

### The Future

The coming year looks exciting, with, we hope, the creation of the Sittingbourne nametile boards and progress in other areas. Our volunteers will continue to look for opportunities to raise awareness of baby loss, and to give families opportunities to have somewhere special to remember their precious babies, and to talk about their losses. We are conscious that ours is a very small team and hope to recruit further volunteers during the year.

During the past year we have been working on a Development Plan for the coming five years and this is attached to this document. We are hoping to be able to deliver our 'Older People' project, aimed at talking to groups of older people who may have faced baby loss many years ago, but that is subject, in part, to us being able to find adequate funding, as well as volunteer time. We are hoping, too, to hold a Wave of Light and Ribbon Display in Ashford's Victoria Park in October 2024 during Baby Loss Awareness Week.

### Financial Summary for 2023-24

<b>Opening balance at 1 April 2023</b>	<b>£13,070.91</b>		
<b>Income</b>		<b>Expenditure</b>	
Name Tiles	£1,338.00	Ashford Garden	£1,492.41
Fundraising	£6,126.58	Name Tiles	£582.78
Event Donations	£650.86	Fundraising & Awareness	£2,450.91
Other Donations	£2,228.99	Fundraising Prizes	£1,473.10
Grants	£0	Other Gardens	£1,196.88
Other	£225.56	Storage	£1,487.20
		Insurance	£292.20
		Other Group Costs	£848.57
		Printing etc	£377.07
		Other	£868.42
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>£10,569.99</b>	<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£11,069.54</b>
<b>Closing Balance 31 March 2024</b>	<b>£12,571.36</b>		

**April 2024**