

Introducing Friends of the Bereaved

The death of one of us touches all of us



What do Friends of the Bereaved do?

Friends of the Bereaved (FoB) is a community volunteering project designed to meet the **short- and medium-term practical problems confronting bereaved people in the aftermath of a death** if those needs are not presently being met by any other agency.

Any FoB project will be inspired, above all, by this statement: **The death of one of us touches all of us.**

A FoB will promote community engagement and revive, in a 21st century way, the traditions of former times when communities came together to help their bereaved members. It is arguable, now that families tend to be scattered, that the need for community engagement with bereavement is greater than it ever has been.

In this way, A FoB promotes community engagement.

What needs does a FoB serve?

Some of the particular needs addressed by a FoB are identified in the [Case Studies](#) (separate document). Others will be identified as the scheme evolves in any particular locality.

The goal of a FoB

In addressing these needs (above) a FoB seeks to enable bereaved people to **live independently as soon as possible**. In the event of failing to enable a bereaved person to achieve independence, a FoB will step back and refer the bereaved person to other agencies – eg social services or, in the case of complicated grief, appropriate specialist grief counselling. A FoB will *never* foster dependency.

It is unlikely that a FoB will address the needs of children because their needs are likely to be emotional, not practical and, therefore, the province of either family members or bereavement experts.

Who needs you?

In order to determine whether the needs of bereaved people are already being met in this **practical** way, those wishing to establish a FoB should liaise with and consult other local volunteering organisations and charities before proceeding. If a FoB is established it ought, as a matter of good policy and practice, to establish partnerships with local charities and volunteering organisations.

All not some

A FoB will draw volunteers from the entire community without regard to age, sex, faith or lifestyle. It will not serve exclusively the needs of 'people like us'. A FoB will do well to establish good relations with all faith groups in the community because faith groups hold funerals. From these faith groups a FoB is likely to recruit excellent volunteers. In its work, of course, a FoB is belief-neutral and must never be used as a vehicle for proselytising. A FoB has a mission of care to all bereaved people.

Emotional support no, comfort and companionship yes

It is not the purpose of a FoB to offer emotional support; there are others who do this specialised work. But an incidental – it must be incidental – and very valuable aspect of the work of a FoB will be the emotional comfort it affords a bereaved person.

An educational remit

Any FoB is encouraged to take upon itself an **educational remit** in order to promote healthy attitudes towards, and positive engagement with, death, dying and bereavement. See [Case Studies](#).

Work with your local undertakers

Undertakers are specialists whose professional life centres exclusively on the care of the dead. Funeral homes are no-go except when needed. As a consequence, the work of undertakers is swathed in mystery and misconception, and funeral homes are the stuff of dread and giggles. Death once happened in the community and was dealt with by community members. Today, the dead, the bereaved and those who serve them have been marginalised. Death has become a taboo.

By joining up the *specialist* care of the bereaved offered by a funeral home to the *non-specialist* care of the bereaved offered by a FoB, volunteers can transform negative perceptions and help their funeral home to become more integrated with its community – more normal.

By becoming familiar with the way undertakers operate, a FoB may undertake a **consumer advocacy role**, guiding community members to funeral homes which will look after them best and requiring high standards of their local undertakers, whose commercial activity will be sensitive to such scrutiny.

A FoB can thereby form a **human and caring interface between the funeral home and the community**, bringing the bereaved and funeral professionals into the social mainstream, and reinforcing the naturalness and normality of death.

What's in it for me?

For any altruistic enterprise to be attractive to its stakeholders it must **appeal to the self-interest** of all those involved in it.

The appeal to bereaved people is obvious. In the case of volunteers, it is in their interest to help others because, in addition to the satisfaction they will gain from altruistic activity, they may, in time, need other community members to help people closest to them – their spouse or partner, for example.

Assessing and managing risk

Before undertaking a FoB scheme its founders should conduct a SWOT analysis. **There is a rich complexity of risk attached to such a scheme and, with that, the potential for fatal reputational damage if a volunteer misbehaves.**

Before proceeding, ask yourself: what is the worst that could happen? Can this be prevented?

It is, of course, impossible to eliminate all risks incurred by establishing a FoB. The purpose of the policies which accompany this document is to enable you to *manage* risk in the most effective way possible. When the local TV station rings to ask you how you could possibly have allowed something awful to have happened, you must be able to demonstrate that you took every reasonable precaution. When things go wrong, you need the best possible mitigation.

Conduct risk assessments

For every role played by your volunteers you would be advised to conduct a risk assessment for 1) the proper management of risk and also 2) the purpose of demonstrating that potential problems were anticipated and steps taken to reduce risk.

A risk assessment using this template is recommended:

1. Look for the hazards.
2. Decide who might be harmed, and how.
3. For each hazard, evaluate the chance, big or small, of harm actually being done and decide whether existing precautions are adequate or whether more should be done.
4. Record the significant findings of risk assessment, such as the main risks and the measures you have taken to deal with them.
5. Review your assessment from time to time, and revise if necessary

Do volunteers need police –DBS – checks?

Yes. The DBS say that volunteers who from time to time offer ‘counsel and services’ to ‘vulnerable adults’ are eligible. In all likelihood, this would cover all volunteers because, while not all service users will be vulnerable adults, some service users will have children and, while those children will not be service users, volunteers may well come into contact with them.

Furthermore, if a FoB is to undertake an educational role, volunteers may well be called in to talk to school students.

The definition of a vulnerable adult is:

A vulnerable adult is a person aged 18 years or over who may be unable to take care of themselves; protect themselves from harm; or prevent themselves from being exploited.

An adult may be vulnerable because they:

- Have a physical disability;
- Have learning difficulties;

- Have mental health problems;
- Are old, frail or ill; or
- Are sometimes unable to take care of themselves or protect themselves without help.

A person may also be vulnerable because of a temporary illness or difficulty.

A vulnerable adult may have difficulty in making their wishes and feelings known and this may make them vulnerable to abuse. It may also mean that they are not able to make their own decisions or choices.

If you want to make further checks for information or peace of mind, contact the DBS here: customerservices@dbs.gsi.gov.uk or phone their helpline here: 0870 90 90 811.

If you want to apply for DBS checks for volunteers you will have to use an umbrella body to forward your application. Find your nearest DBS umbrella body [here](#).

What will it cost?

There are **cost implications** of setting up a FoB group. Will the FoB pay volunteers' travel expenses? Will the FoB purchase certain items of equipment or rely on volunteers to use their own? How will the FoB show its appreciation of its volunteers? How will the FoB raise funds?

Do we need a constitution?

A good idea. Find out more [here](#).

While you're at it, it's well worth joining the [NCVO](#) for advice and support.

Start slowly

Any FoB will evolve according to the needs of its service users and the particular nature of its locality in terms of demographics, traditions and culture. The best advice, therefore, is probably to:

- Start informally and develop more formal and structured approaches as you go
- Be aware that people tend to get involved gradually, so don't expect too much, too soon.
- Target people you know who are, or who are likely to be, interested.
- Make involvement as easy and enjoyable as possible
- Offer incentives

Nice idea but does it work?

The world's first-ever FoB was born on television in Alex Polizzi's show, The Fixer. The Good Funeral Guide was a consultant to the programme's researchers and proposed that the undertaker whom Alex was trying to turn around would score a hit by establishing a FoB. The researchers loved the idea, Alex was lukewarm and the undertaker and his sons hated it.

On a rainy day they set out into the community with a big blackboard and plenty of reluctance under orders to recruit volunteers. They reckoned it would bellyflop. But the public loved it. Huge success!

You can see it [here](#). Start at 11.25

