



Suicide Bereavement Support

For Cumbria & surrounding areas

Annual Report 2019-2020

Introduction from SBS Cumbria Patron Marie Elsa Bragg

“SBS provides a support system built for those who have been affected by suicide.

The volunteers at SBS (all of whom have been affected by suicide) believe in listening and consistently being there. We will talk to you individually and, if it feels right, we can introduce you to a local group run by local people where all are welcome, as well as guiding you towards some resources that might be of help.”



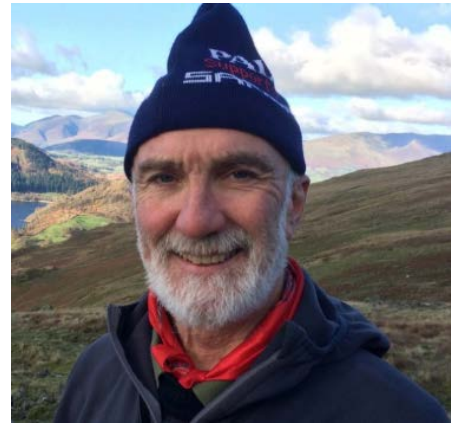
When I look at SBS, I see it is a charity that shows yet more evidence that there are good people in this world; and that the caring culture of Cumbria is a part of who we are. Some would say that the bigger the network we build, the closer we are to making the world a better place. But I would say: the more we re-build our networks, the closer we get to affirming our heritage – that of our innate compassionate community spirit and the delight in our local life. As William Wordsworth said in Lyrical Ballads: The best portion of a good man's life: his little, nameless unremembered acts of kindness and love.”

Marie-Elsa Bragg, Patron

A Word from the Chair

“Welcome to our first ever annual report. I am writing this at a time when a Cumbrian Police Chief has voiced concerns about a ‘dramatic surge’ in the number of suspected suicides reported across Cumbria during the lockdown and in recent weeks.

We should all be deeply concerned about this. The loss of a single life is a total disaster for everyone affected, but the possibility that 45 people may have died by suicide so far this year is nothing short of devastating. We must never lose sight of the fact that people affected by suicide may themselves be vulnerable.



At Suicide Bereavement Support Cumbria, known as SBS Cumbria, we are acutely aware that our services will be more in need now than ever. With that in mind, we remain committed to providing support to the loved ones of those who have taken their own lives.”

John Brown, Chair

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History of SBS Cumbria

2009: In response to the high rate of loss of life by suicide in Cumbria, a strategic multi-agency group was established by the then Director of Public Health for Cumbria, John Ashton. It quickly became clear that there was no specific support available for those bereaved by suicide in the area. Two stakeholders with backgrounds in social work, John Asher and John Brown, agreed to take the lead in developing a response.



2010: The precursor to SBS Cumbria, a Cumbria branch of the nationally run Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS), was established after a meeting held on 5 November attended by 20 people, the majority of whom had been bereaved by suicide. The meeting confirmed the need for a localised, targeted self-help service for this group of people, and a small steering group and monthly meeting were thus initially established in Keswick, chosen for its relatively central location within the county.



2010-2019: Led by founding members John Asher, John Brown, Alison Gilvey and Paul Gurney, SOBS Cumbria grew over the next decade, eventually hosting three groups, in Carlisle, Kendal and Whitehaven. In the course of these nine years throughout which the core team operated as a branch of SOBS, we developed a service which was able to be consolidated and expanded upon in a flexible and responsive way.



2019: Early in 2019, the steering group that had developed SOBS Cumbria set about establishing a new independent Charity, Suicide Bereavement Support Cumbria and surrounding area, known as SBS Cumbria. On 13 August 2019, SBS Cumbria received its registration from the UK Charity Commission, with charity number 1184889.

Governance, ethos and structure

The mission of SBS Cumbria is to provide a lifebelt in the form of targeted peer support for adults living in Cumbria and the surrounding areas who have been touched by suicide.

We provide support in a range of ways based exclusively on self-help principles. Central to this is providing an in-person and online platform for family, friends and colleagues left behind following loss of life by suicide to reflect, share and find support. Developing support for those bereaved in such devastating circumstances must be sensitive, personal and flexible. Those affected by such loss have been quite literally served a life sentence. In responding to such loss we have developed as responsive and flexible a service as we possibly can, bearing in mind that we are a wholly voluntary organisation.

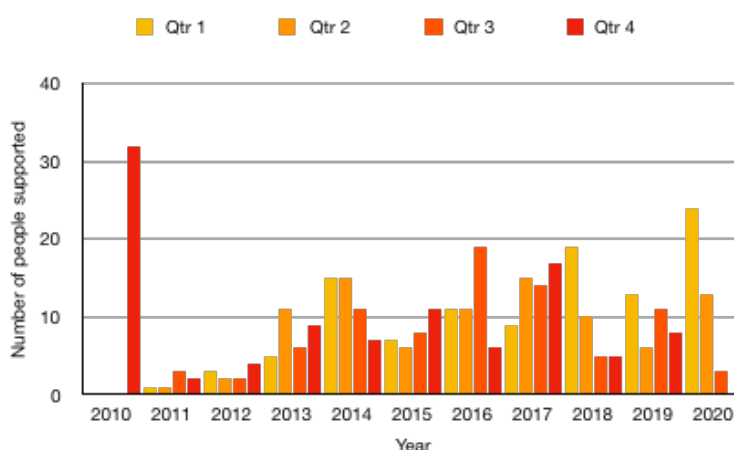
Foundational elements in the delivery of these self-help support services are:

- ◆ Financial probity: professional support to ensure that our income and expenditure balance is critical. We are fortunate to have access to the services and support of Catherine at [Cumbria Admin Services](#) to help ensure that we are open and transparent in our financial transactions;
- ◆ Marketing and public relations: if we are to be successful in supporting people affected by suicide, they must be aware that we are here and feel able to make use of the support we provide. Kate at Blue Shadow Marketing enables SBS Cumbria to develop and implement a formal marketing and communications strategy.

The foundation upon which SBS Cumbria is built is our incredible, committed steering group, made up of people with a wide range of much needed skills, and group facilitators for each of our four support groups. Most of our steering group members have themselves been bereaved or their lives touched by suicide, and five of the group members are the trustees, who oversee the general direction of the organisation. The four founding members of the original SOBS Cumbria - John Asher, John Brown, Alison Gilvey and Paul Gurney - have been the heart of the organisation since its beginnings.

Who has SBS Cumbria assisted?

Since SOBS Cumbria was set up as a service in 2010, we have been contacted by **409** people, including **344** that have been bereaved by suicide, and **65** professionals, organisations or other individuals seeking advice in another context. Since becoming an independent organisation in 2019, **56** people have got in touch with SBS Cumbria. **40** of these people who have been bereaved got in touch with SBS Cumbria for the first time between January and July 2020, as Covid-19 has changed both the way in which SBS Cumbria operates and the environment in which it operates. This represents a **70%** increase on the average for the first two quarters of the year over the past 7 years. The below graph shows new signups to our service since the group’s inception in 2010:



Demographics

We ask for a minimal amount of information when people make contact with us for privacy reasons, which makes providing exact figures difficult. However, we do know that since our core team was established in 2010, the following represents a broad picture of those we have supported:

Gender of person bereaved	No.
Female	265
Male	79
Total	344

Since 2010, most of the group participants have shared with us their relationship with the loved one that took their own life:

Relation of person who took their own life to the bereaved person			
Son	68	Not known	13
Husband/male partner	64	Wife/female partner	7
Sibling	52	Niece/Nephew	4
Father	37	Grandchild	3
Daughter	25	Colleague	2
Mother	25	Brother-in-law	1
Friend	23	Cousin	1
Other	17	Grandmother	1
		Sister-in-law	1
Total		344	

What support has SBS Cumbria provided?

The following list details the specific support available from SBS Cumbria for those that have been bereaved or otherwise affected by suicide. Please note that since March 2020, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has meant that face-to-face group meetings have not been able to take place:

- ◆ Group peer support meetings held on a monthly basis in **Barrow, Carlisle, Kendal** and **Whitehaven**, facilitated by volunteers who have been bereaved themselves. Meetings last up to two hours;
- ◆ A comprehensive [website](#) which contains a wide range of information, resources and details on how to get in touch;
- ◆ An open [Facebook](#) page, which gives updates and information about our services and how to access them through public posts and ads;
- ◆ A [Twitter](#) account, which provides information and updates about access to our services and acts as a general source of information about Suicide Bereavement Support in the area;
- ◆ A dedicated volunteer peer support service through phone, Facebook Messenger and email. Although SBS Cumbria aims to respond to contacts within 24 hours, it is not an emergency hotline service and can't replace professional support and counselling;
- ◆ One-on-one, support meetings from our volunteer facilitators who have been touched by suicide and are usually local to the bereaved person. The facilitator can provide peer support and become a gateway to the rest of our services and to the services available from other key agencies;
- ◆ A closed Facebook group currently with **119** members, only accessible to people who have been bereaved by suicide. The group has become a powerful mechanism for 24/7 sharing and support among others who have a unique understanding of the challenges of losing a loved one to suicide;
- ◆ Virtual weekly meetings using Zoom, which were introduced when Covid-19 struck the UK in March 2020. When group meetings resume it is likely that these Zoom meetings will continue as an alternative to face to face meetings, although probably on a less frequent basis.

Marketing and Communications

The first operational year of SBS Cumbria has seen a push for integrated branding and marketing online and across the county. The objective of our communications and marketing strategy is twofold: First, to ensure that information about our presence and how to get help reaches its target audience, those who have been bereaved by suicide, at the right time; and second, to raise awareness of the existence of the organisation amongst potential donors and supporters, including regional and national agencies and the general public.

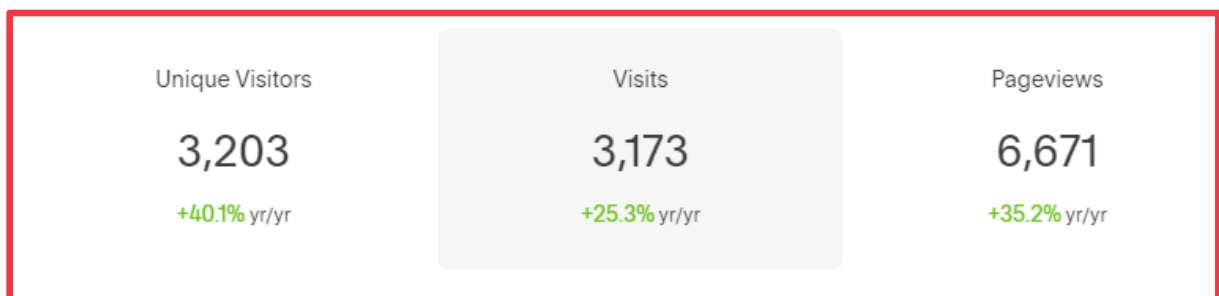


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Highlights of the year include:

- ◆ A five-year marketing plan developed by marketing agency Blue Shadow Marketing;
- ◆ The SBS brand and logo developed and applied to website, banners, leaflets, flyers and business cards;
- ◆ Two volunteers focused on digital optimisation brought into the charity to refine social media and online strategy and content;
- ◆ Fundraising portals including Just Giving, Facebook Fundraiser and The Giving Machine established. Covid-19 has impacted on individual donations via fundraisers, but the process is nevertheless in place for summer 2021;
- ◆ There were more than **3,200** visitors to the SBS Cumbria website (www.sbs.org.uk) between August 2019 and July 2020, a rise of **40%** from the previous year (August 2018-July 2019). Statistics are taken from the previous year of the website for the Cumbria branch of SOBS;



- ◆ Analysis of the SBS Cumbria website traffic shows that most of these visitors are indeed from the target area, with **83.1%** of visitors from the county of Cumbria itself;

Location	Visits
United Kingdom	2,975 (83.1%)
Cumbria	1,177
Carlisle	241
Penrith	214
Workington	145
Barrow in Furness	120
Whitehaven	111
Dalton in Furness	53
Cockermouth	41
Kendal	40
Cleator Moor	31
Unknown	28

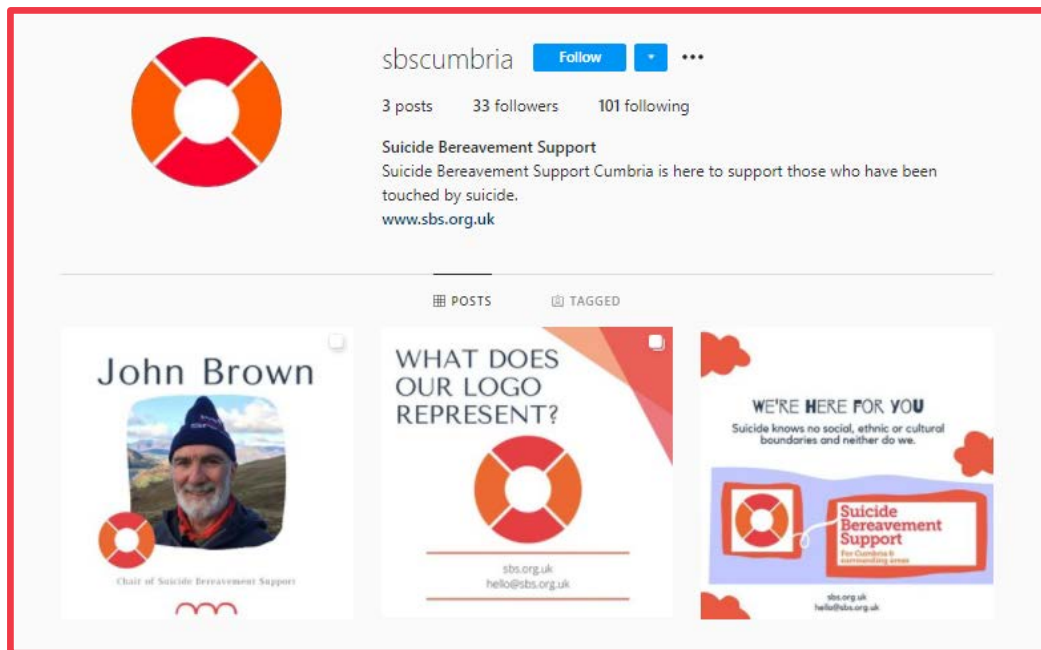
- ◆ **44,400** people were reached via Facebook Events throughout the year, with **196** event responses (August 2019 to July 2020);
- ◆ SBS Cumbria now has **462** Facebook followers and **119** closed Facebook group participants. As the following analysis of Facebook followers shows, at least **357**, or **77.2%** of the page’s followers, are from Cumbria and the surrounding areas, the target areas of the organisation;

City	Your Fans
Carlisle	105
Whitehaven	71
Workington	43
Penrith	34
Barrow in Furness	27
Kendal	19
Cockermouth	14
Lancaster	11
Wigton	10
Maryport	10

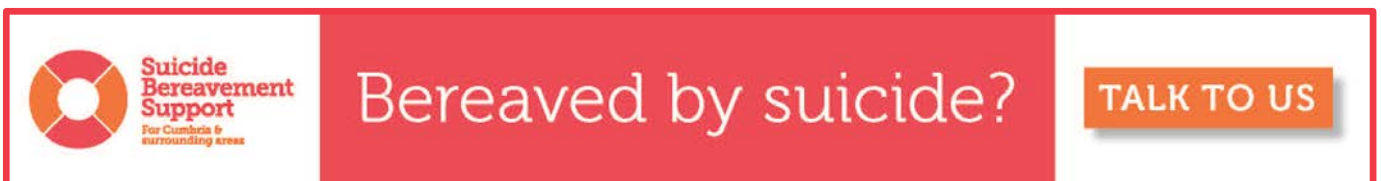
- ◆ SBS Cumbria now has **403** Twitter followers, and actively engages with followers on the platform, including through positive engagement with important regional agencies and stakeholders on the platform;



- ◆ New Instagram account launched with the aim of increasing engagement amongst the younger adult population;



- ◆ Search engine optimisation and a three-month Google Ads campaign (see below for an example banner ad) performed by a local Google Partner ensure that local people who have been bereaved by suicide can find the right help online, when they need it;



- ◆ New charity patron, Marie-Elsa Bragg, [announced](#) in June 2020;
- ◆ SBS Chair John Brown, Patron Marie-Elsa Bragg and support group facilitators have all [spoken](#) on local [radio](#) to [raise awareness](#) of the charity;
- ◆ An awareness campaign introducing SBS Cumbria services was implemented, delivering leaflets (see below) and explanatory information to all GP surgeries throughout Cumbria and North Lancashire, funeral directors in Cumbria, North Lancashire and South Scotland, and to First Step mental health teams throughout [North Cumbria](#) and [South Cumbria and Lancashire](#).



Support us

Suicide Bereavement Support is a charity and we depend on the generosity of people like you to help us do our work, helping the individuals, families and communities throughout Cumbria to grieve and find a way forward after a suicide. Detailed below are various ways in which you can donate.

Arrange a Funeral Collection:
Say a fond farewell to your loved one by holding a funeral collection and you'll make sure your loved one's memory lives on through the work of Suicide Bereavement Support. Please contact us or speak with your funeral director if you'd like any further advice.

Cheque:
Please make cheques payable to 'Suicide Bereavement Support' and send it to SBS, 33 Sandgate, Penrith, Cumbria CA11 7TJ

Bank Transfer:
If you would like to make a one-off donation or set up a standing order, our bank details are as follows:
Account name: Suicide Bereavement Support
Sort code: 40-36-10
Account number: 61491849

Suicide Bereavement Support is a registered charity in England and Wales (number 1184889)

Bereaved by suicide? You're not alone.

Get in touch
Helpline:
07572 975 721 (John)
or 07896 703 757 (Karan)
hello@sbs.org.uk
www.sbs.org.uk

Suicide Bereavement Support
For Cumbria & surrounding areas

The combination of media and interest generated by the new patron announcement and the awareness campaign resulted in a **735% surge of direct traffic to the website** during June and July 2020.

Reflections and updates on SBS Cumbria's first year from group facilitators

SBS Cumbria operates four separate support groups, adding a new group, Barrow-in-Furness, in 2019. Group facilitators share their thoughts and reflections from our first year in operation below.

Barrow-in-Furness

With the support of John Brown and David Hughes, Barrow-based SBS facilitators had a very successful meeting in November 2019. These agencies included the NHS, Police, Haverigg Prison and the church, all of whom were very supportive of SBS Cumbria developing a presence in Barrow. Soon afterwards, we were very pleased to hold the first SBS meeting for the Furness Peninsula, with a dozen participants and two facilitators present.

David was eventually unable to support the group following the Covid-19 lockdown, but Emily Griffiths and Kitty Birtwistle from Barrow and Ulverston respectively have been able to continue as local facilitators. Both are now part of the SBS Cumbria steering group, and Emily, a long-time user of Cumbria's suicide bereavement support services, has become a Trustee of SBS. Emily lost her partner in 2008:

"SOBS Cumbria and now SBS Cumbria was a major factor in getting through the difficult feelings I experienced at the time, and learning to live life in its 'new normal' with my four teenage children."

Kitty lost her father to suicide in early 2019 and discovered the group upon its launch in Barrow:

"After attending a couple of meetings and finding great comfort, I knew this was something I wanted to do. Together with Emily we want to support others who have been bereaved like us as best we can. I've gained trusted friendships through the SBS group."

Although in-person meetings stopped after just three months due to Covid-19, Barrow group members were able to pilot the first 'virtual meeting' via Zoom, now a regular hour long event on Thursday nights. Many group participants are also regularly join discussions on the closed Facebook group. SBS Cumbria now has representation on the local hospital (UHMB) Community Bereavement Forum, and are using local contacts to raise online awareness throughout the local community. We are excited that one of our group has offered to do a sponsored coast-to-coast cycle with a group of friends to raise funds and awareness for SBS Cumbria. We have also received a £500 start-up grant from Public Health England, and are exploring the possibility of other Furness-based funding opportunities.

We are looking forward to being able to meet again face to face and are humbled by the comments we have received from group participants who have found comfort by using SBS Cumbria services:

“I feel like I have a new family to support me”

“I never thought anyone else would understand the pain I’m in”

Kitty Birtwhistle and Emily Griffiths
Barrow support group facilitators

Carlisle

I had the great privilege of joining this wonderful support group Suicide Bereavement Support when it was part of the national SOBS charity. Back then the group meetings captured an aura of comfort and safety and this has continued following a seamless transition from SOBS to Suicide Bereavement Support Cumbria. The sense of belonging transmitted by the members of the support group within the room at each group meeting is truly astonishing, I would urge anyone who has been tragically bereaved by suicide to consider what I believe to be an alternative uplifting support option.

It is rewarding to witness how the ongoing interaction between group members can gradually transpose a person from their respective lives of grief and despair to a ‘new normal’ one which hopefully will provide and sustain a degree of stability. If Suicide Bereavement Support is able to facilitate such a transformation, then without question my time will continue to be well and truly effective with this charity.

John Purdie
Carlisle support group facilitator

It has been pleasing, since we formed SBS, that the Carlisle group has maintained a steady number of attendees with some regular people who are now valued contributors in their own right. It has become, pre-lockdown of course, a collaborative sort of meeting where the regular attendees add much to the group. Also it is great that Barrow now has a group as this was recognised as an area that was crying out for its own group. It feels that SBS has a very promising first year with plans firmly in place for the future.

Sharon Tweedie
Carlisle support group facilitator

Kendal

We are fortunate here in the South Lakes to have comparatively low levels of mental & emotional problems and hence low levels of suicide. Consequently, the demand for suicide bereavement support have been comparatively low too, with a smaller support group. This is not a bad thing!

Our group has in the past been affected by the much higher demand for support from the Barrow-in-Furness region, but now this area has its own support group/network within SBS this demand, too, has fallen. While it is important to maintain support within such a large, mostly rural community it may be time to consider alternative support arrangements, maybe giving wider access to the internet Zoom meetings for example.

Jim Ring
Kendal support group facilitator

Whitehaven

Here in the west of the county, we have maintained a steady number of attendees, some dip in and out, others have been attending our group from day one. Our meetings are never the same, each member bringing their own personal experiences of grief, sharing laughter as well as tears. I am so honoured to be a part of this wonderful group, we truly are a family where we can all witness each other and share in the support.

We have been so lucky in that so many people have generously made donations and are fundraising for our charity. The below photos show an example of the incredible generosity of the people of Cumbria.

Karan Smith
Whitehaven support group facilitator



The *Two Times Tins Team* (left), a group of [nine entrepreneurial students](#) that raised **£700** for SBS Cumbria in February 2020 by upcycling more than 140 tin cans (right) as part of Gen2's [National Apprenticeship Week](#) Entrepreneurial Challenge.

Featured SBS Cumbria support group members

Patricia Armstrong

One of the Carlisle group members, Patricia Armstrong, a 62-year-old grandmother-of-five who tragically lost her husband to suicide, organised a motown and soul music night at a local bar to raise money for SBS Cumbria. Held on 22 February 2020, the event raised more than **£1000**. She was quoted in [local media](#):

“I started going to the group and the support SBS gave to me was second to none. If people have been affected by suicide they can get all the help they need from the group, from things like inquests to how they are going to manage in the years ahead. It is my time to give them something back and help keep the group going.”

Frank Ritchie

Frank has been involved with SBS Cumbria since July 2015 and has become a stalwart of the organisation in so many ways. The loss of his son Alan was utterly devastating. Over the years Frank has been a massive, [active supporter](#) of the work we all try to do in supporting each other through our loss. This has included [raising awareness](#) at a national level in Scotland where he lives and well beyond, through fundraising and more recently signing off our virtual meetings most weeks with an [appropriate song](#) on his [ukulele](#).

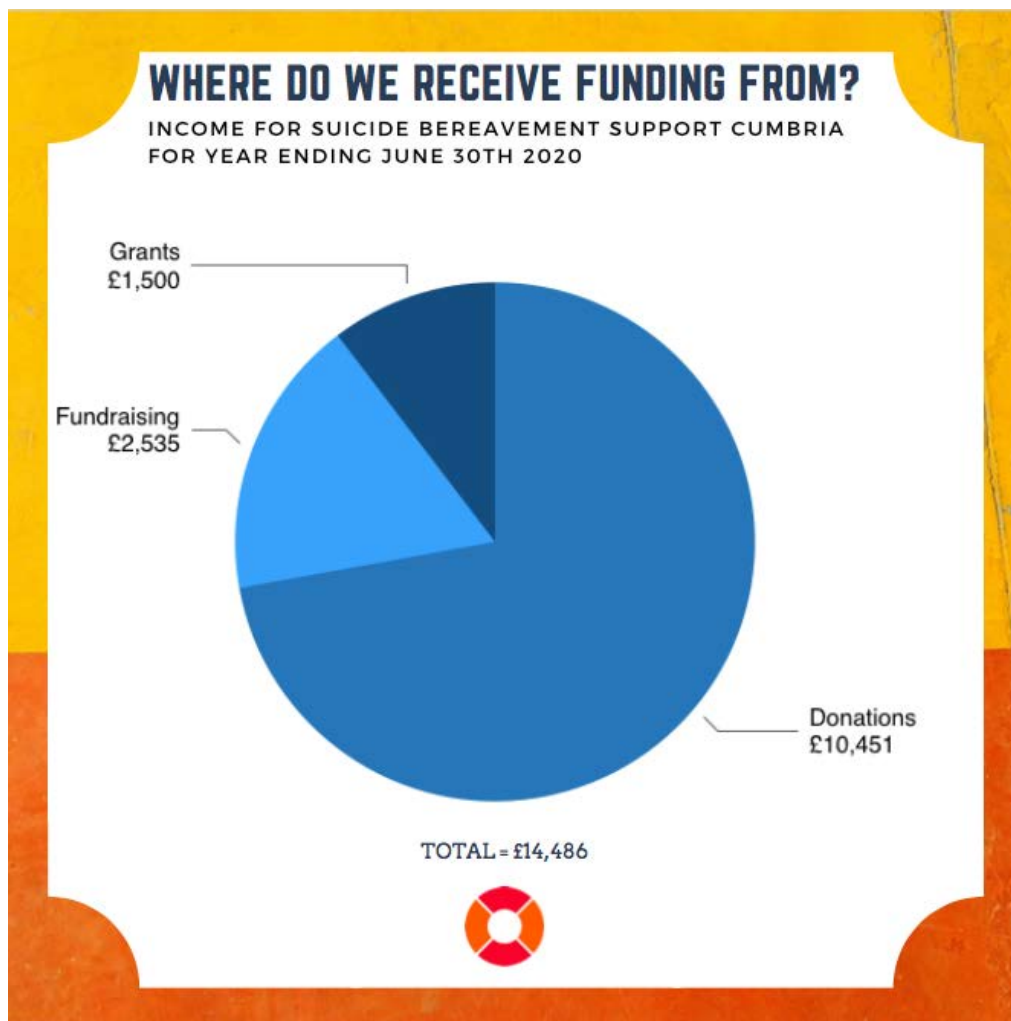
Frank in so many ways epitomises what is possible, moving not *on*, but *forward* through tragic loss. Developing a *new normal*, never forgetting the loss we have suffered but finding a way to put meaning back into life...despite everything.



Finances

Income

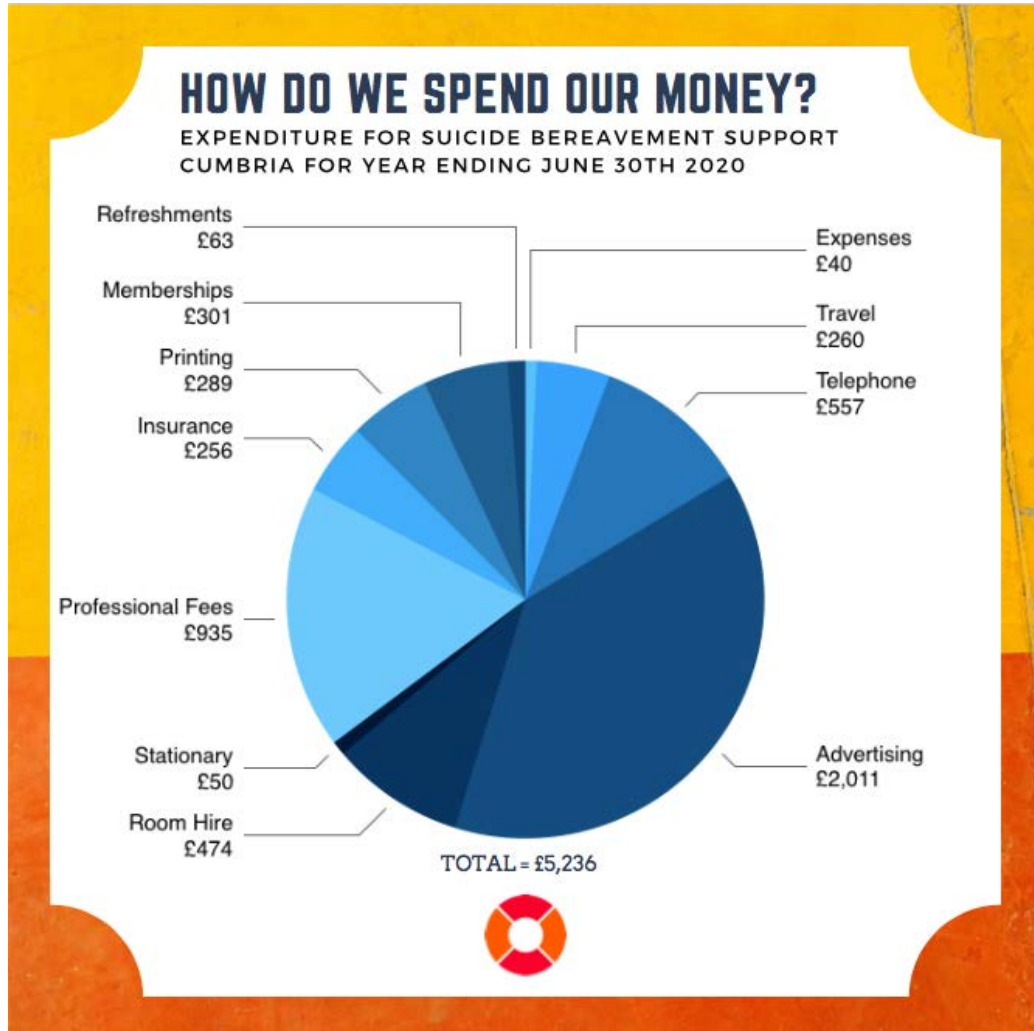
SBS Cumbria was formed in 2019 with a bank balance of **£0.00**. Funds were introduced from John Brown with a pump-priming donation of **£600.00**, quickly followed by a **£450.00** donation from Caldbeck Potato Day, an annual fundraising event.



The total receipts into the account for the first year amount to **£17,361.57**, which includes numerous small donations, a grant of **£1,000.00** from Cumbria County Council, a start-up grant of **£500** from Public Health England to allow us to establish a presence in Barrow, a considerable donation from Distington Crematorium of **£8,000.00** and a grant from NHS North Cumbria of **£2,120.00**. We also received a donation of **£2,060.00** from a fundraiser organised by our Carlisle Group. We finished off the year with a Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) voucher of **£1,000.00** from Sellafield Ltd., who continue to be great supporters of the charity.

Expenditure

In terms of outgoing expenditure, SBS Cumbria has invested in various advertising campaigns and have recently had [leaflets](#) printed which have been distributed across various organisations in Cumbria.



Fundraising

In addition to the various [fundraising](#) opportunities described in this report which included generous donations from individuals and institutions both public and private, we are developing online fundraising tools via the “Shop and Give” mechanism, which includes [The Giving Machine](#), [Amazon Smile](#), the Facebook donate button and the Instagram donate button. We are also creating social media specific fundraising packs (see below) to make it even easier for people to support and raise money for us through events, sponsored activities, and one-off donations.

Progress reports from our generous fundraisers can be found on the [blog page](#) of the SBS Cumbria website.



DID YOU KNOW?

Every day you can click the 'collect now' button on The Giving Machine page and it will make a daily donation to your registered charity.

Not sure how it works? Leave a comment on this post and we'll do our best to help.

Thanks to our 2019-2020 donors, including:



Finally, we would like to thank the many generous individuals who have donated their time and money to SBS Cumbria.

This report was produced by Lucy Binfield with support from Izzy Sharpe