

# Abigail's

## Annual Report 2020



## *Lady Astor of Hever – Abigail's Footsteps Patron.*

Abigail's Footsteps commemorated 10 years but as we all know it wasn't the year anyone had planned for, the arranged gala dinner had to be postponed due to the pandemic and fundraising events scheduled were cancelled, however despite necessary changes the charity adapted to the uncertain climate and found other ways to hold successful events such as the online auction which raised over £19,000 for Abigail's Footsteps.



The positives were the launch of the Abigail's Angels Bereavement Training Programme, 20 hospitals were due to have in-house training but this changed to a virtual programme, again highlighting how quickly we adapted as a charity to still provide our main aims to improve standards of care given to bereaved parents, over 600 health care professionals joined the training. In conjunction our baby loss counselling sessions for parents also moved online instead of face to face, delivering over 300 sessions throughout the year.

Thank you to everyone that has supported Abigail's Footsteps in a year that has challenged us and we hope to have your continued support to make a difference together.

## *Kamal Aggarwal – Abigail's Footsteps Chairman.*

Despite the enormous difficulties the pandemic has caused and the hardship inflicted on so many it has been humbling to see the support that a charity Abigail's is still able to attract. That is very much down to our many supporters and to an extremely hard working and dedicated operations and fund raising team.



It has been a busy and rewarding year in which we have accomplished a great deal although in very different ways. We continue to meet the desperate need for bereavement training. We have continued to help hospitals create or enhance facilities, to support parents, families and friends at what is a very difficult time and we have continued to provide free or subsidised bereavement training to midwives and student nurses.

We have maintained our vigorous standards to ensure that the charity is run as efficiently and sustainably as possible. Our financial position remains secure and we continue to operate in an open and transparent manner with good governance at our core.

Our key objectives continue to be to further promote and provide funding for midwives to undertake specialist bereavement training and to help deliver crucial equipment to hospitals who have a need for it and to work with local groups to support the provision of much needed bereavement suites wherever possible. As always, we welcome the opportunity to work alongside senior hospital management and local fund raising groups in that regard.

Finally and as always there are many people I would like to thank for their support, hard work and dedication. Our patron, vice presidents and trustees continue to give their valuable time, guidance and support. Our fundraisers, supporters and volunteers never fail to amaze and humble us with their quite extraordinary determination, devotion and commitment. Finally, to our sponsors and donors, both private and corporate for their continued goodwill, generosity of spirit, time and resources. Our sincerest gratitude to all of you for everything you do to make what we do possible.

## David Ward – Abigail's Footsteps CEO & Founder.

COVID-19 brought the country to a standstill in 2020 and tragically stillbirth rates increased because of this as parents were unable or reluctant to attend hospital to have checks carried out.



Faye our Charity lead and Naomi our counsellor responded to the surge in demand for help by transferring counselling services on-line almost immediately to ensure that grieving families could still access the care that they needed. Furthermore the demand for our services expanded outside of our original geographical reach and we are now also working with bereaved families in Surrey, Sussex, Essex and South London.

We also continued to provide training services to midwifery teams around the country thanks to the amazing work of Paula Abramson with excellent feedback received from participants on every course.

The big issue we faced this year was with the Abi Cooling Cot. An incident involving a member of staff at a hospital failing to follow basic operational procedures had the potential to stop the production of the cots for ever. Thankfully our friends at the Bond Group worked tirelessly with industry expert Judith Evans who went above and beyond the remit to both confirm the temperatures the cot could achieve in different circumstances but also suggested some design changes to improve the cot even further. The cot is now back in production and continues to meet mortuary guidelines, and we hope to certify the cot with a British Standard or similar in the next twelve months.

Clearly with lockdown in place we had to cancel all of our usual fundraising events, however the support we have received from the Community Foundations, in particular those in Kent and Surrey has been phenomenal, likewise many other organisations such as the Brian Mitchell foundation and Mrs Smith & Mount Trust have continued to generously support us throughout the year for which we are extremely grateful. The one fund raising event that we did manage to hold was an on-line auction which had a raft of amazing prizes from spitfire flights to a ride in a Ferrari, the event was a tremendous success.

In closing I would like to thank our wonderful Patron Liz Astor, our amazing Vice Presidents Cheryl Baker, Craig Chalmers, Julie Etchingham, Faryl Smith, Kellie Marie Stewart, Victor Ubogu, Sian Lloyd and Louise Giblin. Our fantastic board chaired by Kamal Aggarwal, supported by Trevor Adams and Sam Collinge, and most importantly our team members who are there every day for our bereaved families Paula Abramson, Naomi Marston, Becky Hopkins and last but by no means least the lady that holds it all together and works tirelessly to ensure that we all do as we are told Faye Hill.

We were unable to commemorate our tenth anniversary as we had wished this year however we continue to make a significant difference in bereavement care in Abigail's name and Jo and I could not be more proud of our daughters legacy.





## January

To kick off the start to what was planned to be a very busy and fun packed year of events, we launched the new Abigail's Footsteps website! If you haven't had a chance to look, there's no time like the present to take a peek... [www.abigailsfootsteps.co.uk](http://www.abigailsfootsteps.co.uk)

Alas, those planned events were postponed but that didn't stop us supporting bereaved families. We were incredibly proud to be KM Medway Messenger Charity of the Year 2020 and had a double page spread in the paper to launch the coverage and importantly to raise awareness of our charity and the work we do.

We are excited to also announce that we have retained the charity of the year status for 2021 and look forward to coverage on all our postponed events!



Thank you to the Brian Mitchell Charitable Settlement trustees for donating £5,000 to Abigail's Footsteps. This generous contribution makes a huge difference to the programmes we are able to offer throughout the year to families and health care professionals, we appreciate your continued help and belief in our worthy cause.

## February

Abigail's Footsteps was proud sponsors of the 10th neonatal palliative and end of care conference hosted by Child Bereavement UK.



Abigail's Footsteps also heavily subsidised 20 places for student midwives to attend on the day. The event was designed to be useful for those who work in the health sector, including; midwives, fetal medicine teams, neonatal and paediatric teams or those with a palliative care background with babies and children. Becky and Faye enjoyed the trip to Leeds to represent the charity.



## LLHM 2020 pre-race meet up!

Despite the weather looking like it was going to be a complete wash out, team Abigail's had a lot of fun at the pre-race meeting. Vice President Cheryl Baker joined us to present the team with their running tops for the London.



Landmarks Half Marathon, little did we know at this point that it would sadly be cancelled!

A big thank you to Jat from Spec Savvy Opticians at Chatham Dockside for sponsoring our team vests. We also revealed our brand new charity mascot to Abigail's Footsteps co-founders Jo & David Ward, which was a big surprise for them. A massive

thank you to Colin Jarvis at MEMS Power Generation for sponsoring 'Abigail the Bear' who will run alongside the team. Also thank you to Brands Hatch race track for hosting and letting us run round the race circuit, we had a wonderful morning.

The LLHM has been rescheduled for 2021, we would like to say a special thank you to our great team of runners, who have been committed throughout 2020 to continue their training and fundraising. Sarah Hardy on the team, begins her position as a newly qualified midwife in 2021, she is on her way to reaching £2,500 in fundraising and with these generous donations we have committed to delivering a bereavement training day for her colleagues at the Princess Alexandra Hospital. Well done Sarah for your great fundraising and good luck in the job!

## March

*Becky Hopkins, Abigail's Footsteps Manager of Fundraising & Events personally raised £5,776 as part of the London Landmarks Half Marathon team target, thank you to volunteers Grace Cork & Hannah Heaney who helped with the evening as part of their Duke of Edinburgh award.*

**Becky said** "John and I were delighted to be holding our charity event for Abigail's at Rochester & Cobham Park Golf Club, we thought it would be a great idea to get all our friends and family together in one room for one night to try and raise as much money as we could for Abigail's. Our guests received food, drinks, live entertainment from the Voice UK's Jamie Johnson and Millie Bowell, during the course of the evening there were lots of fun ways to raise money like guess the weight of the cake, lucky square board, raffle and a live auction, we would like to thank everyone who purchased a ticket, donated, won on the auction and to all the businesses that donated a prize, we were overwhelmed by everyone's generosity. It truly was a night to remember."





Richard Barnes climbed Kilimanjaro in memory of his son Frank who was stillborn at 38.5 weeks on 8th October 2018.



Richard raised a massive £4,175 which has purchased an Abi cooling cot to go to Queen's Hospital in Romford, with the remaining funds going towards our Bereavement Training programme.

April

Sadly this month the pandemic took hold, we quickly realised that our larger fundraising events were unlikely to take place this year, but thanks to the support of Kent Community Foundation and Colyer Fergusson Charitable Trust we gratefully received Coronavirus resilience grants, which we used to stabilise the charity so we could continue the services we offer within the community.





*The bereavement team at our flagship suite Abigail's Place in Medway Maritime Hospital asked us to purchase new supplies for the self-contained room, we happily donated new bedding covers, towels and a storage unit, as well as more SD cards. It's important to keep the suite fresh and fully stocked with everything families might need during their stay, to make them as comfortable as we possibly can.*

## May

This month was the launch of Abigail's Virtual 10k. Our new mascot 'Abigail the Bear' was due for her debut marathon this year, sadly this wasn't to be, but not one to rest for long our mascot runner Anthony Chapman wanted to encourage families in lockdown to get out into the great outdoors and complete our virtual 10k, every person that registered received a medal, which was a winner with the children that took part. Although not a big fundraiser, this event was more about raising awareness and highlighting family mental health during this unprecedented year. A special mention to Ray Legg and his colleagues at Marsh Maidstone, who all got involved and completed the virtual 10K as a company, raising £320.



*We are truly grateful to Mike Nolan for choosing Abigail's Footsteps to donate £250 after appearing on BBC Ones Celebrity Pointless with band mate Jay Aston which aired on Saturday 16th May.*

Abigail's Footsteps were delighted to support and fully fund the launch of Virtual Bereavement Training sessions, delivered by Paula Abramson, principle of Bereavement Training International and Ambassador for our charity.



Two-hour bitesize training sessions suitable for all professionals providing care for parents following a pregnancy loss and when a baby dies, including midwives and student midwives, neonatal teams, sonographers, obstetricians and gynaecology staff.

**Paula said,** "We are delighted and privileged to have been able to reach out to so many professionals during a time when this type of training and support has arguably been more important than ever. Thank you so much for supporting us and ensuring we are able to continue to offer this much needed training. We are of course looking forward to a time when we are safely able to deliver this training in person, but until then, we hope to be able to continue with this partnership and look forward to working with the Abigail's Footsteps team next year."

We funded 24 training sessions throughout 2020, which was attended by over 600 health care professionals. Of those who completed the evaluation form:

**37% midwives**



99% said the training overall was very good or excellent

**27% nurses**



95% said the content was very good or excellent

**10% doctors**



48% said their skills were very good or excellent before the training session - this increased to 92% after attending the training session

**8% student midwives**



93% said they felt more confident it support bereaved parents having attended the training

'Would have loved to attend this training in person but due to COVID that's was not possible. I was worried how this was going to affect the training but it was brilliant. It was so informative and interesting and feel so much more confident and happy to deal with a bereavement at work. What helped the most was learning the language and being told it was 'ok' to say was so helpful.'



July

*Thank you to Thameside Mortgages for donating a very generous £500 which has gone towards our counselling programme for Kent families to receive funded sessions.*



August

Thank you to Kent Community Foundation for your continued support with our projects and for helping us win a successful grant with Fidelity UK Foundation Kent Community Development Fund to set up a Customer Relationship Management system, making it so much easier for our charity to communicate and keep in touch with our supporters and donors. The database has already made a huge difference to the way we work.



*Thank you to Elisha Randall and daughter Maddie for fundraising again for Abigail's Footsteps, in memory of baby Henrie born 29th August 2020.*

They raised £1,209 together, which will be used for the Bereavement Training programme. Maddie raised funds by donating her hair to the Little Princess Trust, well done for great fundraising and helping other families. Due to the pandemic Elisha didn't get to complete her challenge but looks forward to her skydive in 2021 when it's rescheduled, watch this space!

*Well done to Paige, who completed a skydive in memory of her brother Ronnie and raised an amazing £2,000 which will be used for the Bereavement Training programme*





I am the grandmother of Millie, who was born sleeping at 31 weeks gestation. Thank you for the wonderful way in which my daughter and our family were able to spend 3 days in Abigail's Place with her, to hold her, cuddle and kiss her and to make precious memories. Such a wonderful and amazing charity that will always be in our hearts.



Thank you to the family and friends of baby Millie Carol Hewitt for donating £210 in her memory.



Thank you for donating £600 in memory of Aiden Humphrey, born 10th June 2020



Thank you for donating £3,989 in memory of Margot Rose Cummins, born 4th February 2020





Thank you for donating £2,475  
in memory of Grace Jarvis, born  
18th November 2019



Thank you for donating £1,032 in  
memory of Mylo Austen Stevens,  
born 20th January 2020



Thank you for donating £220  
in memory of baby Caleb,  
born 17th May 2020



Thank you to the family and friends of William Henry Davis who sadly  
passed away on 10th November 2020, for generously donating £300.

Our Dad was a kind man and helped  
many people in his 88 years, he will be  
truly missed by those who knew him.

Jill Brooks & Colin Davis. In loving  
memory of baby Alan William born 1956.







We were delighted in September to have confirmation of a substantial grant from Community Foundation of Surrey which meant we could further offer our specialist baby loss counselling to families in Surrey. The uptake was immediate and referrals from East Surrey Hospital bereavement team have been continuous, highlighting the increased demand.

A special thank you to our qualified baby loss counsellor and charity Ambassador Naomi Marston from Lifecare Counselling for delivering online sessions during the pandemic and supporting bereaved families that need our fully funded service. Our counselling programme is going from strength to strength, this year Naomi has delivered over 300 individual sessions to over 60 families. Following on from the successful grants we received in 2019 to launch the programme we have been overwhelmed by the support from the following Trusts; **Cobtree Charity Trust, Chapman Charitable Trust, The Mrs Smith & Mount Trust, The Albert Hunt Trust**

Thank you for helping us deliver this vital service in Kent, Surrey, Sussex, Essex & South London.

*“Before the counselling sessions I genuinely felt like I couldn’t find happiness where I did before, everything simply led me back to what I had lost and I couldn’t see a way to look to the future. Naomi helped me to understand that it was OK to feel that loss but to focus on the positive memories as opposed to the negative.”*



The football season kicked off for Cobham Colts under 11s, if only for a couple of games before the pandemic saw us in another lockdown, however brief, the team proudly wore the Abigail's Footsteps logo on their home shirts. We wish the boys the best of luck with their games once the season resumes next year.

## October



We were delighted to announce and welcome Louise Giblin as our new Vice President. Speaking about her role **Louise said**, *"Abigail's Footsteps is a really worthwhile and essential charity that supports bereaved parents and raises awareness of this devastating, but all too common, loss. Abigail's Footsteps is a lasting testament to love and a reminder that supporting others can give each of us strength."*



Working for another year in partnership with Rochester Cathedral, sadly we couldn't hold our baby loss service as planned due to the pandemic so instead we streamed a service read by Canon Sue Brewer and poems read by three bereaved parents Elisha Randall, Jayne Gower and Robyn Triplow, a lovely tribute as part of Wave of Light. A special thank you to Ben Gibbs & his team at Visual Elements for lighting up the Cathedral pink and blue for Baby Loss Awareness Week. This year we also enjoyed

the addition of the spire being lit up, thank you to the team at Rochester Cathedral for your support, which means so much.

For 24 days in October we ran our first online auction with the help of Superstars, commemorating 10 years of providing support for bereaved families. Although we missed hosting our gala dinner the auction was a huge success and raised £19,430! We would like to say a huge heartfelt thank you to every company that donated a prize, without you we really couldn't have made this event such a success and also thank you to every person that bid or made a donation. Vice Presidents Craig Chalmers, Louise Giblin and Cheryl Baker kindly donated prizes which made a huge difference to the total. Cheryl's five donations raised £2,699 and Louise's five donations raised £2,270 from the bottom of our hearts thank you so much for everything you do

## November

*Well done to Miky and the MZ9 team who have raised £5,000 in memory of his daughter Bambu. Miky has reached half way on his target and we wish the team the best of luck for smashing the rest of the target next year!*

**Miky said**, *My partner struggled immensely with the grief and she needed help. This is when she was told about a charity called Abigail's Footsteps. They were able to provide her with a specialist baby loss counsellor that would help and support her through her journey. She started the sessions on her own and I later joined her for a couple of sessions. There is hardly any support out there for bereaved parents that specialises in such a loss so finding Abigail's Footsteps was an absolute lifesaver. The counselling sessions helped us find the confidence in*

ourselves to try again for another baby so soon after losing Bambu. Without the love and support, both of us would not have felt strong and confident enough to try again so soon and to be honest, I am not sure if we would ever have been ready to give it another go. As we are so grateful for the support received we would like to help, and collect funds that will go on to support Abigail's Footsteps so they can continue to support all of those bereaved families out there.'



## December



We took the decision to temporarily pause production of the Abi Cooling Cots at the end of 2019. We did this to allow us time to take a closer look at the design of the cot, in particular we wanted to ensure that the temperature of the cot would not be easily compromised when in situ in hospitals with very warm environments. We are extremely grateful to Judith Evans, Director at Refrigeration Developments and Testing Ltd (RD&T) who has administered robust tests to the cold cot throughout 2020 and made some design recommendations. The new Abi Cooling Cot mark 2 is now back in production, produced by our supporters at The Bond Group and we are confident with the new improvements, we have now created an Abi Cooling Cot to the highest possible standard.

**David Ward, founder of Abigail's Footsteps said** "We know many of our fantastic supporters and fundraisers have experienced a long delay in waiting for our new cots to be produced. We are

very sorry for the delay but we know you will appreciate just how important it is for us to get this right. The first cots will be coming off the production line soon and we will be sending them out to hospitals in early 2021. Thank you all for your understanding and continued support, we really could not make the difference we do to families all over the UK without your help."

"Lastly, we would like to say a huge thank you to David & Jo Ward for giving us the love and support we need to work for their wonderful charity. We had quite a scare this month when David contracted Covid-19 and required a short stay in Medway Maritime Hospital. We were delighted when he was back home again with his family for Christmas."



Faye & Becky,  
Team Abigails



*“Thank you to everyone that has supported Abigail’s Footsteps in a year that has challenged us and we hope to have your continued support to make a difference together.”*

### *Sam Collinge - Trustee*

Sam is Bereavement Lead Midwife at George Eliot Hospital NHS Trust, Nuneaton. Sam is also a member of The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Baby Loss and is currently co-leading the Government’s Pregnancy Loss Review and is a huge asset to our charity



### *Trevor Adams - Trustee & Treasurer*

Trevor is a banking professional with a degree in Financial Services, he joined Handelsbanken as Branch Manager in 2008.

*Finally and as always there are many people I would like to thank for their support, hard work and dedication.*

Our patron, vice presidents and trustees continue to give their valuable time, guidance and support. Our fundraisers, supporters and volunteers never fail to amaze and humble us with their quite extraordinary determination, devotion and commitment. Finally, to our sponsors and donors, both private and corporate for their continued goodwill, generosity of spirit, time and resources. Our sincerest gratitude to all of you for everything you do to make what we do possible.





2010 YEARS  
2020