

Annual Report 2023



www.widowedandyoung.org.uk
Support. Understanding. Friendship

Registered Charity No: 1164988

Introduction



A word from WAY's Chief Executive and Chair of Trustees



In 2023, we faced ongoing challenges posed by the cost-of-living crisis. Our 2023 **Impact Survey** highlighted that 68%* of WAY Widowed and Young members were concerned about their finances (up from 62% in 2022).

Over the course of the year, we met the continuing demand for our services and were able to support members who were struggling to meet the cost of the membership fee by doubling the amount available in WAY's **Memorial Fund** (see p4).

Sadly, nearly 24,000** people aged 18-51 die every year, which means that the need for WAY's peer-to-peer support services has never been greater. 2023 saw the year end with 4,650 members and we were able to welcome 1,638 new members. We saw an increase in member retention rates, with 70% choosing to renew their membership this year.

We are pleased that the time we have taken to listen to our members and respond to their needs is really helping to create a service that members truly value. Member feedback drives everything we do and we were delighted to be able to launch our new online **Members Hub** in October. This was in response to members reporting that the previous platform was outdated and difficult to use. This new platform has enabled our volunteers and members to organise their own in-person and online meet-ups – from walks in the park to group meals.

Between them, our volunteers and our members hosted 893 events in 2023, of which 253 were online. In person and online events offer friendship, support and understanding to our members – the special support that can only come from others who have faced the unique experience of losing your partner at a young age (see p8).

Our army of **volunteers** are at the heart of everything that WAY does. In 2023, we had a 2% increase in members choosing

to volunteer, with 170 people covering 196 roles, ensuring that our members are supported through digital platforms and WAY's 62 home groups (see p10).

Our **campaign** work has also been bearing fruit. In February 2023, we celebrated a historic success when cohabiting parents with dependent children were finally able to access bereavement benefit support following the death of their partner (see p9). This was the culmination of more than a decade of campaigning and we continue to campaign for the rights of young widowed people across the UK.

WAY continued to work alongside other bereavement charities and networks to achieve our shared goals. We were delighted to announce our new strategic partnerships with **Irwin Mitchell Solicitors** and child bereavement charity **Winston's Wish** in 2023, with the goal of extending our advice and support for all WAY members (see p15).

WAY is incredibly fortunate to have so many people who are passionate about supporting our charity. We are sincerely grateful to all of our committed volunteers, trustees and dedicated staff team, who provide the structure for the charity's day-to-day operations. And we'd like to say a huge thank you to WAY's incredible fundraisers, donors and corporate partners without whom WAY simply could not operate.

Finally, and most significantly: thank you to our wonderful community of members, who are at the heart of everything we do.

Stephanie Patrick
Chief Executive

Joanna Sedley-Burke
Chair of the Board of Trustees

* Based on feedback from 379 members in WAY's Impact Survey 2023

** Based on ONS death figures 2022

Our Story

94% of WAY members said that WAY membership is good/somewhat good value for money.*

WAY is the only national charity in the UK for people aged 50 or under when their partner died.

Founded in 1997, it's a club that nobody wants to be eligible to join, but we are so glad that our members find us. We provide a safe space for people who have been widowed at a young age – offering friendship, support and understanding.

WAY offers a unique peer-to-peer support network, led by volunteers who have all been bereaved at a young age themselves so they understand exactly what other members are going through.

As well as offering a secure members only website and opportunities to meet and chat online and in person, our members also have access to a confidential telephone support line offering bereavement support, legal, financial and health advice.

WAY also raises awareness of issues affecting those widowed young, campaigns on current issues such as changes to bereavement benefits and seeks out opportunities to publicise the existence of the charity wherever possible, through the media and other avenues, to show that there is support out there to help people navigate life after loss.

"When I found WAY, they helped me so much with support and friendship. Just knowing there were others who were going through what I was going through made it more bearable... I have found their peer-to-peer support invaluable."

Carol (bottom right), WAY member and fundraiser



* Based on survey responses for 2023 from 304 members in our May 2024 Impact Survey.

WAY impacted the lives of
4,650
young widows in 2023



helping them to navigate
their bereavement by
offering friendship,
support and
understanding.



What WAY does



WAY members organised **893**
in person and virtual events in 2023.



170 amazing volunteers
helped to support our work throughout the year.

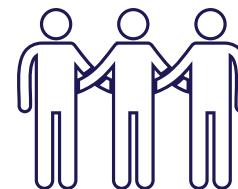


Generous supporters raised **£137,217**,
helping us to reach more people in need of support.



157 young widowed people were gifted annual
membership through our Memorial Fund.

How WAY helped



79% of members found
that meeting people in the
same situation has helped.*



Our small team of
5 employed
members of staff
continued to support
our members.



81% of members felt
that they had better
knowledge about grief and
bereavement.*



83% felt less isolated.*



More than
30,000 people
helped us to
spread the word by
following us across
our social media
channels.

121,029
separate
communications
sent out to our
members
throughout the year.

113 pieces of
press coverage
were generated
throughout the year.



72,617 people
visited our website
in 2023.

* Based on survey responses for 2023 from 304 members in our May 2024 Impact Survey.

Our Members

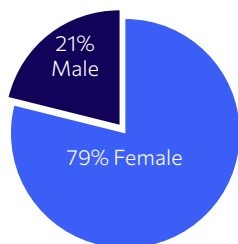
1,638 new members joined WAY's peer support network in 2023.



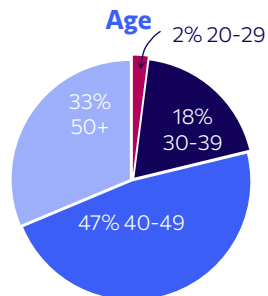
of members renewed their membership.

Demographics

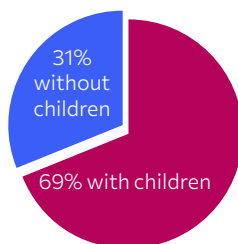
Gender



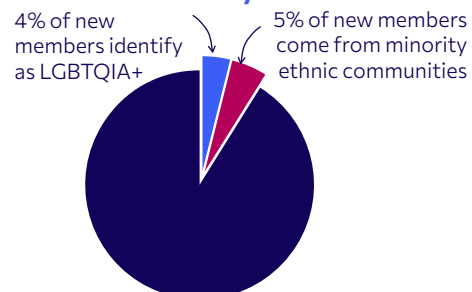
Age



With/without children



Diversity



Our Member Services

WAY continued to provide a range of vital services and support for all of our members as they navigate their bereavement journey, including:



We unveiled our new Members Hub in September 2023, which listed **893** events, and allowed members to connect and communicate privately with each other, as well as offering a wide range of geographical and individual interest groups.



WAY members and volunteers organised **253** online events.



Our closed Facebook group and a large range of subgroups were accessed by **65%** of members.



More than **290** people made use of the telephone support line offering counselling services, legal and financial advice.



68% of members who used the telephone counselling service found it helpful.*



109 events for new members were held.



157 members were supported financially through our Memorial Fund.

* Based on survey responses for 2023 from 304 members in our May 2024 Impact Survey.

"Knowing that WAY has a tailored telephone support line for us to use is really fantastic... It has been a comfort knowing that there is somebody available, just a telephone call away. I feel safer somehow knowing there is another human being available to listen to me cry and grieve. No advice, no judgement, just there for you."

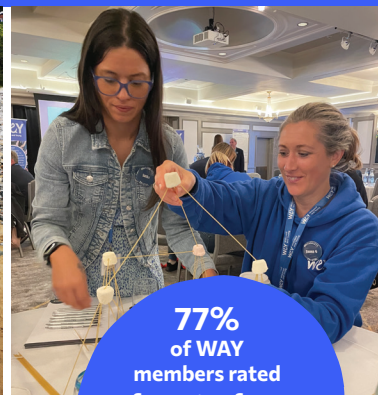
Hannah, WAY Member

"I want you to know that WAY helped me in ways I am still only now discovering. I'm still working my way back to a form of normal myself. There are still hard days and weeks but, in the main, life feels easier now than a year ago."

Steve, WAY member



Events



77%
of WAY
members rated
face-to-face
meetings
as one of the top five
WAY services*

WAY members have been busy getting together in parks, pubs and cafes across the UK – as well as meeting for online bingo, quizzes, yoga and book groups. Many events are organised by members and volunteers in our 62 home groups, which stretch from Scotland to Cornwall.

WAY's Operations Team also organised five national events during the year for members across the country to get together with other young widowed people and their families:

Big Picnic weekend

The sun came out for WAY's Big Picnic weekend in May, enticing more than 400 WAY members, friends and family to roll out their picnic blankets at 38 picturesque picnic locations from North Wales to Norfolk and from Jersey to Aberdeen.

Weekends aWAY

More than 60 WAY members and children headed to **PGL Caythorpe Court** near Grantham for a weekend of adventure in February. It was a great opportunity for WAY members and their families to spend some time in the company of other people who understand what they're going through.

WAY returned to the **Pembrokeshire Coast** for the second year in early May: it was an action-packed couple of days and 15 members had the chance to enjoy the amazing countryside and do something completely different, while finding support and friendship.

In June, 55 members and children got together in **Derbyshire** over the Father's Day weekend to make new memories.

In September, more than 100 members headed to Bristol for the charity's biggest annual gathering – our **Annual General Meeting**, which included a dinner dance.

"This was my first weekend away without my husband. I think I felt safe enough to enjoy it as I was around lovely people that just get it.... I had such a lovely weekend. If someone had told me a month ago that I'd be up dancing and singing, I would have thought they were crazy."

Hayley, WAY member and AGM attendee

Campaigning for Change

It's core to WAY's mission to raise awareness and understanding among the public of the needs of people who are widowed and young – and to campaign on their behalf.

Campaign success

After a decade-long campaign, from February 2023, bereavement benefit payments were finally extended to non-married cohabiting couples with dependent children.

This followed rulings from both the High Court and Supreme Court that found it was against the human rights of the children involved to discriminate against them based on their parent's marital status.

As of 9 February 2023, bereaved cohabiting couples with dependent children can apply for and receive Bereavement Support Payments, in the same way as those who are married or in a civil partnership, to help them cope with the financial challenges of such a significant family bereavement.

As many as 20,000 bereaved parents were also able to submit a claim for retrospective payments worth several thousand pounds.

We were thrilled about this campaign success and continue to campaign on behalf of young widowed people across the UK to make sure their voices are being heard.

We are calling for:

- Bereavement Support Payments to be extended beyond 18 months and uprated in line with inflation.
- Bereavement Support Payments to be extended to cohabiting couples without children.
- National Insurance eligibility to be reconsidered for Bereavement Support Payment applicants.

Blank Space campaign

Our Blank Space campaign is also calling for the birth registration process to be made simpler and more compassionate for mothers whose partner died before their baby's birth was registered. We don't believe it's fair that some babies have a blank space on their birth certificate where their father's name should be.



Blank Space: Birth certificate equality for bereaved parents

"WAY has been a brilliant support in all of this and the campaigning has made a very real difference... It was so incredible to see, after all these years, that unmarried widowed parents will now be able to claim a benefit that was denied to us until now."

Elanor, WAY member

Our Volunteers



WAY was built on volunteering and volunteers continue to help drive forward progressive change while supporting members in a variety of different ways. WAY welcomes volunteers from all over the UK and embraces diversity amongst its volunteer community in all its forms. Volunteering with WAY really is the ultimate in peer support.

At the end of 2023, WAY had 170 volunteers covering 196 different roles. These included the new role of Outreach Volunteers, who help to regularly spread the word about WAY in their local communities, either by attending local events or attending bereavement networks where they can share WAY's work and find out about the work of other bereavement organisations.

WAY continued the work of our Diversity Working Groups. The goal of raising awareness of diversity and inclusivity was evident through our members and volunteers waving WAY's Pride flag at several UK Pride events and participating in activities during Black History Month. We also provided tailored diversity training for WAY's volunteers both in person and online.

With volunteers based across the UK, it can be challenging to bring volunteers together. However, there were several opportunities in 2023 as WAY's Volunteer Manager travelled to different locations to meet some of our volunteers for opportunities to engage in helpful discussions and training sessions. (Thanks to our partners at Irwin Mitchell Solicitors, who offered some of its office space to host these sessions.)



170 volunteers covered **196** volunteering roles – with some volunteers helping in multiple roles.



93% of members have volunteers in their local areas.



83% of new members reported in their three-month survey that they had been welcomed by a volunteer in the area.

"Since starting volunteering, I have organised mostly weekend events so people with and without children can come... I would not have gone to many of these places if it was not for WAY. Whenever I feel lonely, there is someone to talk to and share thoughts and feelings with. As this is a peer-to-peer organisation, each volunteer is helping members – whatever stage of the grieving process they are at – to cope with life."

Kristine, WAY volunteer and recipient of our 2023 Mandy Burrows Award

Raising Funds for WAY



WAY does not receive any government funding, so we rely entirely on memberships, donations and fundraising to support our members. In 2023, our supporters achieved some remarkable fundraising feats, and collectively raised an impressive £137,217* for WAY.

Here are some of the highlights:

- Two teams of intrepid WAY members went head to head with our supporters from Irwin Mitchell Solicitors at the Kingston-upon-Thames **Dragon Boat Race** in July – raising more than £5,000.
- WAY member Carol raised more than £4,700 cycling 100 miles through the heart of London by taking part in the **RideLondon** event.
- WAY supporters Nick (pictured right) and Margaret raised more than £2,300 by taking on the **London Marathon** in April, while fundraising volunteer Chantal raised over £1,600 for WAY in the **Marathon de la Loire** in France.
- Chantal also raised £1,000 by taking part in the **Bournemouth Half Marathon**.
- Not prepared to be outdone, WAY supporter Matt ran a gruelling **seven marathons** over seven days in memory of his brother-in-law Clax – raising £4,400.
- WAY member Kass raised more than £400 by taking part in a **Winter Walk** for WAY; and Ben, Claire and Karli raised an impressive £1,600 through the **London to Brighton** Ultra Challenge.
- WAY member Natalie raised £350 by jumping from a plane in October.



Huge thanks to all our fantastic fundraisers who help make our work possible!

We'd also like to thank the following companies and foundations that have supported WAY in 2023:



• **Irwin Mitchell Solicitors**, who joined in our Dragon Boat Race and our Santa run – raising £858 – and the Irwin Mitchell Charitable Foundation awarded a £10,000 grant which was used to boost our Memorial Fund.



• A team from **CrossCountry Trains**, who got on board with WAY's fundraising and raised more than £4,000.



• 18 colleagues from **Mainstay Recruitment**, who took on an epic Snowdon challenge to raise funds and awareness for WAY, raising a fabulous £3,145. Two Mainstay team members also raised £550 in a fearless skydive.



• **Purple Goat Agency**, whose fundraising crowdfunder raised more than £14,000.

• WAY also received two donations totalling £24,000 through the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Recycling (ICCCM) from **Mintlyn Crematorium** in West Norfolk and **Burnley Crematorium**.

How your support helps

£5

pays for access to the members area of our website

£10

pays for a member to access our helpline for a year

£30

pays for a year's funded membership to WAY

£40

pays to train a WAY volunteer

£100

pays for a member to access a funded place on a WAY weekend break

If you're interested in fundraising, please get in touch at fundraising@widowedandyoung.org.uk

* All figures include Gift Aid.

Financial Review

WAY's Board

Accounts to the end of December 2023 Income & Expenditure Account

	2023	2022
Income	£	£
Membership Fees	121,080	120,675
Donations & Fundraising	107,421	105,654
Other Income	2,735	2,799
Gift Aid	29,796	35,860
TOTAL INCOME	261,032	264,988
Expenditure		
Staff Costs	210,416	191,137
Other Office/Admin Costs	24,951	29,638
Publications/Media/PR	44,624	51,305
Website	22,926	22,415
Helpline	18,996	8,663
Memorial Fund	5,230	5,635
Other	5,860	9,163
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	333,003	317,956
Net Surplus/(Deficit) for the year*	(71,971)	(52,968)

Balance Sheet

	2023	
CURRENT ASSETS	£	£
Fixed Assets		
IT	36,816	
Debtors		
Gift Aid	5,000	
Prepayments	1,113	
		42,929
Current Accounts	153,577	
Less Uncleared Payments/(Credits)	(6,322)	
		147,255
Set Aside Funds		
Memorial Fund	(1,770)	
Gift Membership	(650)	
		(2,420)
CURRENT LIABILITIES AND DEFERRED INCOME		
Liabilities	(12,678)	
Events	(3,963)	
		(16,641)
TOTAL Assets		171,123
FINANCED BY:		
Accumulated Surplus Brought Forward		243,094
Net Deficit/(Surplus) for the year*		(71,971)
		171,123

* The charity's policy, as decided by the Board of Trustees, is to maintain WAY's reserves at the level of 50% of anticipated running costs for the coming year. With total funds of just under £180k at the end of 2023, our reserves remain above that level.

In previous years, it has been a key challenge for the charity to identify how to best use surplus funds to support our members and to reach more of those eligible to become members. In 2022 and 2023, the Board invested in new staff as well as improving our website for members. This resulted in a planned deficit during 2023 of £71,971 (and £52,968 in 2022). However, this level of deficit is not expected to recur.



At our 2023 AGM in Bristol, WAY members approved the re-appointment of Trustee **Louise Dodds**, who is a member of WAY in the North East.

AGM attendees also approved the appointment of new Trustees **Bobbie Kelly** and **Marcos Eleftheriou**, who were both co-opted onto the Board earlier in the year.

Bill James stood down as Treasurer after seven years as a Trustee; and **Rammi Janack** stood down after one year in post.

Trustee

Stuart Scarbrough
Bill James (Treasurer)
Graham Briscoe
Jo Sedley-Burke (Chair)
Kate Siegler
Louise Dodds
Mike Etherington
Rammi Janack
Bobbie Kelly
Marcos Eleftheriou

Appointed

2016
2017 (stood down in 2023)
2018
2018
2019
2019
2020
2022 (stood down in 2023)
2023
2023



"I applied to become a Trustee of WAY to say thank you and to give something back to the charity that has helped me. I also work for a mental health charity in communications, and I intend to use my skills and ideas to raise WAY's profile and help the charity to reach more widowed people at an earlier stage in their journeys."

Bobbie, WAY member and Trustee

Strategy and Charity Objectives

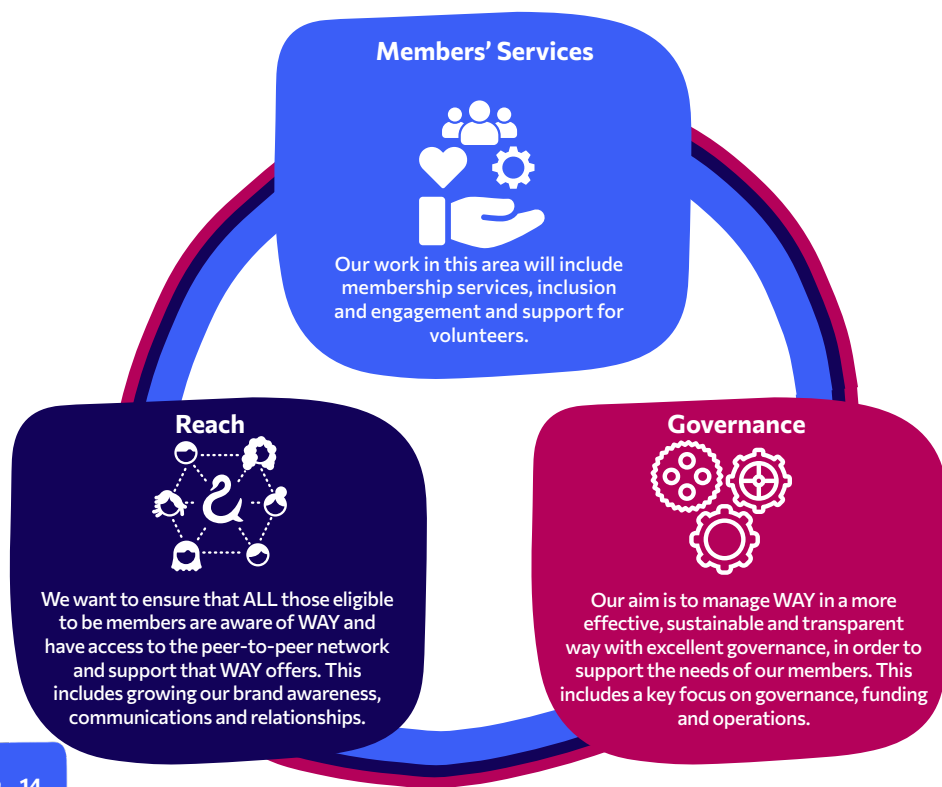
WAY members help to shape our future and, after going through an organisational transformation in 2018, WAY carried out a range of consultations with our members to help inform the direction our charity should take in the future. We carried out an extensive survey of our members and volunteers to work out the best way forward as our charity continues to grow.

From this, our 2021-2026 five-year Strategic Plan was born, which reflects the views of all our members and volunteers to make sure the charity meets their needs, to draw out our long-term ambitions, to help outline our organisational priorities and to reflect our new structure.

WAY's Strategic Plan was developed in line with recommendations drawn from reports and takes on feedback from our members, staff and volunteers.

We would like to thank everyone who offered their valuable input – from completing WAY surveys to attending meetings, from talking to our team to taking part in working groups.

Our strategic plan is split into three key areas:



Our Strategic Partnerships

Irwin Mitchell

In December 2023, we were pleased to announce our strategic partnership with Irwin Mitchell Solicitors, who have been supporting WAY with fundraising and legal advice over the past four years.

Irwin Mitchell have been fantastic supporters of WAY, taking part in our Big Picnics, giving us opportunities to speak and share our work with their company, taking part in various fundraising events, offering meeting spaces and supporting our campaign work.

As part of our partnership, Irwin Mitchell is taking over the financial and legal aspect of our telephone support line and they will be offering tailored support through a series of webinars.



Winston's Wish

Together, WAY and Winston's Wish are partnering to provide full circle support for the whole family following a bereavement. As well as referring bereaved families to each other's services, the two charities are joining forces to provide tips and advice to offer help for the parents they support and their children.

We are also partnering on campaign and policy work, advocating for improved services and experiences for bereaved families both now and in the future.



"Having access to over 4,600 members who understand what I'm feeling and can support me through tough moments and celebrate my successes is invaluable, whether that be online through the Members Hub or in person at meet ups."

Kathryn, WAY member and volunteer

WAY's Mission

To offer unique support for those aged 50 or under when their partner died, through an inclusive peer-led network based upon mutual self-help. WAY also campaigns to raise awareness and understanding of the issues affecting those widowed young, and to influence relevant policy.

WAY's Vision

To ensure ALL those eligible to be members are aware of WAY and have access to the peer-to-peer network and support that WAY offers.

WAY's Values

Caring

Respectful

Innovative

Valued

Transparent

www.widowedandyoung.org.uk

Registered Charity No: 1164988

Email: enquiries@widowedandyoung.org.uk | Telephone: 0300 201 0051

Registered Address: Advantage House, Stowe Court, Stowe Street, Lichfield WS13 6AQ

