

Ruth Radley

Link Letter no. 34 | October 2021

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The call in action

Hi everyone,

I hope you are all doing well, I know that these times with more “freedom”, as people say, are also bringing a lot more days of anxiety and stress, especially for people who are clinically vulnerable. Personally, I am still wearing a mask anywhere inside and being cautious as to where I go, and will continue to do so. For me, it is about respecting others who may be feeling vulnerable, in the hope more people will feel able to be out and about and feel safe in doing so. I am also still very cautious as I am working with very vulnerable children as well, and do not wish to put them at any more risk because of my choices. We are still under strict COVID guidelines here in the hospital; masks, distancing, restricted visiting. Life “on the outside” may feel like it’s getting back to something that we recognise, but please do remember that in our hospitals it is far from that.

Last weekend we held our annual memorial walk and picnic at the National Arboretum. After last year’s drop-in – all outside and with families not doing activities, it was amazing to be able to welcome families into the large building at NRA once again. After our experiences of doing things differently last year, we kept some of those changes this year and we held a drop-in over the day: families came, enjoyed refreshments, enjoyed some activities and were able to freely talk about the child who is sadly no longer with them, as it is often so very difficult to do that in the outside world. I was with one mum who became a little emotional and I asked about her daughter. I was informed she had died three years ago, and my response was, “But I bet it feels like yesterday.” Dad looked at me – also a little misty-eyed and said, “Thank you so much for saying that. Everyone else is like, ‘It’s been three years, you should be able to get on with life now...’ and then go on to make comparisons about losing parents/ grandparents or pets.”

The loss of a child is really a unique one, and although families eventually find ways to continue through life, that sadness never really goes away. The day itself was full of a lot of joy as well as some sad moments, and being able to once again sit with families and chat as we did the activities was so great. We are so glad that we were able to do this day and know so much that it is a really important date on the calendars of many of our families.



Name: Ruth Radley

Location: Birmingham, UK

My call: To see children become whole and empowered to use their God-given gifts.

My role: I work in the multi-faith chaplaincy team at Birmingham Children’s Hospital (BCH), providing spiritual care and support to children and families.



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Sand art that was made and put around the memorial tree

I also do a number of home visits, due to our partnership with the Birmingham community palliative care nurses. You may recall that they have brought in our services for staff support, and we are also able to support some families at home. It is currently a mixture of supporting parents with palliative children, supporting the children themselves and doing some bereavement visiting to help siblings explore and express emotions. It is such a privilege to be invited into someone's home during the toughest time of their lives. In addition to this work, I have also been on call at the weekends, being available to come and support children and families who may find themselves at the end of life, and offering an end-of-life blessing for the child or supporting children and families in other difficulties.

Sadly, during August, I was informed of a significant drop in my funding, which was rather hard. As I think I mentioned in my last letter, funding has been slowly dropping, but this latest news means that at the best I may have to drop days next year, as I am no longer sustainable as funding stands past the end of this year. I am blessed to have a boss here at the hospital who appears to want to keep me on the team! Over the last year, the hospital has been sending money for almost a day a week to CMS from some of the project work I have been doing (the multi-faith work, the palliative care staff support and home visits to name a couple) and my boss, Paul, has committed to trying to find even more funding for me going forward. Not long after I joined the team, a chaplain who worked four days a week left, and the hospital was not able to re-employ into that role, so it was interesting that my hours became four days. It is hard for me to comprehend this at times. I see so much need here, we are always all running around trying to keep up with the demand for chaplaincy – which has grown significantly around the hospital, and we are regularly saying we need more chaplains to be able to continue to grow and do what we are already doing well. It has also been a place of healing over things that had been very hard and led me to a place of ill-health, for which I will always be grateful – and indeed Paul said he hoped it would be a place of healing for me when I joined the team. I know times are hard for many people and I remain so very grateful for those of you who continue to see the need for my role and are able continue to support me, it *really* does mean so very much. Thank you so much,

I hope I am able to visit churches and see many of you in the not-too-distant future.

Ruth



Photos from top to bottom: Sand art; the memorial tree with the sand art and sunflowers, each one representing a precious child

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