



In-Memory Briefing

# Funeral directors and their relationship with charities

August 2018



In-Memory Insight explores the size, shape and scope of in-memory giving in the UK. We work closely with a learning circle of leading charities – over eighty of them in the past seven years – who agree to pool their budgets, experiences and data to help build evidence and insight.

We define in-memory as ‘any type of charitable giving or fundraising commemorating the life of someone special’. This includes gifts made at funerals, direct in-memory donations (both one-off and regular), ‘Tribute Funds’, commemorative objects such as plaques and benches, event participation (e.g. marathons and bike rides); and legacies in honour of a loved one.

In-Memory Insight aims to collect objective evidence and insight on in-memory giving to build a case for investment, inform fundraising strategies and help manage supporter relationships.

## **Our latest research focused on the changes taking place in the UK funerals market, and the implications for charities.**

Members of In-Memory Insight received a series of reports and presentations on all aspects of the research programme, including consumer research, best practice case studies, charity benchmarking and workshop discussion notes.

This publicly-available briefing draws on insights from the consumer research to focus on one particular area of our findings: funeral directors’ attitudes towards charities and their view of the relationship. As always, we are grateful to our Learning Circle members for agreeing to share these insights more widely.

The In-Memory Insight programme year runs from July to June. To enquire about joining the programme in 2019-20 and accessing the full benefits of membership, please contact Meg Abdy on [m.abdy@legacyforesight.co.uk](mailto:m.abdy@legacyforesight.co.uk)

## About this research

Donating at or after a funeral is the most common and long-established way to give in memory, representing 38% of all in-memory donations. Although average donation values are relatively low, this may be the donor's first interaction with the charity and the all-important first step in the in-memory journey. Their initial experience – often via a funeral director – can directly impact on whether they continue to give or fundraise in honour of a loved one.

Our research examined the funeral directors' role in the process of remembrance, their relationships with families and charities, and how – if at all – they influence in-memory donations. There were three main elements to the research reported here:

- Desk research: from a wide range of articles and reports, plus consultation with industry experts
- Industry insight: eighteen in-depth, telephone interviews with funeral directors – representing large and small chains, independents and a selection of alternative providers
- Consumer insight: an online survey of 418 people who had been personally involved in arranging a funeral over the past 5 years.

In addition, our 2018-19 programme included:

- **Case study examples** of charities working with funeral directors, whether directly on the funeral collection process, or more generally as partners within their communities.
- A **mystery shopping exercise** to assess the quality of information that our Learning Circle members are currently offering people who approach wanting to find out about organising a funeral collection in memory of a loved one.
- **In-memory performance benchmarking** of the resources invested in in-memory fundraising and the sums raised through a range of donation channels.

Full reports on the charity case studies, mystery shopping and performance benchmarking have been made available exclusively to In-Memory Insight members.

## What we learned

### Charitable donations at funerals now 'commonplace' – but values waning

The funeral directors we spoke to estimated that between 50-90% of funerals involved a collection for charity, depending on client base and catchment area. Our consumer research supported this, finding that two-thirds of recent funerals featured a donation to charity, mostly to a single charity. Of the 491 funerals investigated in our online survey, 53% included gifts to one charity, and a further 10% to two or more; while 38% had no collection.

Although charity donations were the norm, for families they were still an important and meaningful choice at a sad time. That said, many funeral directors felt that the 'in lieu of flowers' link that used to exist was no longer there and that donation values were often far lower than the equivalent cost of flowers. As they have become more common, donations have become easier to skip, and charities may need to work harder in future to secure them.

### Funeral directors have negligible influence over the choice of benefitting charity

Our research debunked the long-held supposition that funeral directors have significant influence over the family's choice of charity for a funeral collection. The funeral directors we interviewed told us that it was exceptionally rare for them to be asked by the family to suggest

a charity. In our consumer research, 87% of respondents said the funeral director had no influence, while only 13% said they had a little (5%) or a lot (8%) of influence.

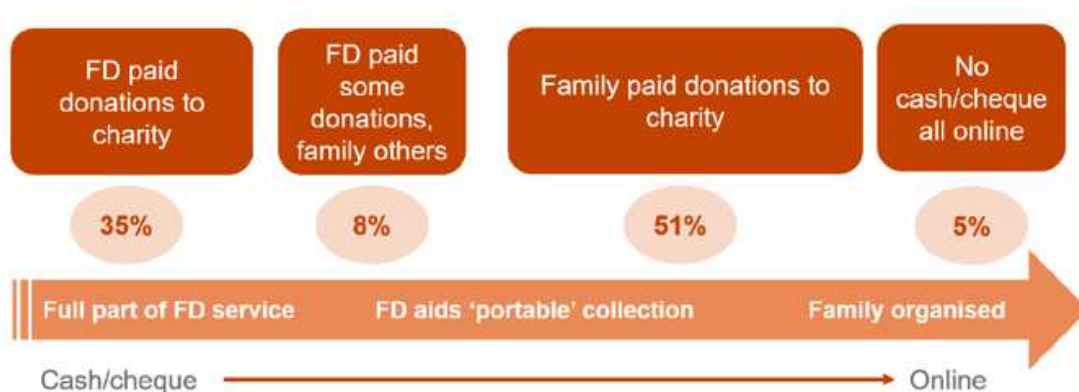
On the rare occasions that funeral directors were asked, they tended to encourage the family to consider 'cause of death' or 'loved in life' links rather than recommend their own favourites.

Our survey also suggested that funeral arrangers had little problem deciding for themselves on an appropriate charity. 60% said they'd found it extremely easy, while another 36% said it had been fairly easy. Only 4% of respondents had struggled to decide which charity the funeral donations should go to.

### Funeral directors relinquishing control of the charity collection

When we asked about how funeral collections were taken, it was clear that funeral director involvement in collections is very much in decline. This was due to cost, complexity, the potential for fraud and a lack of demand from families. Some traditional funeral directors still collected and banked donations, but several of the major chains have moved to collecting donations on the day in a sealed box or 'tube', passed directly to a family member.

We asked recent funeral arrangers how the money was paid to the charity and it was clear that already, families are more involved in this than funeral directors. Nearly 60% were involved fully or partially in paying in donations. Our research suggests that in the future, funeral directors will dissociate more and more from funeral donations and decisions will be increasingly made and executed by families.



Base: 267 funerals with charity donation, Populus, March 2018

### Online donations a 'new norm'

Newer, perhaps more modern, funeral directors were pointing families exclusively to online donation, via third parties (e.g. JustGiving) or direct with the charity. The majority of all the funeral directors we spoke to felt that online (or some other form of electronic) donation was very much the direction of travel, in the context of an increasingly cashless society.

In our consumer research we asked all funeral arrangers if they had an online donation page and one in five (22%) did. Among younger people – 18-34s – this figure was nearly 50%, implying a definite trend for the future.

Of the funerals involving an online collection page, half had been organised through a third-party platform like JustGiving, a third were direct with the charity and one in ten was via a funeral director's website.

## **Independently of the funeral, FDs actively engage with charities of their own choice**

Funeral directors had almost no relationship with the charities nominated for funeral donations. However, they did have their own significant, independent links with charities, whom they supported in a variety of ways. The links could be with national charities, but more often with local charities within their community. This was especially true of hospices, where funeral directors saw their work first hand.

Funeral director support covered a number of different areas, practical as well as financial. It included: staging their own fundraising events, or supporting charity-led events, allowing charity promotion in their shop windows, acting as collecting points for campaigns, recycling items from the deceased (e.g. spectacles, shoes), providing manpower or even entertainment and running support groups.

## **Driven to serve their community**

Funeral directors felt that their reputation within the community was vital – their *raison d'être*, no less – and many talked of wanting to serve their local community. This was partly because their reputation was important to business, but also because they felt they had something to give back. There were many instances of funeral directors offering end of life and bereavement support, to help fill what they saw as a gap. This wasn't usually formal counselling, more education and social support, but it could be offered widely within the community via the church or GPs. There were also many close relationships with hospices, care homes and other relevant community groups (e.g. Probus).

This research raises a number of important questions for charities to consider when defining their future relationships with funeral directors. Not least, it highlights significant implications for charity communication channels and messaging and suggests new opportunities to forge links of a different kind with these important players at the heart of their community.

**For all enquiries about the In-Memory Insight programme contact  
Meg Abdy: [m.abdy@legacyforesight.co.uk](mailto:m.abdy@legacyforesight.co.uk)**

## **Time to book a Health-Check?**

Have you reached a pivotal point with your in-memory fundraising? Are you wondering how to pinpoint exactly where you should be focusing attention and investment?

An In-Memory Health Check from Legacy Foresight could give you the confidence to move onwards and upwards with a sound base of evidence unique to your organisation.

To talk to us informally about your charity's needs, please contact Kate Jenkinson, Head of In-Memory Consultancy: [k.jenkinson@legacyforesight.co.uk](mailto:k.jenkinson@legacyforesight.co.uk)