

# 

GIVING HOPE TO GRIEVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



1 APRIL 2024 - 31 MARCH 2025

# AMESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR, LIZ GRATTON

"I always enjoy writing the introduction to our impact report; it's a moment to reflect on our achievements over the past year, marking both the conclusion of our three-year "Break the Script" strategy and the launch of "Turn Up the Dial."

This year, I had the pleasure of reconnecting with Julie Stokes, the founder of Winston's Wish. Hearing her recollections of her original 35-year-old vision—a pioneering approach to bereavement support, especially for grieving children—reminded me why this work is so fundamental to our mission. Julie's vision and determination remain at the core of our identity and guide everything we do.

Three years ago, we had an ambition to break the script for how support for grieving children and young people was provided. And at the heart of this was how we place the voices of those children and young people at the centre of everything we do. We are incredibly committed to designing services that meet their ever-changing needs based on what they tell us works best for them. As a result, we have embraced the use of digital technologies and we are available on demand, providing instant support without lengthy wait times. We are available to children and young people directly, should they wish, with

64



Liz Gratton, Chair of Trustees



Julie Stokes, Founder of Winston's Wish

All of this is re-defining the world of bereavement support for children and young people, and I am proud that we are at the forefront. We are delivering support in a way that a whole generation of young people want, need and expect it to be delivered. This generation has grown up with technology; they live on social media, chat on apps, and learn through video, and they naturally prefer to access support in the familiar spaces of their devices.

In my conversation with Julie, she mentioned her dream of having a Winston's Wish team in every county, perhaps even every village. In reflecting on her vision, we have realised that today's technology allows us to go even further: Winston's Wish is now available virtually in every home and every pocket. This digital capability has transformed us into a truly national charity. Physical distance is no longer a barrier to receiving our support.

This past year has laid a strong foundation for our future. We reached more young people than ever before—up 16% from the previous year—and raised enough money to cover all our costs, a significant achievement in today's challenging environment.

As we look ahead, we are taking a significant step to extend our reach and deepen our impact by announcing the planned merger of Child Bereavement UK and Winston's Wish. This union will bring together our vital bereavement services, training, and expertise to better support grieving children, young people, parents, and families across the UK. More than a joining of resources, this is a shared commitment to ensure no bereaved child or family faces grief alone. The merged organisation will operate under the name Child Bereavement UK, with Fergus Crow, our CEO of Winston's Wish, leading as CEO. We look forward to sharing our next report as one unified organisation working hard to ensure no child, young person or family has to face grief alone. This refreshed mission and our ongoing commitment promise an exciting next chapter in our journey to support and uplift grieving children and young people across the nation.

I am deeply grateful for our brilliant team, led by CEO Fergus Crow, and the dedicated Trustees whose commitment and professionalism are truly inspirational. My sincere thanks go to everyone at Winston's Wish—our team, our board, our supporters, and most importantly, the children and young people who inspire us each day."

#### LIZ GRATTON.

Chair of the Board of Trustees





# SAMMY & AMANDA'S STORY 6

This year, we launched the Winston's Wish Junior Youth Team, offering safe and creative spaces for bereaved children aged 12 and under to help shape the services we provide. One of our very first members, Sammy, along with his mum Amanda, shares why Winston's Wish means so much to their family.

Sammy was just two when his Daddy died of cancer. For him, staying connected to his Daddy has always been important.

"On Daddy's birthday, we always do something, like eating his favourite dinner or his favourite retro sweets like Dib Dabs, Fruit Salads and Rainbow Drops. Mum always tells us funny stories. Daddy had always wanted to go skydiving, so we went indoor skydiving this year."

"Daddy liked sunflowers, and we always used to plant them together before he died, and each year we have a competition. Mine and Daddy's sunflower always wins, it has more colour and is taller."

As Sammy got older, he started feeling sad and worried about not having his own memories of his Daddy, relying mostly on stories from his mum. Amanda, who had been in touch with Winston's Wish over the



years, encouraged him to reach out to our bereavement team.

Amanda shares: "Live chat helped (Sammy) an enormous amount. He used the service whilst waiting for counselling. He got an instant response to some very deep and heavy questions from a bereavement professional. I was really touched that Winston's Wish then identified he needed more support, and suggested he have more sessions."

Sammy adds: "I had some sessions on Zoom. They helped me talk about Daddy, and we made 'Ooglies' that all (represented) feelings. Whenever I feel sad, I play with my favourite Ooglie called Skittles. Then I went to groups, and we talked about how we were feeling, and that's a good thing because you shouldn't hold it all in. It's like we were helping ourselves now to be better in the future. (We did) loads of games and activities and chatting, and it helped to know other children are going through it."

Amanda reflects on the wider impact of that support: "It wasn't just that he had sessions and that's it. I knew I could call the helpline, or he could go on the live chat if he had a question or was struggling, and that we'd get a response right away. And that takes the pressure off. It gives you support and comfort to know that whenever we are struggling, we can call Winston's Wish."

Sammy has been inspired to give back to Winston's Wish.

#### "I said I wanted to give back and help other children, and now I'm on the Junior Youth Team. I helped to make the children's website, which was really fun to do."

"I like giving the support back. I like to do more stuff to help people and make them feel less alone. Being more vocal and saying what you feel is better for you, because if you get it all out, you'll feel better. All the questions that will pop in your head about your future, and you might want to ignore them and want to be cool and not show your emotions, but you should always say how you feel. You will feel better. I want them (other bereaved children and young people) to know they aren't alone; there's about 1,000 other people feeling this, too."

Amanda is hopeful that being part of the Youth Team will continue to have a positive impact: "From something very tragic, being involved with Winston's Wish has been a really positive experience for him to meet and work with others who are in the same boat."

For Amanda, Winston's Wish has been a source of strength since the very beginning: "Right from when my husband got poorly, I needed to know how to help my kids who were two and four. There were lots of wellmeaning people offering advice, but they just didn't get it. I knew I needed expert advice. Winston's Wish helped me have some of the most difficult conversations with my children. They gave me information that was all about being honest, clear and age appropriate. I knew I wanted the children to be at the funeral, and Winston's Wish talked me through how to handle that."

Over the years, Amanda has continued to lean on Winston's Wish at different times in their journey.

"Back then, I relied a lot on calling the helpline, and I have called back many times over the years at different points in time. They have always offered accessibility, to keep coming back and ask for support when we needed it.

"Winston's Wish also helped me when it came to supporting my daughter at school. At the time, her school wasn't supportive, there was no bereavement policy or programme in place, but with the help of Winston's Wish, I got a lot of things in place. Now, teachers who'd previously blocked any mention of my children's Daddy are far more supportive."

One of the most meaningful gifts Amanda and her children received was a way to keep their Daddy's memory alive.



Memories of Daddy

"And one of the most treasured things Winston's Wish has given us is the gift to keep their Daddy fresh in their minds. They were so young when he died, but with help from Winston's Wish, we recorded the memories they did have of him in sand jars, with each colour of sand representing a different memory, such as an item Daddy had bought for them. We were advised to 'fill the empty chair' and that's what we do. The children look forward to Daddy's birthday, it's a chance to celebrate him."

Amanda concludes: "I know that none of us will ever get over what's happened, but we do feel stronger for having had the help of Winston's Wish. We have the toolkit to cope, and we know they are only a phone call or a message away if we need them."

# AYEAR OF TRANSFORMATIVE AND PAGE TO STANDARD TO STAN

It has been a year of growth, impact, and transformation at Winston's Wish.

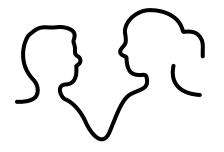


#### THAT WORKS OUT TO:



18,171

children and young people benefitted from helpline support 459



children and young people benefitted from specialist 1-1 support

Amongst those who engaged in our specialist one-to-one support last year,

76.5% shared that they had experienced a measurable reduction in grief-related vulnerability

in accordance with the Children's Attitude toward Grief scale (CAG) - a psychological assessment tool which measures how children perceive and cope with grief and loss. It aims to assess children's emotional, cognitive, and behavioural responses to experiencing the death of a loved one or other significant losses. This is a powerful testament to the dedication and expertise of our teams and the evidence-based approaches we continue to champion.

22,852

children and young people benefitted from email support

I FEEL LIKE YOU SEE ME.
SOMEHOW, YOU MADE
IT EASY TO OPEN UP A
LITTLE. THANK YOU FOR
BEING HERE, YOU'VE
DONE MORE THAN YOU
WILL EVER KNOW."

**BEREAVED YOUNG PERSON** 

95%

of people using our services rated their experience as positive



12,766

children and young people benefitted from live chat support

# **INSTON'S WISH**

# EXPANDING ACCESS AND EVOLVING SERVICES

A key highlight of the year was the launch of a new online group support model. Drop-in style sessions were replaced with five-week closed groups, based on age or type of bereavement, and timed to suit the young people's routines. This made the groups feel more consistent and supportive. We introduced age-appropriate sessions, like "Story and Play" for under sevens, and offered themed groups where needed. By the end of the year, 21 groups had run, with over 120 children and young people taking part.

"I REALLY LIKED IT. AT FIRST, I CRIED A LOT, BUT IN THE LAST FEW SESSIONS, I DIDN'T CRY AT ALL. NOW I CAN TALK ABOUT MUMMY WITHOUT CRYING."

#### **BEREAVED CHILD**

We also expanded our psychoeducational grief content, diversifying our resources to include tailored support for ethnically diverse communities and young people with special educational needs (SEND). Our online grief content and resources reached a total of 1,145,495 digital users.

We launched the Genesys project, integrating the channels that bereaved children, young people and supporting adults use to reach out to Winston's Wish into one seamless communications and reporting system.

Now, every interaction is automatically linked to the young person's record, enabling our bereavement teams to understand their journey before a single word is exchanged.

"[The practitioner] was honestly the most kind, patient and comforting practitioner that could've been assigned to my sweet boy. She made him feel at ease instantly and showed such interest in not only his grief but in him as an individual."

Parent of a bereaved child

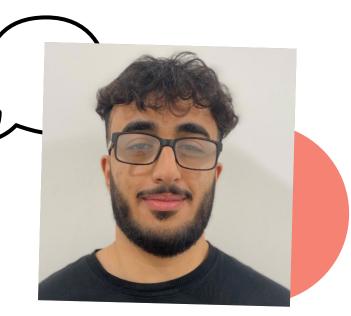


## THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR LISTENING TO ME. YOU SOUND LIKE YOU REALLY GET IT."

**BEREAVED YOUNG PERSON** 

# MINSTON'S WISH

# BUILDING AWIDER, SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY



Meher, Youth Advisor

We continued to celebrate our growing community of lived-experience advocates, expanding our Youth Ambassador programme to 104 young people, with a new Junior Youth Team for under 13s. Their voices and experiences are integral in shaping services that truly resonate with the bereaved children and young people we support.



My dad died due to alcoholism when I was 12 years old. I wanted to be part of the Youth Forum because I wanted to talk about how we can make Winston's Wish an even better community than it already is, and help loads of other children like me. I loved everything about it, working with other people who have lost someone special to them makes it so much easier and comfortable to talk about and makes Winston's Wish a fabulous support system. The Youth Forum was such a good opportunity to share my ideas and make change happen."

DAISY, Youth Advisor



I lost my mum when I was four. Grief at that age is hard to put into words; you just feel the absence in a hundred little ways: moments that should have been shared, questions you don't know how to ask, a silence you don't know how to fill. It lingers in birthdays, school events and the quiet moments when you realise what's missing. Looking back, I know how much it would have meant to have people who understood how to support a grieving child, especially when those around me were grieving too. That's why this work matters. It's about making sure no child feels lost in their grief, that they have people around them who can offer the right kind of support, helping them express what feels impossible to say. Because no one should have to navigate loss alone..."

MEHER, Youth Advisor

IR IMPLIET 2024/25

We inspired hundreds of fundraisers and supporters to help raise essential funds and awareness for Winston's Wish in their local community, including 280 individuals who ran or took on a personal challenge, 468 individuals who hosted events and 30 Community Ambassadors who delivered talks.

# WORKING AS A VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY AMBASSADOR FOR WINSTON'S WISH FOR THE LAST TWO YEARS HAS BEEN A GREAT HONOUR.

Of course, what drives me is helping the charity to provide much-needed support for grieving children and young people. However, it benefits me too! I very much feel part of a community and incredibly well supported and valued by colleagues at the charity.

My role falls into two main areas. Firstly, spreading the word about this amazing charity and what it provides for grieving children and young people. Second, by raising funds either through my own endeavours or by encouraging others to do likewise.

Local groups are keen to have speakers with a story to tell. My own illustrated talk links my long-distance walking with the work of Winston's Wish and goes down well with a wide range of audiences from the Freemasons and Rotary Clubs to Mothers' Unions and church groups. This led to our local Rotary Club adopting Winston's Wish as its charity of choice for two consecutive years. My own fundraising efforts have included walking the length of Italy and annual plant sales.

There are so many opportunities, and it's important to be on the lookout for the next chance to spread the word and raise money. I love working as a Volunteer Community Ambassador. It has, without doubt, changed my life for the better."

#### PAUL JAMES,

**Community Ambassador** 

280
individuals took
on personal
fundraising
challenges

468

local organisers hosted fundraising events



**Paul James**, Winston's Wish Community Ambassador



A standout moment came from the Good Morning Britain One Million Minutes campaign, which recruited

#### **300 NEW VOLUNTEERS**

— significantly boosting our fundraising and awareness-raising efforts.

# **INSLON'S WISH**

# STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND NATIONAL ADVOCACY

We formed pioneering partnerships with organisations including Maggie's Cancer Care, delivering grief training and introductory sessions to families, and Olive Academies, where we supported students in alternative educational settings with grief resources and staff training. We also agreed to continue our Full Circle Partnership with WAY Widowed and Young for a second year, ensuring the whole family is able to access timely and appropriate grief support.

Our partnership started with having forums to develop a better understanding of our individual services. Winston's Wish delivered a presentation about their services to our team, empowering our staff to feel confident when signposting families, knowing how the charity can support children and young people who are facing the death of someone important to them.

Since launch, Winston's Wish and Maggie's have jointly facilitated a course delivered to families at our West London Centre. The course covered a range of topics, including myth busting, how to communicate with a child about a loved one's illness, signs to look out for when a child is struggling, changes in family roles when someone is sick, memory boxes and real, personal accounts of anticipatory grief from children and young people. All participants were hugely appreciative of the advice and information they received, and a number were keen to reach out to Winston's Wish separately for additional support for their family.

Ultimately, our aim for the partnership is to be able to empower and equip parents with the tools and confidence to approach conversations with their children about death and dying and support their emotional well-being following these conversations."

TROY CHASE,

Quality Assurance & Training Lead | Clinical Psychologist Maggie's West London We also played a pivotal role in Children's Grief Awareness Week, contributing to a campaign that resulted in a 54% increase in the number of bereaved children and young people we reached during the week — a total of 6,211 individuals supported through services and training.

Through collaboration with At A Loss, we helped establish the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Grief Support and the Impact of Death on Society, ensuring the needs of grieving children are represented at a national policy level.



(L-R) Letizia Perna, Director of Services and Fergus Crow, CEO of Winston's Wish with Mandy Gosling, Integrative Counsellor and Psychotherapist ABC Grief attend the Children's Grief Awareness Week 2024 Launch Event.

# **OUR IMPACT 2024/25**

## LEADING CONVERSATIONS



Sarah Helton, Back Pocket Teacher

Our communications and creative campaigns were widely celebrated this year with our film, "Grief Looks Like This Too", which showcases real young people's grieving journeys, winning the Mental Health category at the Big Syn International Film Festival 2024 — seen by over 50 million people in 120 countries.



Our winning film entry "Grief Looks Like This Too" displayed at Piccadilly Circus.

We also addressed a unique gap in the market by collaborating with the Greeting Card Association to develop sympathy card guidelines for children and young people. These guidelines have already been adopted by major retailers including Moonpig, The Card Factory, and Raspberry Blossom.

Additionally, we launched our SEND Rapid Response training package with specialist Sarah Helton (also known as Back Pocket Teacher) to support grieving children with SEND in educational settings. We also began offering Spotlight Sessions — accessible, short-form grief trainings tailored for professionals. In total, we delivered training to 3,637 professionals, of which 545 sessions focused on supporting bereaved young people with SEND.

The needs of children and young people with SEND are often overlooked due to their cognitive or communication differences. We know that a young baby can be affected by the death of a parent. If a baby has the capacity to experience this, then every child with SEND has at least this level of understanding and it is often much higher than we realise.

There are many perceived barriers to children and young people with SEND gaining bereavement and grief support, but in reality, the only true barrier is us. We need to have confidence to talk about death and grief to all young people.

All schools will experience bereavement, but for special schools it can sadly occur more frequently. A significant death within the school community can have a ripple effect, impacting students, staff and families, making it hard to balance their own grief whilst supporting the grief of others.

That's why Winston's Wish created the SEND Rapid Response Training prorgamme aimed at supporting special schools through the toughest of times and preparing them for future losses. The training considers the particular needs that staff will face when helping young people to understand and express their grief, whilst being mindful of staff wellbeing."

#### SARAH HELTON,

**Back Pocket Teacher** 

young people.

# BOOSTING ENGAGEMENT AND DIGITAL GROWTH

increase in TikTok followers We saw substantial growth in our digital presence, reflecting our dedication to meeting children and young people where they are. TikTok followers grew by 38% and YouTube subscribers by 25%, while

the Grief in Common podcast, hosted by Youth Ambassadors, saw a 70% increase in listeners.

Volunteering also flourished, with over 400 volunteers offering their time and support, including a new cohort of 'on-demand volunteers' who assist us in providing direct bereavement support to children, young people and supporting adults accessing our helpline, live chat, and email services.

The Winston's Wish brand made headlines throughout the year, reaching over 400 million people through features and expert commentary in BBC News, ITV, Cosmopolitan, The Independent, Huffington Post, and many more. This media visibility helped reaffirm our status not only as a service provider but as a national voice for bereaved children and

Over volunteers

#### **INSPIRING ROLE MODELS AND COLLABORATIONS**

We welcomed Alfie Watts, winner of BBC's Race Across the World 2024, as an official Ambassador, bravely sharing his own story of losing his mother and using his platform to promote open conversations about grief. He even released a charity single with proceeds donated to Winston's Wish.

We collaborated with social media influencers. using their growing platforms to highlight their experience of grief, including hosts Amie and Alicia from "If We Don't Laugh We'll Cry" podcast, Ashley who creates TikTok content on her channel "Shamelessly Grieving" (formerly "Black & Bereaved"), and Frankie from the podcast, "Lost and Found with Frankie".



Grief TikToker Ashley (right) speaks with Winston's Wish Youth Ambassador Kim on the Grief in Common Podcast.

A collaboration with Marie Curie also led to more inclusive online bereavement content for children and young people experiencing anticipatory grief, extending the charity's influence in hospice and palliative care settings.

# **JUR IMPACT 2024/25**

# FINANCIAL GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY

130/o
increase in regular monthly givers



We successfully raised

£2.7M

to deliver our essential bereavement services

A significant £720,000 came from trusts and foundations, funding crucial new projects like on-demand services and creative therapies. We saw £194,000 pledged through gifts in wills, and our Christmas Appeal raised £43,000, a 35% increase from the previous year. Our community of regular monthly givers also grew by 13%, providing consistent and vital financial support.

With financial support from the MetLife Foundation, we launched the Genesys Project, which has enabled us to integrate our various communication channels, providing a much improved and seamless experience for those accessing our digital services.

At MetLife, we believe every child deserves access to the support they need during life's most difficult moments. That's why we're proud to partner with Winston's Wish and help fund their digital transformation. Projects like Help Our Helpline reflect our commitment to driving meaningful, lasting impact in the communities we serve."

#### **DOMINIC GRINSTEAD,**

**UK Managing Director, MetLife** 

Importantly, we ended the financial year with our goal of maintaining six months of reserves, offering stability needed to plan for the future.



Grief changes everything. When a child or young person loses someone they love — a parent, a sibling, a carer, a friend — their whole world is turned upside down. Every part of life is affected. And for far too many, the support they need simply isn't accessible.

At Winston's Wish, we're here to change that. For over 30 years, we've stood alongside grieving children and young people. And now, as we look ahead to the next four years, we're launching a bold new strategy that builds on our past and looks determinedly to the future.

#### **OUR 2025-2029 STRATEGY IS A PROMISE:**

No child or young person grieves alone.

We'll do that by focusing on five strategic key areas:

Definitively digital first.

Digital is not just a tool; it's a driver of transformation, making grief support accessible beyond physical locations and in the spaces where children and young people feel most comfortable.

2 Centring children and young people.

Children and young people are not just at the heart of what we do — they are the reason we exist. Our strategy reaffirms our deep commitment to putting their voices, needs and living experiences at the centre of every decision, service, and message.



### Championing equity, diversity and inclusion.

Over the next four years, we will continue to take meaningful action to become ever more inclusive, representative, and fair in everything we do — from who we hire, to how we deliver, to the systems we challenge. We believe that inclusive grief support is effective grief support. Every grieving child and young person, no matter their background, deserves care that recognises and respects their unique experience.



### Building a sustainable organisation.

Sustainability is more than survival — it's about strength and integrity. We're building Winston's Wish to last, for every young person who needs us both now and in the future.



## Growing impact through collaboration.

We know we can't do this alone. That's why we're placing partnerships and collaborations at the heart of this strategy. Whether through transformational projects, cross-sector alliances or grassroots networks, we will work with others to create a deeper, sustainable impact for grieving children and young people.



Both charities share a deep commitment to ensuring that no bereaved child, young person, parent or family has to face grief alone. By coming together, we are combining our expertise, resources, and decades of experience to create a stronger, more impactful organisation, one that will be able to reach more grieving families across the UK with compassionate support, training, and guidance.

Over the next year, our teams will work closely together to ensure a thoughtful and seamless merger process. Every step will be taken with care to honour the values and voices of those we serve. We are preparing to launch as a single, unified organisation under the name Child Bereavement UK in Spring 2026.

This is more than an operational change; it's a powerful expression of our shared purpose. By uniting, we are not just pooling resources; we are amplifying hope.

I am delighted to be stepping into the role of CEO of the combined organisation, and I am confident in a future that builds on the strengths of both charities while embracing the opportunities ahead.

Together, we are determined to ensure that every bereaved child and family in the UK has access to the support they need, not just today, but for generations to come."

FERGUS CROW, CEO

## THANK YOU!

Thank you to all of our incredible partners, philanthropists and funders, some of whom are highlighted below. We cannot thank you enough for all of your support, and whilst we can't name everyone individually, please know that each contribution makes a vital difference to the lives of grieving children and young people.















































































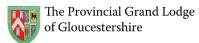






























# THIS IS MORE THAN JUST GRIEF SUPPORT; IT'S A MOVEMENT

A powerful stand for the young people who have suffered the unimaginable. Together, we are breaking down barriers and transforming how grief is experienced, understood, and supported. And this is just the beginning.

Join us, and let's create a future where no young person has to navigate grief alone.

Winston's Wish depends on donations, legacies and incredible fundraisers so that we can provide our vital services. There are lots of ways you can help:

#### TAKE PART IN A RUN OR CHALLENGE

Whether you're running a race, climbing a mountain, or pushing your limits in any other way, a charity challenge is your chance to do something truly extraordinary. There's no feeling like crossing the finish line or reaching the summit—knowing your effort is helping to change the lives of bereaved children and create lasting impact.

#### **LEAVE A GIFT IN YOUR WILL**

We want to ensure that every bereaved child and young person who has experienced the loss of someone they love can access our services both now and in the years to come. By giving a gift in your will, you can make this future a reality, leaving a legacy of hope.

### PLAY THE WINSTON'S WISH LOTTERY



Pledge from just £1 a week and you could be in with a chance of winning £25,000 in our weekly Friday draw. The more entries you play, the more chances you have to win, and the more you'll be able to transform a child's life. Enter now, and you could be celebrating next week!

#### **HOST YOUR OWN FUNDRAISER**

Whether it's as an individual, with friends and family or through school or work, do something you love whilst raising funds to support Winston's Wish.

### BECOME A CORPORATE PARTNER

Gather your work colleagues and together let's create a unique partnership that will not only help you to achieve your business goals, but ensure every bereaved child and young person across the UK has access to timely and appropriate support when they need it most.

#### **MAKE A DONATION**

Whatever you can give, it will go towards giving hope to grieving children and young people across the UK. **You can donate:** 

Online at winstonswish.org/donate-online

By phone, call **01242 515157** to speak to a member of our fundraising team

By post, cheques should be made payable to Winston's Wish and posted to Winston's Wish, Conway House, 31-33 Worcester Street, Gloucester GL1 3AJ



## TO SPEAK WITH OUR BEREAVEMENT TEAM:



Live chat at winstonswish.org





Email ask@winstonswish.org

All services are open from 8am to 8pm, Monday to Friday

