



Suicide Bereavement Support

For Cumbria & surrounding areas

Annual Report 2020-2021



Introduction from the Chair

"The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the lives of everyone, and Suicide Bereavement Support (SBS) is no different. This year we have continued to support those in the area who have tragically lost a loved one to suicide through the pandemic via online (Zoom) meetings, by phone and also through our closed Facebook group. In doing so we have found an even deeper sense of community with each other."

John Brown, Chair

Featured image



10-year-old Shaun from Cockermouth dressed as Dennis the Menace with his dog Google for his 10km run which raised more than £5,000 for SBS Cumbria this year.

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Helpline:

Helpline: 07896 703 757 or 07572 975 721

Web: www.sbs.org.uk

Email: hello@sbs.org.uk

Facebook: [facebook.com/CumbriaSBS/](https://www.facebook.com/CumbriaSBS/)

Twitter: @Cumbriasbs

We aim to respond to enquiries within 24 hours

Suicide Bereavement Support is a registered charity number 1184889

History of SBS Cumbria

2009: In response to the high rate of loss of life by suicide in Cumbria, a strategic multi-agency group was established by the then Regional Director of Public Health for North-West England, John Ashton. It quickly became clear that there was no specific support available for those bereaved by suicide in the area. Two stakeholders with backgrounds in social work, John Asher and John Brown, agreed to take the lead in developing a response.



2010: The precursor to SBS Cumbria, a Cumbria branch of the nationally run Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS), was established after a meeting held on 5 November attended by 20 people, the majority of whom had been bereaved by suicide. The meeting confirmed the need for a localised, targeted self-help service for this group of people, and a small steering group and monthly meeting were thus initially established in Keswick, chosen for its relatively central location within the county.



2010-2019: SOBS Cumbria grew over the next decade, eventually hosting three groups, in Carlisle, Kendal and Whitehaven. In the course of these nine years throughout which the core team operated as a branch of SOBS, we developed a service which was able to be consolidated and expanded upon in a flexible and responsive way.



2019: Early in 2019, the steering group that had developed SOBS Cumbria set about establishing a new independent Charity, Suicide Bereavement Support Cumbria and surrounding areas, known as SBS Cumbria. On 13 August 2019, SBS Cumbria received its registration from the UK Charity Commission, with charity number 1184889.



2021: SBS Cumbria continues to provide support for those bereaved by suicide in Cumbria and surrounding areas, adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic by moving meetings online and recognising the need to develop a new family focus to support young people, children and their families very much inspired by Shauns wonderful fund raising and awareness raising on our behalf.

Governance, Ethos and Structure

The mission of SBS Cumbria is to provide a lifebelt in the form of targeted peer support for adults living in Cumbria and the surrounding areas who have been touched by suicide.

We provide support in a range of ways based exclusively on self-help principles. Central to this is providing an in-person and online platform for family, friends and colleagues left behind following loss of life by suicide to reflect, share and find support. Developing support for those bereaved in such devastating circumstances must be sensitive, personal and flexible. Those affected by such loss have been quite literally served a life sentence. In responding to such loss we have developed as responsive and flexible a service as we possibly can, bearing in mind that we are a wholly voluntary organisation.

Foundational elements in the delivery of these self-help support service are:

- ◆ Financial probity: professional support to ensure that our income and expenditure balance is critical. We are fortunate to have access to the services and support of Catherine at [Cumbria Admin Services](#) to help ensure that we are open and transparent in our financial transactions;
- ◆ Marketing and public relations: if we are to be successful in supporting people affected by suicide, they must be aware that we are here and feel able to make use of the support we provide. Kate at [Blue Shadow Marketing](#) enables us to develop and implement a marketing and communications strategy.

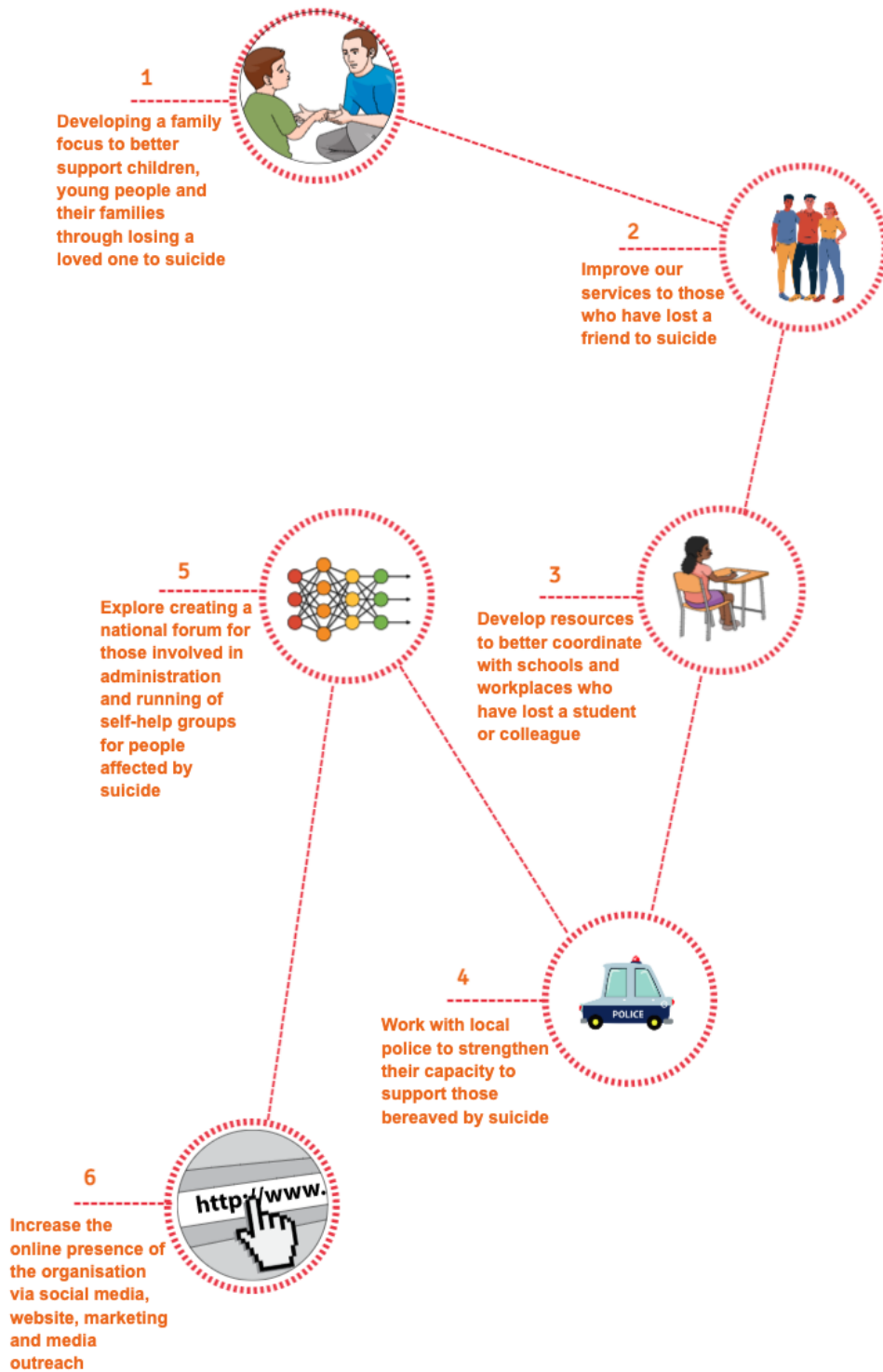
The foundation upon which SBS Cumbria is built is our incredible, committed steering group, made up of people with a wide range of much needed skills, and group facilitators for each of our four support groups. Most of our steering group members have themselves been bereaved or their lives touched by suicide. In 2021 we were pleased to welcome a new trustee to our group, bringing the total number of trustees to six. Our committed group of trustees are responsible for the general direction of the organisation.



Some of our volunteers and facilitators taking part in one of our Zoom meetings in June 2021

Future Focus

In 2021, SBS Cumbria has identified six priorities for governance and strategy moving forward, summarised below.



Lockdown and its consequences for SBS Cumbria

Soon after the lockdown was introduced in spring 2020, with a heavy heart we took a decision to switch from face-to-face to online meetings via Zoom. We decided that this would take the form an hour-long Zoom meeting every Thursday evening from 6.45 to 7.45. This gave us time to stand on our doorsteps and clap the heroes of the NHS and other essential services helping us get through the pandemic. These weekly Zoom meetings continued from 8 April 2020 through to 24 June 2021.

Despite our initial anxiety about how well people would adapt to the radically different approach to providing a platform of support a real sense of mutual support and camaraderie has developed. Our dear friend Frank who tragically lost his son 6 years ago has been a rock for us all. Every week since June last year he has played us out with a tune and song on his ukulele. For many of us this has become a defining part of the experience of offering a network of support during the lockdown.



Poster created for SBS Cumbria's first ever origami night

SBS Cumbria volunteers Kitty, Izzy and Emily arranged Zoom social events throughout the Winter of 2020 and into Spring 2021. They have organised a quiz, origami night, online games night, and a professional, participatory, online magic show, attended by 23 households (of between one and four people) of members, friends and family of SBS. The events have resulted in much laughter, and being online has allowed members from Scotland and North Lancashire to join in together. These events have been a light through dark times for many and we hope to continue them next year even as the COVID-19 crisis subsides.

In June 2021 we agreed to reduce the weekly Zoom meetings to fortnightly as the lockdown was easing and better weather meant that people could get out and about more.



Magicians Jay and Joss entertained SBS Cumbria members with an online magic show especially for our group.

As of July 2021, the West Cumbria group has re-established face to face and we are actively seeking to recommence face to face meetings in Barrow, Carlisle and Kendal as soon as we safely can. We will be maintaining a Zoom presence on a monthly basis to complement our face-to-face meetings for as long as there is an interest. It does have some advantages, especially for people who have young children that they can join a meeting without leaving their home and dip in and out of meetings as circumstances permit. One new attendee, J, described herself as one of these beneficiaries, saying that she is a "*tragically bereaved Mum with very little family support, two young children, and difficulty getting childcare and leaving her children too long to travel to the Carlisle venue.*" These attendees may in normal circumstances have been forgotten and left to deal with their respective tragedy on their own. SBS has certainly thrown these individuals a real lifebelt; the dynamic of our service is changing.

Marketing and communications

The objective of our communications and marketing strategy is twofold: First, to ensure that information about our presence and how to get help reaches its target audience, those who have been bereaved by suicide, at the right time; and second, to raise awareness of the existence of the organisation amongst potential donors and supporters, including regional and national agencies and the general public.



An article in the Barrow-based newspaper, the North West Evening Mail, featuring SBS Cumbria and facilitator Kitty.

The isolation caused by COVID-19 has made our online presence even more important this year. Highlights of our marketing and communications work, both from our volunteer media sub-group and from Marketing Consultant Blue Shadow Marketing, include:

- ◆ Supporting fundraisers with communications and marketing, including Shaun Mayall, a young person affected by the suicide of his father who was awarded a Points of Light award for his fundraising efforts by the prime minister. His efforts were featured on local media and TV.
- ◆ Revamping several pages on the website;
- ◆ Continuing to regularly post on Facebook and Instagram and on the blog;
- ◆ Relaunching our newsletter with a revamped format;
- ◆ And supplying volunteers with SBS Cumbria branded materials such as leaflets, keyrings and posters.

Impact: Facts and Figures

Between August 2020 and July 2021, 41 people have taken part in SBS Cumbria meetings at least once. SBS Cumbria has been newly contacted by 51 people who have been bereaved and we have had 8 contacts from agencies seeking advice or making referrals. This includes five contacts from people affected by suicide and one contact who sought support from our regional facilitator, Emily G, about a vulnerable person affected by suicide in the area.

Of the 54 new contacts to SBS Cumbria, 42 were females and 12 males. Below is a summary of the relationship between the bereaved person and their loved one who took their own life:

RELATION OF PERSON WHO TOOK THEIR OWN LIFE TO BEREAVED PERSON	NUMBER OF PEOPLE BEREAVED
HUSBAND / PARTNER	10
BROTHER	7
FRIEND	9
SON	5
DAUGHTER	5
SISTER	3
FATHER	2
GRANDFATHER	1
GODSON	1
NIECE	1
MOTHER	2
COUSIN	1
STEP MUM	1
EMPLOYER	2
SCHOOL	1
NOT KNOWN	3
TOTAL	54
CONTACTS FROM AGENCIES	8

Fundraising

This year has seen some incredible fundraising efforts from inspiring members and volunteers. Below are stories just some of the initiatives that have raised money for SBS Cumbria.



Change collections in a local pub to raised money and crucial awareness of our services

400 miles in four weeks

Dedicated SBS Cumbria volunteer Izzy Sharpe and her family, including Kathryn, Alex, Karen and supporter Geoff, took on an extra challenge this year and raised an incredible £1,030 for SBS Cumbria and suicide prevention charity Every Life Matters. They vastly exceeded their original goal of raising £400 and kept active, competing with each other to run at least 400 miles in 4 weeks between them. Writing on her Facebook page, Izzy said *“the pandemic has made life for those already struggling with mental health problems even harder. Therefore, as a family we want to raise awareness money for these two very worthwhile Cumbrian charities.”*

The family have greatly inspired the SBS community by using four weeks of UK lockdown to take part in this inspiring challenge, keeping fit and enjoying scenic running routes around the beautiful Cumbrian countryside.

Walney to Whitby bike ride



On Saturday 12 September 2020, SBS Cumbria member Alex Hutt completed a 150-mile cycle across the country from Walney to Whitby with a group of seven friends. The effort raised over £9,000 for charities including SBS Cumbria. The money went to Campaign Against Living Miserably ([CALM](#)), a nationwide suicide prevention effort; and to pay for an Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) course in Alex's hometown of Ulverston, administered by [Mental Health Learning](#), a North West England based course provider. Fundraiser Alex, who has lost two close family members to suicide over the last two years, has completed an ASIST training course himself, and says he chose these three charities to make a difference to suicide prevention efforts across the area:

“Before joining SBS, I did not realise how much it would help me, meeting others going through the same feelings, stresses and emotions. If we can help just one person to not choose suicide or help just one family to deal with the loss of a family member, then this effort is more than worth it.”



Cumbria Globe Trotters

A determined group of 20 staff from Cumbria County Council completed a combined distance of 2,535 miles during September and October, resulting in a global second place in the **IASP Cycle Around the Globe challenge**. The council workers – calling themselves the *Cumbria Globetrotters* – ‘set off’ on 10 September, which marked World Suicide Prevention Day and notched up 2,535 miles before 10 October. They have raised more than £3,000 for SBS by various means including road riding, mountain biking and riding exercise bikes at home; even runners and walkers joined the challenge!



The [Cumbria County Council](#) group were keen to embark on the challenge to draw attention to the prevalence of suicide and the importance of positive mental health and wellbeing; the council have had involvement in the *Time to Change* initiative, a growing social movement working to change the way we all think and act about mental health problems. It’s a sad fact that motivation for the *Cumbria Globetrotters* cycle campaign was due to some of the team losing loved ones to suicide in recent months, relying on organisations such as *Suicide Bereavement Support* to get through the challenges that bereavement by suicide presents.

Angela Armstrong is a member of the team who has experienced the loss of suicide first-hand: *“I lost my nephew Harry Armstrong to Suicide in 2019 when he was 20 years old, so I wanted something positive to come out of a horrible situation and I want Harry to be remembered. I’ve found this challenge hard at times; it’s brought a lot of emotions to the surface. I’m sad now that it’s over. Knowing that my colleagues were so passionate about our cause was hugely inspiring and kept me going. The donations that kept coming has been incredibly heart-warming. I’m so proud to be part of this amazing team.”*



10k run and Points of Light Award

Having waited for more than five months to complete his 10km charity run, Shaun Mayall (10) finally undertook the challenge and raised over £5,000 for SBS Cumbria. The schoolboy from Cockermouth sadly lost his dad, Andy, to suicide in 2014 and decided to honour his memory by challenging himself to run 10km in December. Lockdown, however, put paid to his plans and the youngster was forced to delay. [Watch ITV's coverage here.](#)

The sun was shining and the birds were singing; the perfect day for the children at Fairfield Primary to cheer Shaun on his run. Many of them took part, some in costume, with Shaun dressed as his dad's favourite Beano character, Dennis the Menace. A guest appearance was made by Shaun's faithful friend, Google the labradoodle, who was today known as Gnasher [see below]. *"Some of my teachers took part too,"* said Shaun; *"Mr Steele [Head] ran, Mr Gale ran as Batman and Mrs Winter ran in a red tutu[see below]."* The atmosphere was electric.



Almost 300 people donated to raise £5,000 for people in Cumbria who have been bereaved by suicide. Shaun attracted some high-profile supporters; legendary mountaineer Alan Hinkes OBE, as well as the Prime Minister, who awarded Shaun the [Points of Light](#) award in recognition of his exceptional service in fundraising.

"I want to say a massive thank you to my friends at school," said Shaun. *"Grace has made a poster for me [see below left], Emily has been really supportive ever since I had the idea and Mac and Thomas have been really good friends."*



Shaun's fundraising efforts will make a huge impact, explained John Brown: *"Yesterday I spent the day outside Fairfield School. The atmosphere was incredible with the whole school involved in supporting Shaun's extraordinary fund raising achievement. The money he has raised is being used to develop much more of a 'family focus' to the support we provide. Shaun has also shone a light on the devastating impact that bereavement by suicide has not just on families but also communities. I salute him and his family. I also salute Fairfield School who have done a fantastic job of supporting Shaun and his mum through the utter devastation of bereavement by suicide. He is a true inspiration and his kindness will be felt by the many families who need to call on Suicide Bereavement Support."*



100 days of 2k

A team of 12 friends and colleagues including key workers and emergency response staff have come together to raise awareness about suicide in Cumbria by each running 2km every day for 100 days. Many of them are not runners and almost everyone on the team has been affected by suicide personally or through their work. They have already run more than 800 miles (Land's End to John O'Groats is a mere 603 miles as the crow flies) and raised over £1,200.

The idea was the brainchild of Jonathan of Cumbria Police, who has put the challenge into action and has been joined by colleagues in the police, NHS and teaching staff. The team is made up of teachers, police officers, NHS staff and more, ranging from Cumbria to Durham and North Wales, all of whom have a connection and a love of Cumbria. Some have never run before, including Jayne Blackwell (63), who works as a teaching assistant in North Wales. She has completed her run by 6.50am before work each day and, despite not being too keen on the idea initially, has become the inspiration and motivation for the rest of the team.

“The biggest challenge is fitting the run in around shift patterns and family life,” says Anna Blackwell, childminder and ex-Police Officer from Stainton. “We receive Jayne’s daily run report before 7am every single day, which leaves us with no excuses not to run ourselves! Even my brother, Matthew Brown, who works for the NHS runs between his meetings. The improvement to everyone’s physical and mental health since we started running is clearly evident and, actually, some of us are not looking forward to ending the challenge in July as it’s had such a positive impact. Hopefully, the habit will stick. There are definitely days when bad weather makes it less enticing to set out on a run, but we’re all able to have a good laugh at ourselves and each other’s running exploits.”

Most of the team have experienced the reality of suicide as emergency response workers, but Anna and Matthew have been touched by suicide on a personal level when they lost their beloved Grandpa Mac. *“As children, we knew that Grandpa Mac had taken his own life, but it’s not until you grow older that you really start to understand and feel the impact. It would have been his birthday on 22 May and he’s still very much in our thoughts to this day. It’s so important for loved ones left behind by suicide to feel supported and that’s why we wanted to help others through the critical work carried out by SBS.”*

Co-op collaboration

SBS has also been selected by the Co-op as one of several local community charities to support. In this initiative, local charities receive a penny out of every pound spent on Co-op brand goods in selected shops. Incredibly, this alone has raised over £2,500 for SBS Cumbria, and raised awareness of our newly launched local services, especially in the Furness area.



Barrow facilitators Emily and Kitty in front of the SBS Cumbria banner to launch the community collaboration at local Co-op shops.

Training and Capacity Building

As part of our strategic goal to increase capacity of our volunteers, steering group and trustees, SBS Cumbria members have attended several training events over the last year:

Suicide Bereavement UK conference

Delivered online to more than 200 people worldwide, this suicide prevention training was attended by several SBS members, including one joining in the middle of the night from Canada! The conference was a valuable opportunity to learn and share, particularly regarding the results of the largest ever study published on suicide bereavement support.

Postvention Assisting those bereaved by Suicide training (PABBS)

On Thursday 1 October 5 of our facilitators were able to attend the PABBS course which was delivered in Penrith by Dr Sharon McDonnell and Angela Samata.

The [PABBS training](#) is the only ‘evidence-based’ and ‘theory-based’ suicide bereavement training available internationally. ‘Evidence-based’ means that it was developed from a three-year research study (The PABBS Study), led by Dr Sharon McDonnell at the University of Manchester and funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Research for Patient Benefit (RfPB) programme (£243K total funding). ‘Theory-based’ means that delivery of PABBS training is based on an existing training framework based on clear and defined theories or models.

The research that this groundbreaking training is based on explored the experiences and needs of people bereaved by suicide; the experiences and needs of health professionals responsible for the care of people bereaved by suicide (i.e. GPs, mental health professionals and ambulance staff) the best existing evidence about suicide bereavement support and policy/training materials. Members of a self-help suicide bereavement group formed part of the training development advisory group, ensuring its relevance for organisations such as SBS Cumbria.

Our sincere thanks go to the NHS for funding the training which was invaluable both for its content and for the networking between local agencies involved in postvention that was able to take place despite restrictions due to COVID-19.

Other groups

Emily and Jim have represented SBS on the Bereavement Group Forum established by University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay for statutory and non statutory services involved in bereavement support, and Emily and John P represent SBS on the Countywide Suicide Postvention group hosted by [Every Life Matters](#), which is currently reviewing local information available to those bereaved and other aspects of joint working. Barrow facilitators also joined a local [MIND](#) chapter meeting. John B represented SBS at the Cumbria Multi-Agency Suicide Prevention Group and the Cumbria Bereavement Support Partnership Group.

Reflections and updates on SBS Cumbria from Participants and Facilitators

Barrow-in-Furness

Our fledging local group in Barrow only managed to meet face-to-face twice before the pandemic closed our doors. However, we have tried to stay in touch with as many members as possible via the closed Facebook group and one-to-one phone calls. National Suicide Prevention Day in September gave us an opportunity to remember our loved ones as a group, and many members shared beautiful photographs of their loved ones, together in our love and sadness for those lost. In February 2021 we started a monthly local meeting via Zoom. Although the attendance has been quite small, it has been appreciated by those attending, and the smaller numbers have given us the opportunity to have in-depth conversations. We hope to restart face-to-face meetings in a few months time when our preferred venue reopens.

In addition to meetings, we are proud of local fundraising efforts. There have been many fundraising efforts across the county, including our local member Alex' awesome coast to coast cycle ride, and raised awareness of suicide prevention and bereavement support. A big "thank you" is also due to our facilitator Kitty, who worked with the local Barrow newspaper the [North West Evening Mail](#) on several occasions and has been featured in several articles. Our fundraising collaboration with local Co-ops has raised more than £2,500. Finally, Barrow facilitators joined Furness MIND for a staff meeting via Zoom to build relationships with local stakeholders, and have had our literature and posters presented during Millom's month-long Wellbeing Fair in June 2020.

Emily and Kitty

Carlisle

The pandemic has presented SBS with an unprecedented challenge in how to effectively support those who not only were dealing with the loss of a loved one, but also with the isolation brought about by the national crisis. By acting swiftly and offering weekly meetings reaching countywide and beyond I feel a degree of satisfaction that we have provided a platform for people to make connections and hopefully gain support during what is most painful time of their lives. Zoom hasn't been perfect but it's been hugely rewarding to meet those who have become new 'regulars' and observe those who were once strangers becoming friends and offering one another understanding and compassion.

Sharon

Whitehaven

Before the pandemic some 18 months ago, we in the West of the county had a small but regular group. We became a family and supported each other. Throughout the lockdown we had a mixed reaction from our members to the weekly zoom meetings, some missing the personal face to face contact and the whole group dynamics. However, we all kept in touch and contacted each other with either a phone call, text or through social media ([Facebook](#)). Checking in with one another was so important, especially in the beginning.

Thankfully now, we are back. We have had our second monthly group meeting and we are all so grateful to be together again.

These meetings are so important for people, and I thank each and every one of our members for their courage and support throughout.

Karan

The Healing Power of Music

Music plays an important role in daily lives.

Towards the end of our weekly Zoom meeting, Frank Ritchie sings a song, accompanied on the ukulele. It helps to lift the mood and in many cases evokes connections with loved ones and the past.

Research has identified that music:

- 🎵 Helps a group connect with each other.
- 🎵 Reduces blood pressure.
- 🎵 Improves Concentration and attention.
- 🎵 Helps reduce the feeling of fatigue.
- 🎵 Helps energise a person.
- 🎵 Calms and relaxes.
- 🎵 Evokes a feeling of contentment

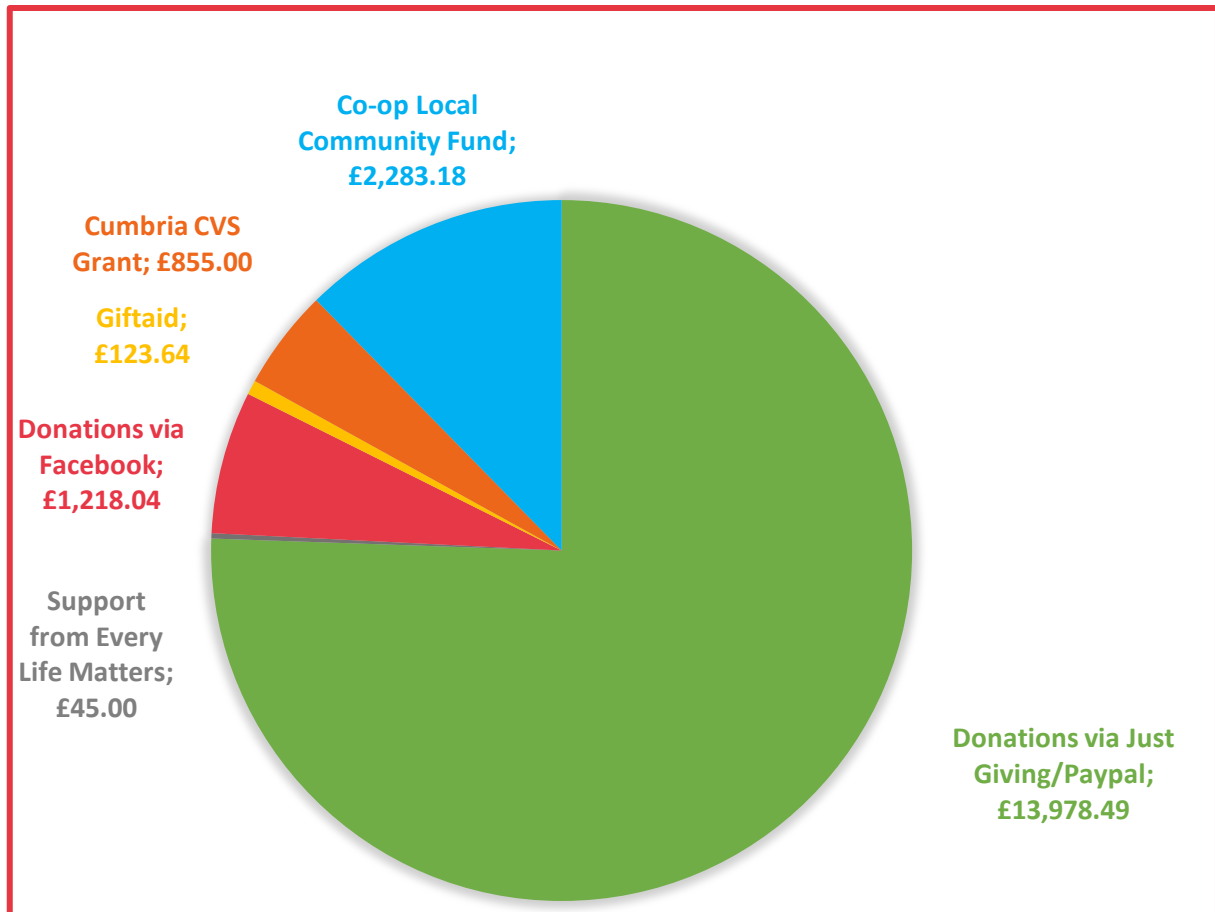
Frank's songs are an [eclectic mix](#), but some of the many artists featured include the Beatles, the Byrds, Vince Gill, Ed Sheeran, Passenger, and Avicii. Requests are always welcome and the performances have been a highlight of the week for SBS Cumbria. A range of [videos](#) and tracks that have inspired us, including some videos of from Frank's performances, are available on the SBS website.

When face-to-face meetings return to Carlisle, Frank hopes to continue to play and entertain our members by popular demand.

Finances

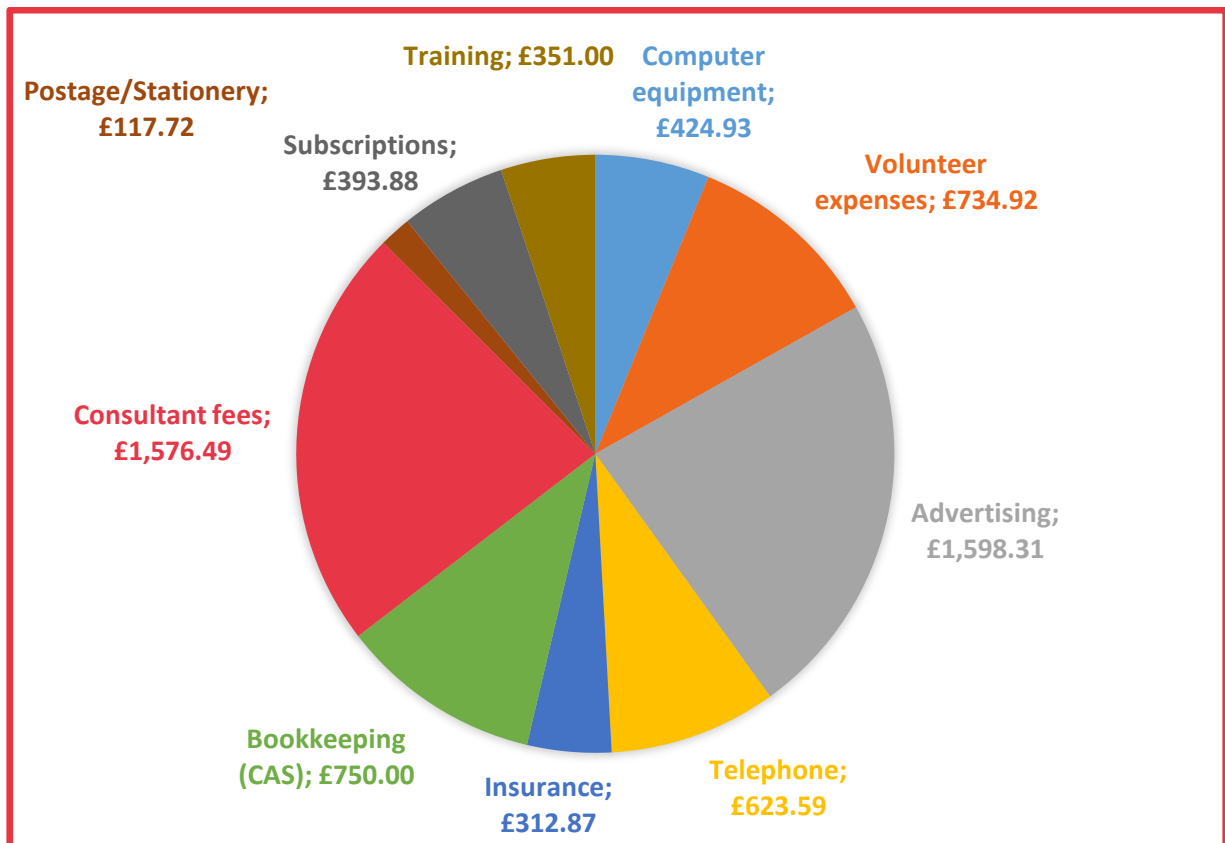
Income

The total income received by SBS Cumbria between August 2020 and July 2021 was **£18,503.35**. The below chart shows various sources of this income.



Expenditure

Total expenses for this year were **£6,883.71**, meaning that thanks to our generous community of fundraisers and activities being limited by the COVID-19 crisis, we have a healthy balance of **£22,412.33**. SBS Cumbria will use this sum to continue to develop our capacity and to implement our six areas of future focus outlined in this report. Sources of expenditure are shown in the below chart.



Thank you to our 2020-2021 donors, including the many generous individuals, groups and organizations that have donated their time, money and resources towards supporting our mission.

This report was written by John Brown and Lucy Binfield and edited by Lucy Binfield.



If you've been left behind by a friend or a family member who has taken their own life and you struggle to cope, then SBS Cumbria is here to walk alongside you and to help you through the dark times.