



Dear friends,

September may seem like a strange time to reflect on last year, but we have in fact just signed off our accounts for 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 (it's a charity thing), so now is a great time to reflect on the year. Do turn to page six to see our impact in statistics, where we look at the support our incredible teams have given to those with life-limiting illnesses and their families and carers in our hospitals, at the hospice and across the community. Of course, during the year we also launched our home hospice care and our hospital rapid response teams, so we look also at the impact they have had. However, this year, we are also reporting on the amazing efforts of you – our supporters – in donating to our appeals, in diverting goods from landfill by buying from and donating to our shops, and in attending our events and participating in challenges. You are our hospice heroes, and these statistics prove it!

Though statistics are great for showing the breadth of what we do and detailing the ever-growing number of people we can support, nothing demonstrates the depth of what we do and the importance of caring for the whole person like our patient stories. In this edition, we have two very moving stories: those of George (page ten) and Sheila (page four). Do take a moment to read about their journeys with Sobell House. Those who have gone before are as much a part of our community as those we are serving now.

The other thing I want to reflect on is what we mean by community. You can read on page 13 about our work with those who are homeless and in need of palliative and end of life care. We are also working to ensure that we reach out to other marginalised groups such as prisoners and are doing some self-reflection and data analysis on who is accessing our services. We will write more about this in the future. We want everyone who needs and wants our services to feel able to access them, and we need to ensure that we are not inadvertently putting barriers in people's way. We hope that the home hospice service has helped to provide more care to people at the end of their lives in a setting in which they are comfortable, but we also know there is work to do.

Speaking of work, our industrious fundraisers and retail staff have been very busy, and I hope you will have a good read to find out what they have been up to...



Amelia Foster
Chief Executive



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Sheila's story

Shared by Sheila's husband, Ray.



My wife Sheila and I had just celebrated 41 years of marriage together and our three children, Nic, Jo, and Andy, were all in their thirties.

In early September 2008, while on holiday in Cornwall, I noticed that on occasion Sheila's coordination and behaviour seemed unusual, and she lost peripheral vision at times. Nothing was too concerning until after we had arrived home.

The day after we got back, I was in the kitchen making lunch and Sheila was in the living room and decided to tackle the pile of ironing. She called through to me 'Ray, could you put the ironing board up for me?'. I asked why, and she said she didn't know which way round it went. I put it up, asked if she was ok, and she said she was fine so I went back to the kitchen. The next thing I heard was a crash and a shout, so I ran through to find Sheila lying on the sofa with the ironing board on top of her. She remembered trying to move it but couldn't see properly. With it being a weekend, I called the out-of-hours number immediately, and an emergency doctor took my call and wanted to see Sheila straight away.

The doctor, who told me his background included brain surgery, did some tests and he could see that Sheila's coordination was poor and she was confused. A bed was found for her in the neurology department at the John Radcliffe Hospital and Sheila was fast-tracked in for a scan.

This is when we were told the unthinkable news, on our son Andy's birthday, that Sheila had a grade four glioblastoma brain tumour, and she would need an operation immediately to help relieve some of the pressure in her head. The whole family were in total shock and felt numb, but we did our best to ready ourselves for the surgery.

The operation went well for Sheila, and it seemed to

make her feel a lot better. Hope kicked in, but we were told that this sometimes happens and that eventually Sheila would drift back to feeling very unwell.

We were struggling to understand how the tumour would continue to affect Sheila, and we were told that sadly there was no way back from this. I won't forget how the surgeon described it to us: 'picture the brain with all of its crevices and contours, then picture the tumour as an octopus with many small tentacles spreading through it'. It would mean that, depending on where the pressure was, some days Sheila would be able to feed herself, her sight would improve, and she would be able to write, and other days she would be unable to do these things.

Sheila spent six weeks at the John Radcliffe before being moved to the Churchill Hospital. At the time, the cancer wing that exists today was being built, and unfortunately the ward that Sheila was on was very busy and noisy. The nursing staff were so lovely and caring and were doing their best with the facilities and environment they had, but it wasn't ideal. We were told that Sheila's condition would soon worsen, and she would need palliative care.

This is when we were introduced to Sobell House. From that point in November when Sheila was admitted to Sobell House it was like she was wrapped in a cloak of peace. Her face brightened and she couldn't believe the love and care that she was receiving. It was wonderful, and such a calm place after the hospital wards. The staff at Sobell House are so caring, humble, loving, and warm – in fact, there's not enough lovely words to describe them. All of this is shown to the family too – the staff have hearts of gold, and nothing is too much trouble.

During her admission, Sheila made use of the many services Sobell House has to offer, such as music and art therapy. By this point, Sheila didn't have too much control, but she would nod along to the music, and splash about with the paint. She loved it! Another wonderful

therapy on offer was the hand and foot massages she received. That's one of the great things about Sobell House, they help you to keep on living while you're there and give you more quality of life in the limited time you have.

By the end of November, a home care package was arranged for Sheila and a bed was brought downstairs so she could be looked after at home. All was fine for a few days, but it quickly became obvious that even with all the care things were becoming very difficult, so the decision was made for Sheila to go back into Sobell House where she felt most settled. At this point, Sheila was aware that she was dying and that her time was limited, and she was at peace with that – she had great faith which helped too. It was her wish to die at Sobell House.

There was one night in January that I will always remember. Sheila was having steroid treatment which made her very hungry – even after dinner! She told us that she fancied fish and chips, so my son-in-law went to pick us up a late supper. The nurses thought it was a great idea and told us they would set up the table in the family room so we could all eat together. They even looked out the nice cutlery, crockery and some candles just to make it nice for Sheila.

Sheila's great loves in life were her precious family, people, and animals – particularly our cats Chloe and George, and other people's dogs! Mandi the housekeeper saw the photos we'd put up around the room and realised Sheila's fondness for cats. Amazingly, Mandi decided to bring in the new-born kittens she had at home, which made Sheila's day. It really is the little things that make such a difference at the end of life.



Pictured: Sheila with her daughter Nic and Muffin the dog

Later that month, the consultant very gently and kindly said to us that he was sorry, but as Sheila's condition had now stabilised, and they couldn't give a timeframe on how long she had, we would need to look into moving her into a nursing home. We understood that beds were precious at Sobell House, but we were sad to leave.

The nursing home in Oxford was so kind to us, as were many friends, and we had an amazing offer of financial help to cover the high cost of care. However, Sheila was only there for ten days before I received the phone call that everyone dreads – Sheila had slipped into a coma. The care home staff were aware that Sheila wished to die at Sobell House and helped transfer her back to the hospice.

The next few days were a blur – Sheila's major organs were failing and we knew that these would be her final days of life. We contacted our son Andy, who was living and working in Japan at the time and was encountering some issues getting a flight home. The team at Sobell House were so proactive and helpful in making sure he could get back to the UK as quickly as possible.

On 2 February 2009, my daughters Jo and Nic and I left the hospice and went home for the night. I was woken up at 2:15am to the news that Sheila had died. My son Andy was still on his way to the airport in Japan, many hours from home. I drove straight to the hospice and said my final goodbye to Sheila. The staff were so kind and gave me time with her. She looked so peaceful.

I went to pick Andy up from the airport later that day. He came through the gate, saw me, and I didn't have to tell him the news. He knew at that moment that his mum had died. We hugged and cried together.

I received counselling from the Sobell House bereavement team, which was so very helpful, and I also volunteered at the hospice from 2012 to 2020 helping on reception, the ward desk, and in many other ways. I loved being part of the team, frequently receiving far more than I was giving.

Life at Sobell House has taught me that it's ok to cry and it's ok to laugh when you're facing the passage from life to death. There are no rules, and you feel every emotion under the sun. Only 19 weeks passed from Sheila being diagnosed to leaving us.

Thank you to everyone at Sobell House who cared for Sheila – you helped us in more ways than we could ever imagine. Thank you also to the friends at the hospice I've made along the way. For me, Sobell House is and always will be a big warm hug.

Your impact

Between April 2022 and March 2023, your support meant we could provide compassionate and life-enhancing care to the thousands of people in our community who needed us. This is the difference you made...



**We can keep caring because you do.
Thank you so much.**

Did you know that we rely on people leaving a gift to Sobell House in their will to fund £500,000 of our annual costs?

Access our free will service → sobellhouse.org/leave-a-legacy





Living Well at Sobell House

Through our Living Well service, we work alongside people as they adjust to life with an incurable illness, giving them the space and support they need to live as fully and independently as possible.

Living well has a different meaning for every person we care for, which is why we offer a range of activities so everyone can find something right for them. Sessions such as 'living well with breathlessness' help people manage their symptoms and feel empowered at a time when many things feel out of their control.

We also understand that sometimes a patient simply needs the offer of a safe space to come and be seen and heard in the way they need.

Most of all, we find that patients hugely benefit from being around other people who understand what they are going through.

“What I gained at Living Well is the feeling of significance. You made us all feel that we are not just ‘poorly’ but that we are significant people. We were genuinely listened to.”

Families and carers are just as important and we look after them too, by providing support groups packed full of advice and information.

If you would like to refer yourself or a loved one to Living Well, please email pallcarelivingwell@ouh.nhs.uk or call **01865 225875**.





THE OXEN ARE COMING TO OXON!

Join us next summer for an **art trail** unlike anything Oxfordshire has seen before...

Get ready for eight weeks of OxTrail magic! In summer 2024, Oxfordshire will be home to a herd of life-sized and mini oxen. Each sculpture will be individually designed by artists, local schools, and community groups, making the herd truly unique.

The vibrant, free, and family-friendly trail will encourage thousands to be tourists in their own city, and attract national and international visitors.

Following the eight-week trail, the life-sized oxen will go under the hammer at a grand auction. The lucky new owners will then take their moo-gnificent ox to its forever home.

OxTrail is raising essential funds for Sobell House, so we can continue to provide the best possible care to people when they need it most. It's our biggest event to date and we are so excited to bring you on this ox-citing journey with us.

Join the herd

@oxtrail2024

#oxtrail2024



BE PART OF THE MOO-VEMENT...



Call for schools

We want to ensure no child gets left behind and each has the chance to experience the magic of OxTrail. Our Learning Programme is a fantastic opportunity for schools and youth groups across the county to create their own mini ox sculpture and join the herd!

Don't miss out, and get your school behind this fun and engaging community project in support of your local hospice.



Call for sponsors

We need ox sponsors and trail partners to help us make OxTrail ox-traordinary!

If your business would like the opportunity to raise its profile, be affiliated with a much-loved charity, increase footfall, and take part in Oxfordshire's must-see event of summer 2024, please get in touch with us.



Call for artists

OxTrail is a wonderful opportunity for artists to showcase their talents. Our iconic ox sculpture is synonymous with our city and, with the breadth of history, culture, and sights Oxfordshire has to offer, there is inspiration for designs wherever you look.

We're looking for both established and emerging artists to design our herd and we can't wait to see some ox-ceptional designs!



Find out more



oxtrail2024.co.uk

George's story

Shared by George's wife, Caroline.



George and I were married for 13 years and have three children together. Life was ticking along nicely, but in August 2011, while on holiday in Cornwall, George started to complain of a stomach ache. When we got home, the pain was so severe he had to take time off work. After seven gruelling months of investigations, we were told the devastating news that George had severe, life-threatening pancreatic cancer. He was 42 years old.

Following the diagnosis, George's pain just got worse. Our friend was so concerned for him that she reached out to Sobell House. The team advised us to speak to George's doctor who could refer us to their service and they could then arrange for a Sobell House community nurse to visit us at home.

When the nurse arrived, this was the day our lives, and George's pain, changed. She was kind, she listened, and made changes right away to make George comfortable. The nurse arrived at 3pm and George had proper pain relief by 5pm, which meant he could fall into a restful sleep for the first time in months that night.

We all took a breath and hoped this would be enough to keep him comfortable for some time, but little did we know that four short weeks later we would need Sobell House's help more than ever.

After arriving home from work and finding George in a terrible state, followed by a restless night, I called Sobell House in the morning who asked us to come into the hospice. When we arrived, George managed to get out of the car with my help and walk to the entrance, but no further. A wheelchair appeared from nowhere, and a very friendly man helped us through to the ward, where the staff acted quickly and assessed George so they could give him more pain relief.

What sticks in my mind about that day is that every member of staff we met called us by our first names and helped us to understand what was happening. It was so different to the experience we'd had over the past nine

months. The second thing that sticks in my mind – and made us both chuckle! – was that at 11am, someone popped into the room to offer George a morning drink. As a joke, George asked for a cider, but the answer was 'yes, of course!' This put us at ease and gave us some much-needed light relief. They didn't have the cider George drank at home, but the next day, there it was.

The following morning, it was like my George was back, he was even up and walking. George had panicked when I had spoken to the ward sister the day before. He said 'I don't want to go there, as that's where people go to die'. However, while we were on our own that day, he said to me, 'it's ok here, it feels like home and the staff get me'. I had peace of mind knowing that he felt relaxed and comfortable.

While at the hospice, George met with the music therapist and shared his wish to record a piece of music that had been in his head since he was 16 years old. The music therapist helped him to record it and George came back to his room almost glowing. He received the finished CD a few days later and the piece of music is beautiful.

On the Friday, George had improved and he wanted to go home. I spoke to his nurse to see what the chances were of taking him home. He explained that the improvement was possibly just a blip and the body's reaction to not being in constant pain. This was such a shock to me – reality had finally hit. The nurse was so professional and kind and explained that George should stay in over the weekend so they could monitor him and make sure he was well enough to go home.

That weekend was full of visitors. As we have three children, room nine (the family room) was perfect for us. George had a bedroom and we had a lounge and small kitchen. The kids were comfortable and George could sit and talk to people without being in bed. The gardens at Sobell House are beautiful and George loved to walk outside with family and friends, or be pushed around in a wheelchair when he was tired. By Sunday, it was



clear he was going downhill, so we had a quiet afternoon where the five of us watched a film with popcorn with the curtains closed, just like we did at home.

On the Monday morning, George's mum and I arrived at the hospice and met with Dr Mary Miller, who is the most gentle, thoughtful person I think I will ever meet in my life. She had already assessed George before we arrived and delivered to us the news that George would not be coming home, and that he in fact would probably only have a week to live. She asked heartfelt questions which would not have even crossed my mind after hearing this kind of news. Through her actions, she enabled us to make decisions that would help us as a family and, although we didn't know it then, would help the kids through the toughest year of their lives and the grieving process. She told us as much as she could and explained how the staff would give us information throughout the week. George was very much included in this conversation and it was at a pace he could keep up with. We had just been delivered the worst news in the world, but in such a way that I was able to take it all in and not go into a complete panic. I admire and respect Dr Miller so much and can only thank her for taking such gentle steps with us.

We left to tell the kids and pack our bags so we could stay at the hospice. The advice we had received on how to help the children through this was put into full effect, and although it was the hardest thing I have ever done, I went through it with the confidence that I was not setting the kids up for any future stress or problems.

The next ten days were a blur; however, I was able to keep the two promises George asked me to keep – 'please don't let me be in pain, and don't leave me on my own'. The kids, George's mum and I moved into the family room and did not leave until George's spirit was free. I had a bed brought in so I could sleep right next to George – this meant the world to me as I could sleep holding his hand.

George deteriorated quickly but the staff at Sobell House were amazing. They always spoke to him and never spoke

over the bed as if he wasn't there. They included me in every decision, drug check or assessment, and let me know what to expect at each stage. Nothing was ever too much for any of the staff, nurses, volunteers or doctors and they looked after our whole family, as well as George, always checking if we needed anything and making us feel at home.

On the Tuesday, I knew George was very close to the end but you really do go into denial. The staff were helpful and told us it could be in the next 24 or 48 hours. They recommended that the kids should always say goodbye each time they left, just in case. That night, all three kids wanted to go home – I think kids have a sixth sense. They each had a turn in the room with daddy by themselves. They said goodbye, told him they loved him and that they would miss him, all in their own private way. This had a huge impact on their grief – a year on, they all said what a difference it made; they had no regrets and left nothing unsaid.

That night, George's mum, my mum and I all took turns to sit with him as we had for the past ten days. George passed away very peacefully holding mine and his mum's hand at 6:45am on Wednesday 6 June.

Most people would think this would be the end of Sobell House's support when we left the hospice that Wednesday, but no, I was offered counselling support from the bereavement team which helped me so much in that first year. The kids received amazing support from a local bereavement charity called SeeSaw, which was recommended to us by Sobell House.

We live in the proud memory of George, fulfilling his wishes to live our lives and be happy people. That is not to say we don't have our days where the loss of such a beautiful, amazing man cripples us, but we had our hand held through the worst time of our lives by people who care. They care not just because it is their job, but from their hearts and souls. Thank you to all the team, you make such a difference when it really matters.

Lights of Love

Please join us for our 28th Lights of Love event this December, which is once again taking place at the beautiful Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford. There, you will have the chance to remember and celebrate your loved ones during our uplifting and special service.

Save the date

Date: Sunday 3 December 2023

Time: 4pm – 5pm

Address: Sheldonian Theatre, Broad Street, Oxford, OX1 3AZ

We will be sending out invitations soon, so please do look out for yours. If you have not received an invitation by the end of October, please visit sobellhouse.org/lightsoflove to register for the event online.



Fundraise for us

Can you go the extra mile?

Fundraising is a brilliant way to put your skills to good use. Whether that's by running a marathon, hosting a bake sale or charity quiz, organising a football match, or selling your clothes, books, or homemade jam! Whatever you choose to do it's guaranteed to bring you joy, and every pound you raise helps us to care for our community.

If you'd like to start fundraising or discuss your ideas, please contact Niki, our friendly community fundraiser.

E: mail@sobellhospice.org

T: 01865 857007

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Caring for our community...

Did you know that Oxford has the tenth highest number of rough sleepers per 100,000 people in all of England according to recent government data?

Accessing palliative and end of life care can be particularly difficult for people experiencing homelessness. At Sobell House, we know that everyone deserves the same dignity, care, and choice no matter what their circumstances are. That's why we have a dedicated team of health and support staff to share their expertise and best practices with local GPs, hostels, and outreach services to help homeless people who may benefit from palliative care get the support they need.

One particular area of focus for our team has been giving local hostels and GPs the information to know how and when to refer a homeless patient to Sobell House. This referral process is very important, as it means we can treat patients earlier on in their illness, and help to improve their quality of life in their final months or years of life, rather than crisis-led care in their final weeks or days.

Crucially, this also helps to give patients more choice about where they are when they die. A hospice or hospital is not always the preferred place of care, and so we have been working with hostels to set up procedures to deliver specialist care and equipment within temporary housing if

this is where a patient would prefer to be. For many people living in temporary accommodation, they have structure and support networks in place – such as particular outreach or food services they rely on – and it's up to us to ensure these familiar structures can remain in place during a turbulent time.

After speaking to people who are currently or have previously been homeless, another challenge our team is working to solve is how people with no home can leave a legacy behind. A common worry people have is that there will be no trace left of them after they die. Our services such as music and art therapy can help people to create a legacy, whether that's by recording a piece of music or documenting their life story, and it's our goal to ensure future patients are referred to Sobell House early enough in their diagnosis to benefit from services like these.

In the future, we are looking to expand the training we can provide to homelessness outreach workers around end of life and palliative care and also to conduct research to ensure that the services we offer reflect the wants and needs of people who are vulnerably housed.

This ongoing and vital work is partly funded by our charity. Thank you to our incredible supporters for helping us to provide every person in our community with care, kindness, and dignity when they need it most.



The care Sobell House provides is so comprehensive and truly amazing. By setting up connections with local outreach services, we hope to be able to give people experiencing homelessness the opportunity to benefit from the additional services we offer, such as spiritual care, bereavement support, legacy work, and social care, and adapt these services to best suit their needs. We want to give every person who needs our support the chance to live well in the time they have.

Nicole Satullo

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Project Officer



Tina, Jane and Nicole at Homeless Oxfordshire

Support our shops



Season's greetings

We have a lovely range of Christmas cards and 2024 diaries on sale now. Browse the full collection in the enclosed booklet and purchase yours via post, online sobellhospice.org/online-shop, or by visiting your local shop.



Our eBay shop

Through our eBay shop we sell unique and special items in need of a new home. Some are previously-loved whereas others are brand new, but all are sold for a great price. Don't miss out and place your bids today!

ebay.co.uk/str/sobellhousehospiceshop

Find your local shop

Bicester

Address: Unit 4, Launton Business Centre,
Murdock Road, Bicester, OX26 4PL
Phone number: 01869 245235

Carterton

Address: 10 Alvescot Road, Carterton, OX18 3JH
Phone number: 01993 867763

Headington

Address: 119 London Road, Headington, OX3 9HZ
Phone number: 01865 308743

Kidlington

Address: 8 Kidlington Centre, High Street,
Kidlington, OX5 2DL
Phone number: 01865 372441

Little Clarendon Street, Oxford

Address: 4 Dartington House, Little Clarendon
Street, Oxford, OX1 2HS
Phone number: 01865 559927

Marston

Address: 16 Cherwell Drive, Marston, OX3 0LY
Phone number: 01865 767883

Thame

Address: 7 Greyhound Walk, Thame, OX9 3DY
Phone number: 01844 212682

Wantage

Address: 4 Kings Walk, Wantage, OX12 9AJ
Phone number: 01235 768969

Witney

Address: Unit 10, Avenue One, Station Lane,
Witney, OX28 4XZ
Phone number: 01993 700660

Become a trustee

We are looking for four new trustees to join our board. As a trustee, you will have shared and individual responsibility for the overall governance and strategic direction of the charity, and ensure that the charity fulfils its duty to its beneficiaries.



Glorious gardens

You may know that we are currently undergoing a complete transformation of one of our gardens, in order to turn a previously unused and neglected space into a colourful haven, where people can make memories for years to come.

Since our last update, the garden has really taken shape, and every day there's something new to admire.

For us, the best thing by far is seeing how much our patients and their families are enjoying and finding solace in the garden. Our ward team can easily wheel beds outside for people to enjoy the sunshine on their face, or hear the patter of rain. These moments may feel small, but can make all the difference to someone at the end of life.

Here, Sarah shares how the garden brought joy to her family during her dad's final days.

"I can't express how grateful I am for the support that my family and I received from Sobell House. Dad became very ill very quickly, and spent his final days at the hospice. When we first arrived at Sobell House, we asked dad if there was anything he wanted to do, and he asked to sit in the garden. Well, the amazing staff made this possible within minutes, and dad was wheeled outside in his bed to feel the fresh air, enjoy the peace and quiet, and look at the flowers. There were bird feeders outside and dad enjoyed watching the birds and listening to birdsong, just as he did at home. We were all laughing and singing – dad was even trying to dance by moving his feet to the music and enjoying a small glass of wine. It was a really special and memorable evening. The nurses were angels and gave dad the care that he deserved."



Before



Before



During



During



Now



Now

We are continuing to raise funds to finish our garden transformation. If you would like to donate, please call 01865 857007 or visit sobellhouse.org/donate. Thank you.



Our hospice heroes



Our Rainbow of Ribbons display in August was made up of hundreds of brightly coloured ribbons each dedicated in memory of a loved one.

The launch event on 30 July at University Parks, Oxford was very moving, with local families coming together to remember and celebrate the people special to them.

Thank you to everyone who dedicated a ribbon – you helped us to raise **£12,884.18** and your generosity will enable us to care for more families in Oxfordshire.



Thanks to over 400 fabulous submissions of postcard-sized artwork, our My Lovely Postcards exhibition and auction raised **£18,801** (and counting!) for Beth's Bursary Fund. Established in 2017 in memory of Beth Foreman, Beth's Bursary Fund enables nurses to receive further training in palliative care and gain the specialist skills they need.

Every piece of artwork received a bid in the auction, with the highest bid of £1,000 winning Dame Judi Dench's original artwork! Thank you so much to our artists and bidders for making a difference.

We would like to say a big congratulations to our incredible London Marathon runners, who collectively ran 288.2 miles on 23 April, raising a record-breaking **£61,671.28** for Sobell House.

This money could fund all of our services at the hospice, in the local hospitals, and in the community for two whole days. Thank you to our 11 runners for being a part of Team Sobell!

