



SARAG - Yorkshire and Humberside Asbestos Support Group

ANNUAL REPORT

2024-25



SARAG - Yorkshire and Humberside Asbestos Support Group

Unit 20, Moorgate Crofts Business Centre, South Grove, Rotherham S60 2DH

01709 360 672 • enquiries@saragasbestosupport.org • www.saragasbestosupport.org • Registered charity 1080365



Welcome from the Chair - Beth Cheshire

I am pleased to introduce the Yorkshire and Humberside Asbestos Support Group (SARAG) Annual Report for 2024 to 2025. This report reflects on the services we have delivered over the past 12 months and celebrates the continued strength and impact of our organisation. Despite ongoing challenges, SARAG has once again demonstrated resilience, dedication, and ambition. Balancing growing demand with finite resources is never easy, but I am incredibly proud of how our team has continued to rise to the occasion. We've supported more people than ever before, expanded our reach into new communities, and developed new projects that allow us to make an even greater difference.

This progress is only possible thanks to the unwavering commitment of our staff, volunteers, and supporters. Their passion and belief in our mission are the foundation of everything we do. We are also deeply grateful to our funders, whose continued support enables us to deliver vital services to those affected by asbestos-related conditions.

We are proud to share that SARAG has now raised over £40 million in support of our service users. This remarkable achievement has made a lasting difference to the lives of thousands of individuals and families across our region.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to growing our support, amplifying the voices of those we serve, and continuing the fight for justice and care for all those affected. Thank you for your continued support.

- Beth Cheshire – Chair
- Nigel Ball – Vice Chair
- Simon Bolton
- Bob Fitzpatrick
- Helena Stanley
- Steve Whitfield



Annual Review from Nevyin Stevenson, Head of Service and Charity Development

In October 2024, our charity proudly marked 25 years of impact with an inspiring celebration in Rotherham, bringing together supporters, volunteers, and community members to reflect on our journey and achievements. I'm thrilled to share that our 26th year has been our most successful yet, raising an incredible £7.8 million for those we support.

Our Team

We've had a few changes in our team over the past year. In December 2024, Penny Partlow moved from her role as Administrator to become our Finance and Fundraising Officer — a fantastic step that builds on her strengths and dedication. At the same time, we were delighted to welcome Ying Xuan Chian as our new Administrator. Earlier in 2025, we said goodbye to Wendy Benfold in April, and welcomed Michael Morris, who stepped into her role as Activity and Support Worker. It's been a year of change, but one that's brought new energy and skills to the team.



We're so lucky to have such an incredibly dedicated and compassionate group of people. Time and again, they've gone the extra mile for our service users, always with kindness and care. It's a real privilege to work with them, and I want to say a heartfelt thank you for everything they've done. I'm really looking forward to what we'll achieve together in the year ahead.

Service Delivery

Referrals into SARAG's services remained strong throughout 2024/25. We received 332 referrals over the year — a slight decrease compared to 351 the previous year — but referrals to our benefits service saw a small increase, rising from 311 to 318. What's particularly encouraging is the financial impact of this work. Our benefits team helped secure

over £7.8 million in financial support for service users this year — a substantial increase from £4.3 million in 2023/24. These outcomes are life-changing for many individuals and families, ensuring access to vital support at a time of crisis. In 2024/25, we recorded 855 attendances across six social group locations. Sheffield saw the highest turnout (336 attendees), followed by Doncaster (163) and Hull (161). Sadly, our Wakefield group ceased running after November, but we're exploring ways to re-establish support in that area.

Our bereavement support services also provided consistent, meaningful support throughout the year. We recorded 97 attendances at bereavement support groups, almost evenly split between Wakefield (48) and Sheffield (49), with average monthly attendance around 8 people.

Behind every referral, every support group, and every financial outcome is a story of someone facing the challenges of asbestos-related illness. We're incredibly proud of the work our team continues to do to ensure no one has to face that journey alone.

Financial Overview 2024/5

We're pleased to share that SARAG has made strong financial progress over the past year, continuing the upward momentum from 2023/24. Thanks to the incredible support of our funders, donors, and partners, our total income grew by more than £55,000 — rising from £242,110 to £297,794 in 2024/25. That's a 23% increase, and a reflection of our ongoing efforts to diversify where our income comes from and to build a more financially resilient future for the charity.



It is very beneficial to hear how other people have benefited from help and advice on the medical issues which I may be facing. Also, being able to chat informally with SARAG staff in person is much more useful than by telephone

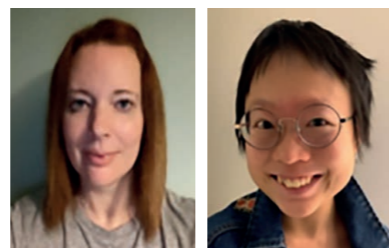
A key highlight this year has been the growth in grant income, which nearly doubled — from £45,613 to £84,718. This success speaks to the strong relationships we've built with funders and the trust they place in the work we do. We also saw a very welcome rise in donations, which increased by over 70% to just over £49,000. Our fundraising activities nearly doubled as well, raising £15,669, thanks to the dedication of our supporters and community.

Of course, with growth comes increased costs — and our expenditure rose in line with our income, from £240,913 last year to £290,326 in 2024/25. The majority of this went towards wages, which support our expanding team and allow us to reach more people with our services.

Importantly, we ended the year in a strong financial position, with income once again exceeding expenditure. This puts us on a firm footing as we look to the future — confident in our sustainability and driven by our mission to support even more individuals and families affected by asbestos-related conditions. We want to express our heartfelt thanks to every individual who donated, our committed solicitor panel, our generous grant funders, and the incredible fundraisers who gave their time and energy to support our work. Your contributions continue to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those we serve.

Benefits Advice Service Report July 2024 to June 2025

Our service supports individuals diagnosed with asbestos-related conditions — and their families — to apply for state benefits. The team includes Jason Shaw, Ruth Davies, Jane Aitchison, and Caroline Holmes. They are assisted by our administrator, Ying Xuan Chian.



Overview of Benefits

The main state benefits accessed by our service users are Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit (IIDB) and lump sum payments under the Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) Act (PWCA).

We also assist with:

- Personal Independence Payment (PIP) or Attendance Allowance (AA) (if not already in place)
- Blue Badges
- Carer's Allowance
- Pension Credit
- Bereavement Support Payments
- Other general benefit checks

Total financial gains for clients this year: £7.8 million, a significant increase from the £4.3 million secured in 2023/2024.

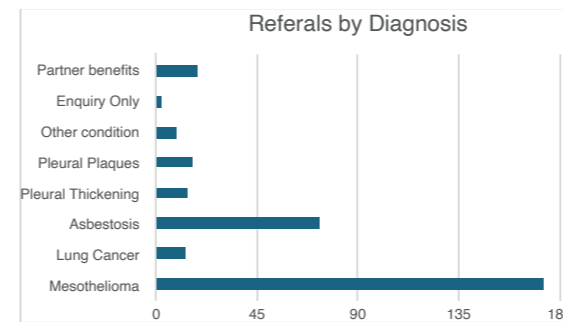
DWP Processes and Delays

For non-malignant asbestos-related diseases, the DWP arranges medical assessments for IIDB. Applicants over 80 are seen at home. These cases — including renewals — are taking several months, often requiring repeated contact from our advisers to track progress. In contrast, Mesothelioma and asbestos-related lung cancer cases are processed via a fast-track route, with no medicals required. These claims are typically resolved more quickly due to the nature of the diagnosis.

Referrals

Total referrals to benefits Service = 318

- Mesothelioma = 173
- Lung Cancer = 13
- Asbestosis = 73
- Pleural Thickening = 14
- Pleural Plaques = 16
- Other condition = 9
- Enquiry Only = 2
- Partner benefits = 18



Most of our work involves fast-track cancer cases. In previous years, decisions were returned in around four weeks. However, we are now seeing increasing delays caused by DWP disruptions.

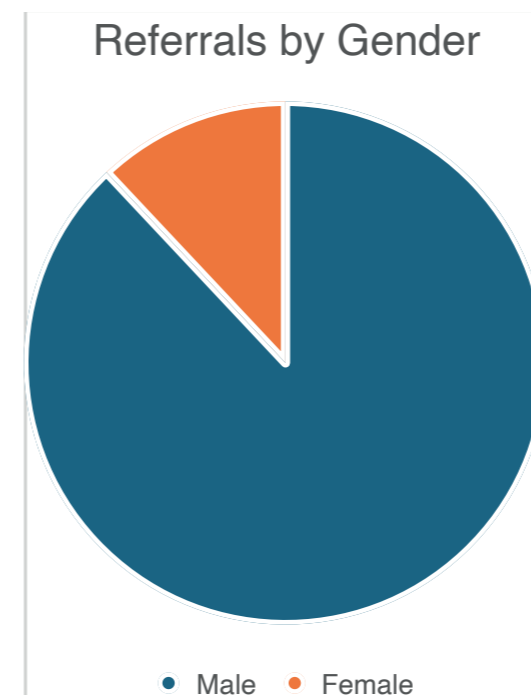
Mandatory Reconsiderations and Appeals

When decisions are disputed, we follow the formal process for Mandatory Reconsideration. Most issues are resolved at this stage, avoiding the need for formal appeals — a process that can be lengthy and distressing for our clients.

Demographics

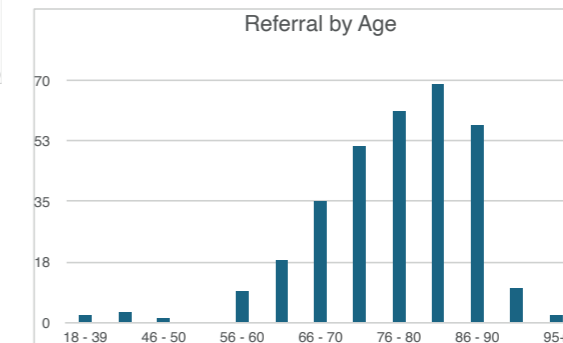
Gender

Most of our service users are men, reflecting the historical occupational exposure to asbestos in traditional industries such as construction, shipbuilding, and engineering.



Age

Given the latency period of asbestos-related diseases, the majority of our users are older. Two clients were under 50, and two were over 95 during this reporting period.



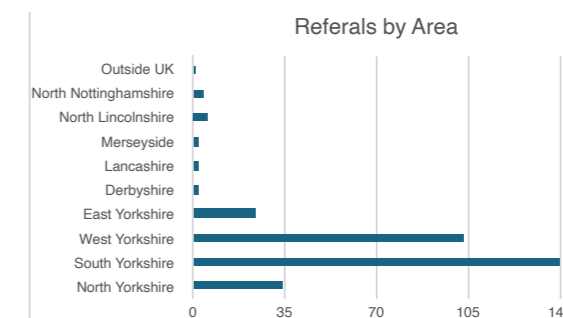
Breakdown of service users per Area

Geographic Breakdown North, East, West Yorkshire & Humberside

- 2022/23 – 154
- 2023/24 – 151
- 2024/25 – 161

South Yorkshire / North Notts / Out of Area

- 2022/23 – 157
- 2023/24 – 160
- 2024/25 – 157

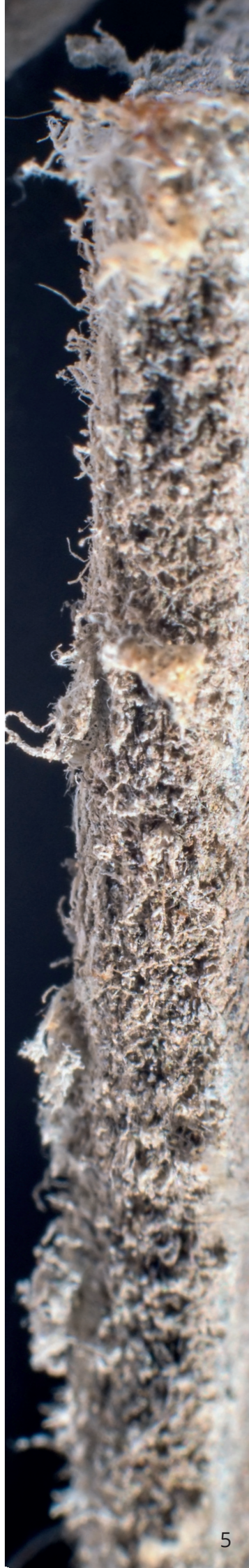


Support for Partners and Bereaved Families

Our team also supports bereaved partners, whether through ongoing relationships established during earlier claims or referrals from our bereavement support worker. This year, we supported 32 individuals, securing approximately £118,000 in benefits.

Improving Our Service

We now hold bi-weekly adviser meetings to discuss complex cases and share knowledge. Any cases likely to be turned down or requiring appeal are reviewed



as a group, and a peer-to-peer review process helps us improve consistency and quality of advice.

Beyond Benefits

Our support extends beyond benefits advice. Though not formally recorded, our team routinely assists with:

- Contacting GPs and hospitals
- Continuing care assessments
- Power of Attorney applications
- Referrals for local authority care assessments

We also offer emotional support, combating isolation and encouraging service users to engage with social groups where possible. For many, just having someone to talk to makes a significant difference.

Testimonials

"SARAG is the best support I have ever had, at a very worrying time of my life. Everything about the various processes was easy & straightforward"

"what a brilliant support SARAG has been, I cannot thank you enough for all you have done"

"it took the stress out of the financial side of things for my father. When dealing with a terminal diagnosis not having to worry about money is so important"

"incredibly efficient and kind. It took away all the stress of applying for benefits and gave us invaluable advice and support"

"you are doing a very worthwhile job for people affected by asbestos. Thank you very much!"

"The service has been amazing during this emotional time we are extremely grateful for the support received"

"We are extremely thankful for the high level of support, caring and information we have received"

Activity and Support Worker Report – Michaela Morris



Michaela joined us in May 2025, following the retirement of Wendy Benfold – thanks Wendy for the great work you have done to support our service users. Michaela has supported people living with asbestos related disease for 8 years with one of our legal panel firms, prior to this she has worked in hospices, hospitals and in the community as an Occupational Therapist. She is assisted by her ever active cat Maggie! Michaela said "I am really enjoying the opportunity to work with our group members – the support and insight they give to each other is amazing and reduces the isolation and fear of living with asbestos related disease and the SARAG team are the BEST!"

General Support Groups

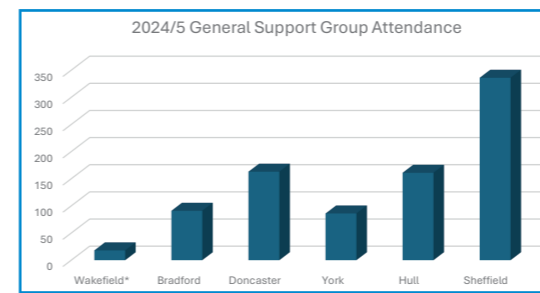
We have had an amazing response to the support groups this year, and they have become an essential and valued part of the service. A total of 855 attendances were recorded across six locations over the year, reflecting the growing demand and positive impact of these sessions. Sheffield saw the highest level of engagement with 336 attendances, highlighting the strong community interest and consistent participation in the area. Doncaster and Hull also experienced excellent turnouts, with 163 and 161 attendances respectively. Due to attendance, we decided that a monthly meeting in Bradford was a better use of resources, and its popularity has justified the decision. The continued popularity and effectiveness of these groups demonstrate their vital role in supporting individuals across the region.

General Support Groups Attendance

Period: 1st July 2024 – 30th June 2025

*Wakefield Support Group ended Jan 25

Group	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Annual Total
Wakefield*	6	-	4	-	8	-	(End)	-	-	-	-	-	18
Bradford	-	14	-	13	-	9	4	10	11	7	10	13	91
Doncaster	9	19	17	10	18	0	14	17	13	19	11	16	163
York	7	6	12	4	-	6	10	8	8	9	10	6	86
Hull	10	22	15	15	11	12	16	11	11	14	14	10	161
Sheffield	28	38	27	29	34	-	21	35	29	35	33	27	336
Month Total	60	99	75	71	71	27	65	81	72	84	78	72	855



On-Line ZOOM Group

The online ZOOM Social group for service users affected with an asbestos related disease continues to run on a monthly basis. It is a small group, currently consisting of 5 regular attendees, which enables them to meet up in addition to them regularly attending the Social Group.

1:1 support

Information, advice and guidance is provided to those attending Social Groups and/or who contact us via telephone. Service users may be contacted if they have missed any of the Groups to touch base with them to see if there is anything SARAG can do to help. If SARAG cannot directly assist them with their enquiry, they are signposted to relevant organisations and services.

Feedback

"Going to the Social Groups has helped me by talking to other people and to share views and opinions. Hearing others opinions has helped me to improve my own thoughts with regard to other people's struggles. It has also helped me to realise that I am not on my own."

"It is very beneficial to hear how other people have benefited from help and advice on the medical issues which I may be facing. Also, being able to chat informally with SARAG staff in person is much more useful than by telephone."

"The SARAG staff are simply brilliant, always helpful and proactive where my needs and requirements are concerned. I would not have applied for most of the benefits which I have been given."

"I cannot praise the staff enough for their efforts and listening ear. Without others input I would not be realising where I am today."

"Listening to the information provided by the speakers is very informative. It makes you think about things you have not previously considered."

Grants, Fundraising and Donations in 2024-2025 by Penny Partlow (Finance and Fundraising Officer)



During the last financial year, the charity moved towards actively focussing on these areas more than ever before. Penny Partlow moved away from Administration into a new role, developing income and improving sustainability mid-way through 2024-25.

As in the last annual report, we wish to acknowledge the incredible and repeated support we have received from The Alex Ferry Foundation who have again contributed significantly towards the costs of our social groups. National Lottery Community Fund are also in the second funding year of three we have been awarded, to support our Bereavement project, and finally B & C E Charitable Trust again agreed to cover the costs of a part-time benefit adviser for a second year. We thank you sincerely for your ongoing and vital support.

We have also been successful in several smaller grants this year from other organisations who have contributed towards our social groups. These include The Blakemore Foundation, North Yorkshire Council and working with the South Yorkshire Community Fund, we were able to access the Sir George Earle Benevolent Fund which focusses on reducing social isolation in older people.

National Lottery Awards for All provided a substantial grant of £20,000 over two years to fund more benefit adviser hours and the Rotherham Community Lottery was also founded in this year, where a small number of regular players have made us their beneficiaries raising £1200 to the end of June 2025. Doncaster Lions fundraised £500 for us, which covered the Doncaster based service users Christmas meals.

Right at the end of this financial year a group of volunteers took on the

With your service, I witnessed understanding and friendliness once again

Knowing you were supporting us, reduced the pressure in an incredibly stressful time.

Yorkshire Three Peaks Challenge and raised over £2500 for SARAG. In July 2024 Andy Shields completed the gruelling National Three Peaks raising well over £3000, whilst Alexis Krachai donated SARAG two years membership of Sheffield Chamber of Commerce and Industry which is allowing us to widen our reach and increase our profile. Nevyn Stevenson raised £1500 by taking part in the Sheffield 10k and Sheffield Half Marathon, Michael Wolstencroft ran both the Barcelona and Chester Marathons and Nicola Harrison ran the Nottingham race too raising over £2500 combined. Jon Whitfield raised funds for us by completing a marathon on a hand

bike bringing in over £600 of sponsorship. Patrick Rutherford walked 100 miles in November and smashed the £1000 mark in fundraising. Irwin Mitchell held a Quiz in May this year raising over £1000 each for SARAG and Mesothelioma UK.

For the 2025-2026 year, funding applications and fundraising projects are increasing steadily, and we have already been successful in several substantial awards, to be announced next year. If you have any fundraising ideas, or can support us in any way, please get in touch.

Look at the fantastic progress over the past 3 financial years:

Income Source	2022/3 (£)	% of Income	2023/4 (£)	% of Income	2024/5 (£)	% of Income
Donations	20,005.17	10.5%	28,686.33	11.8%	49,082.44	16.5%
Fundraising	7,149.34	3.7%	7,403.86	3.1%	15,669.09	5.3%
Grant	6,840.00	3.6%	45,612.84	18.8%	84,718.10	28.4%

Here are some photos from projects and events throughout the year:



Bereavement and Family Support Worker: Deb Williams



In the second year of the project, the funding we received has continued to add a vital and deeply personal dimension to the support we provide to our service users.

Previously, our emotional support was primarily delivered through peer support groups across Yorkshire and Humberside. While these groups have played an important role in reducing social isolation and fostering community, they were not always able to meet the unique and often complex needs of individuals—particularly those bereaved by asbestos-related conditions.

The introduction of a dedicated Bereavement Support Worker, now in her second year with the project, has had a profound and lasting impact. Where previously individuals and families may have felt that support from our organisation tapered off following the loss of a loved one, they now receive personalised, ongoing support to help them navigate their grief and begin to heal.

This continuity of care has transformed our offer—from a predominantly group-based model to one that is more responsive, compassionate, and tailored to each person's journey through bereavement.

Here are just a few of the heartfelt comments from service users who have received support from Deb Williams, our Bereavement Support Worker:

"Deb has been fantastic, very understanding, and issues I felt were not normal, she normalised and helped me to understand it was all part of the grieving processPlain and simply, Thank you for the help comfort and understanding shown to me."

"very supportive, made me feel uplifted on some dark days ... She was very kind and gently spoken and had a calming effect on me."

"It helped to speak to someone out of the family. I was very depressed about my mum's condition and Deb being there helped with my feelings and depression. ... Just... thank you."

// It is very beneficial to hear how other people have benefited from help and advice on the medical issues which I may be facing. Also, being able to chat informally with SARAG staff in person is much more useful than by telephone //

Reporting Period: 1st July 2024 – 30th June 2025

1:1 Bereavement Support

In the second year of the project, the 1:1 Bereavement Support service made significant progress toward its targets.

- 170 individuals were offered bereavement support, just shy of the annual target of 200.
- 66 beneficiaries received direct support (target: 70).
- 151 people reported receiving compassionate support—showcasing the effectiveness and sensitivity of the service delivered during a particularly vulnerable time.

These figures reflect a consistent and meaningful outreach effort, with strong engagement from those offered support.

Bereavement Support Groups

The group-based support element of the project has seen consistent engagement across both key locations—Wakefield and Sheffield.

- A total of 97 attendances were recorded over the year.
- Wakefield and Sheffield groups were almost evenly matched, with 48 and 49 attendances, respectively.
- Attendance remained steady throughout the year, averaging around 8 attendees per session—demonstrating the ongoing need and community interest in peer support environments.

Developing our offering throughout 2024/2025.

We have just completed a full year of offering a space dedicated to the bereavement service within SARAG's newsletter called 'Finding Our Feet'. In each quarterly newsletter our space offers a reflection on the current season we are entering and how this might show up in grief and bereavement. It also offers a breathing exercise, and a nature connection exercise to help with general health and well-being. We share a meal for one recipe and a poem or something creative in our 'Creative Corner' section. We invite and encourage submissions from our service users in the meal for one and creative corner sections.

SARAG Bereavement Groups 2025

We would like to invite you to come along to our small, friendly, support and social group dedicated specifically to people who have been bereaved by asbestos related disease. We are here to listen and to provide support within a safe space and to provide the opportunity to chat to others who understand.

Please come along and join us. A complimentary lunch and hot drinks will be provided.

Accessible parking and public transport is nearby to all our venues.

If you'd like to chat to us to find out more or would like to confirm your attendance, please contact our Bereavement and Family Support Worker, Deb Williams, on 07714172416 or Deb@saragbestosupport.org

St Swithun's Community Centre, Arneliffe Rd, Wakefield WF1 4RR	7th Jan 4th Feb 4th March 1st April 6th May 3rd June	1st July 5th Aug 2nd Sept 7th Oct 4th Nov 2nd Dec	The Burton Pub Room (upstairs), The Burton St Foundation, Sheffield S6 2HH	28th Jan 25th Feb 25th March 22nd April 27th May 24th June	22nd July 26th Aug 23rd Sept 28th Oct 25th Nov 23rd Dec
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Time: 12-2pm



**2024
25th Anniversary and Christmas Dinner**

**Celebrating
1999 25 years 2024**



Monthly Group Attendance Breakdown													
Group	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Total
Wakefield	-	-	4	3	5	7	0	6	5	7	7	4	48
Sheffield	5	5	4	4	4	-	10	4	3	4	2	4	49
Monthly Total	5	5	8	7	9	7	10	10	8	11	9	8	97



I cannot put into words the amount of care and empathy you gave us as a family. I felt I could cry, and no judgment was made. I felt like I had known you all my life. Thank you.

Testimonials

I cannot put into words the amount of care and empathy you gave us as a family. I felt I could cry, and no judgment was made. I felt like I had known you all my life. Thank you.

Your service is so important coming at a time of devastation in our lives. It is so important it continues. Thank you

You should be applauded for your knowledgeable and kindness. Thank you so much

Knowing you were supporting us, reduced the pressure in an incredibly stressful time.

Your service certainly removed a load from my mind at a time when I was coming to terms with my diagnosis SARAG made it easy for my father to claim his compensation. Without SARAG, I'm not sure he'd have pursued it. We received bereavement support, and it definitely reduced stress, wouldn't have known where to start, from first call to last, there is nothing negative to say. THANK YOU

With your service, I witnessed understanding and friendliness once again - thank you

Nice to think help is just a phone call away

With thanks to our funders and solicitor panel for their continued support

