

ANNUAL REVIEW 2024


rtminds
Saving Lives with Art
Charity no: 1141017



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RTMinds,
formerly RTProjects,
is an independent
mental health charity,
founded in 2007 by people
with lived experience
of poor mental health.



By working face to face with
people who are experiencing
emotional distress, we aim to
transform the mental health of
the people we support including
those who are suicidal.

We also reach out to ‘spread the word’ about all things
mental health and to raise awareness about the
problem of suicide and how we can all help.



ETHOS ————— MISSION

SUPPORTING
CONNECTING
ENABLING

Using Art
to Save Lives
from Suicide



*“Recovery can begin as soon as
someone truly listens”*

Our Pals [REDACTED] (Beneficiaries)

In order to destigmatise mental health conditions, our beneficiaries are referred to as Pals



Our incredible Pals are at the heart of RTMinds - survivors who embody strength, resilience, and creativity. You bring life, energy, and joy to everything we do.

You've faced profound challenges and have shown extraordinary bravery in each of your journeys toward healing. Through your openness and humour you inspire us all, creating a vibrant, supportive community where connection and creativity flourish.

It is your courage and willingness to embrace support and give life another chance, that make RTMinds such a special and transformative space.

“ Before I came to RTProjects I was depressed, lonely, socially isolated, had no confidence or self-esteem. I cried every day. I had no meaning in my life and no hope for the future. There were many times that I felt suicidal. Coming to RTProjects has changed my life completely. I cannot thank RTProjects enough for saving and giving me a life worth living.”



**A poem by one of our pals which describes
RTMinds better than we ever could**

Enough to keep us

**The walls of my bedroom grew teeth in the pandemic—
gnawed at my sanity while the news chanted cases,
deaths, lockdown
like a funeral dirge.**

**I became a ghost in my own skin,
a hollow thing,
counting days by the weight of unmade beds
and unwashed coffee cups.**

**Loneliness was a virus too.
It didn't need a swab test to infect me—
just silence,
just the echo of my own breath
in a room too big for one.**

**Then I found.
RT Minds.**

**A sanctuary where the broken gather
not to be fixed, but seen.
Where paintbrushes are weapons,
where canvases scream when we can't,
where every stroke is a rebellion against the dark.
They handed me colors when my world was gray,
said, "Here, bleed your sorrow into something beautiful."**

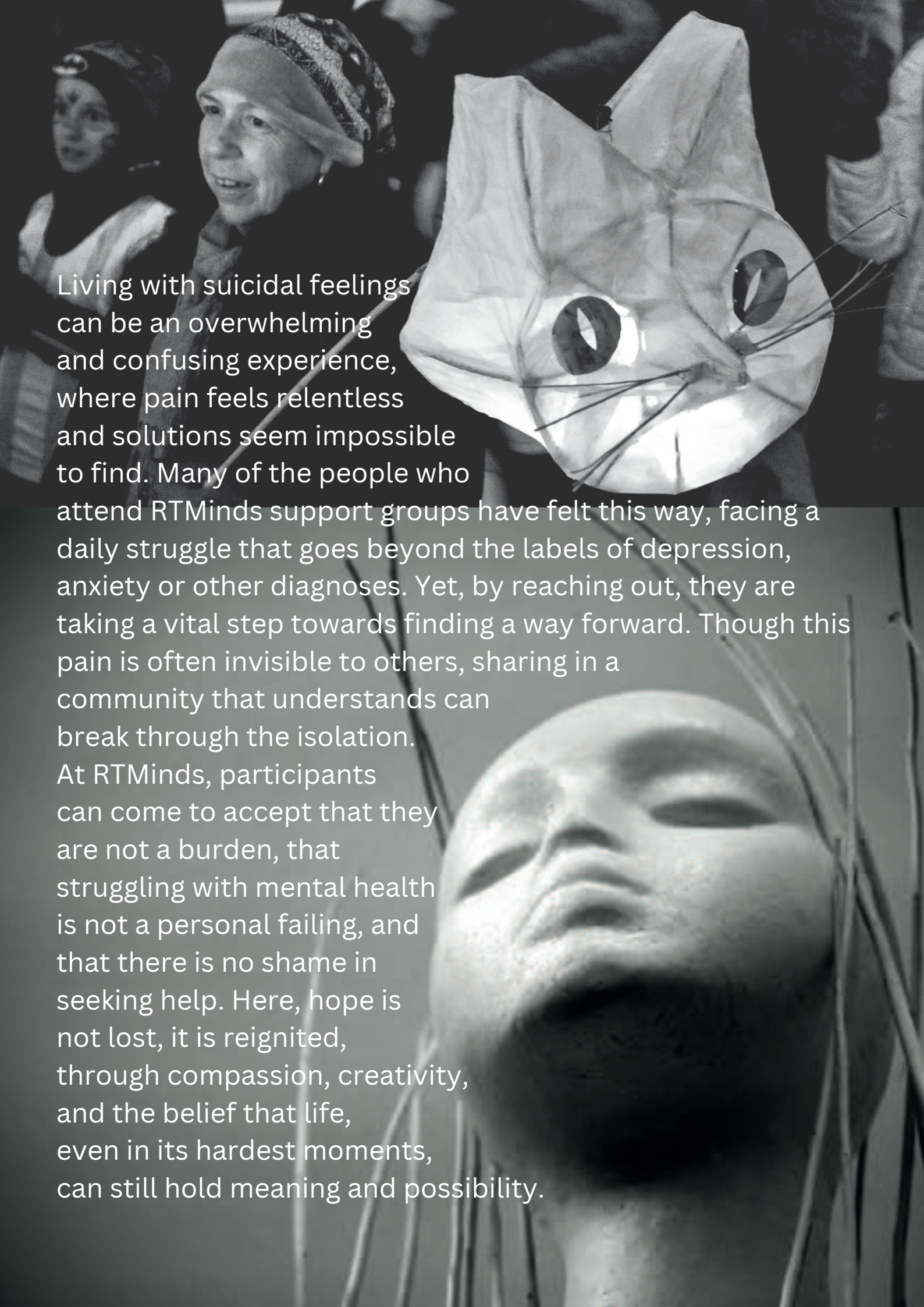
And I did.
I painted my sadness into sunsets,
my fear into fierce, jagged lines,
my loneliness into landscapes where no one is ever truly alone.
We are a choir of cracked voices here,
singing in the key of survival.
Some days, the music is messy.
Some days, it's the only thing holding our bones together.

But we show up.
We create.
We drag light out of the wreckage like archaeologists of hope.

RT Minds doesn't promise miracles—
just a space where your trembling hands
are held steady,
where your chaos is not a curse
but raw material for art.

And in that alchemy,
I found it:
a reason to stay.
A reason to believe the world still needs
the stories only the broken can tell.

We are not healed here.
We are healing.
And that—
that is enough to keep us alive.



Living with suicidal feelings can be an overwhelming and confusing experience, where pain feels relentless and solutions seem impossible to find. Many of the people who attend RTMinds support groups have felt this way, facing a daily struggle that goes beyond the labels of depression, anxiety or other diagnoses. Yet, by reaching out, they are taking a vital step towards finding a way forward. Though this pain is often invisible to others, sharing in a community that understands can break through the isolation. At RTMinds, participants can come to accept that they are not a burden, that struggling with mental health is not a personal failing, and that there is no shame in seeking help. Here, hope is not lost, it is reignited, through compassion, creativity, and the belief that life, even in its hardest moments, can still hold meaning and possibility.

THE PROBLEM



Data from Public Health England indicates that the suicide rate in County Durham is nearly 50% above the national average, with the North East being the worst area in England for suicide deaths.

These alarming statistics highlight the pressing need for effective mental health interventions in our community.

These statistics are not just numbers - they represent lives lost and families devastated by a preventable tragedy.

With an overburdened NHS, many people in County Durham can no longer rely on statutory mental health services. Long waiting lists leave people in distress, with 78% of those in need seeking help from emergency services (RC Psych 2022). Even when statutory care is accessed, recent CQC reports highlight concerns about the quality of care provided by local NHS Trusts, with some beneficiaries reporting traumatic experiences.



OUR SOLUTION

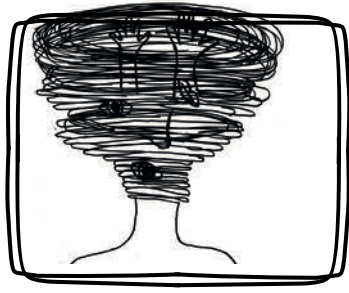
We exist to address the critical and urgent issue of widespread poor mental health and high suicide rates in County Durham.

When someone is struggling to make sense of their world and doesn't know which way to turn or where to look for support, they need stability. They need to feel safe. They need to be accepted for who they are. Most of all they need hope. They need to believe that they can recover. They need the time, the space and the support to find their way again. Once they are emotionally stable the process of recovery can begin.

We know what is needed. We know it works.

- **Timely.** Support begins immediately. From the very first contact we listen and assess how best to help.
- **No formal diagnosis needed.** You don't have to have been through the often re-traumatising process of diagnostic assessments. You just need to know that you are struggling.
- **Our service is free.** Lack of money should not be a barrier to good mental health.
- **Not time limited.** You stay until you are ready to leave. No-one is ever 'discharged'.
- **Delivered by people with lived experience.** Every member of staff has experience of mental health struggle. This gives insight, patience and understanding of others suffering.
- **Continued support.** Once a Pal always a Pal. To know that support is always there can have a dramatic, stabilising effect.

WHY ART?



A language

Trauma is often too much to speak about. Art can be a vehicle for expressing overwhelming emotions and feelings. It can help people process what has happened to them.

Social activity

An opportunity to spend some time with and be a part of a social group. Moreover, to be part of an accepting and supportive group where others have had similar experiences.



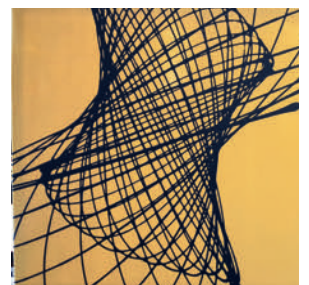
Relaxation

Art can be a very mindful activity where your mind can leave the troubled world which may have become your norm, and transport you right back to the present moment. When taking part in creative activities time can pass unnoticed. It can be powerfully relaxing, like taking a break from stress.



New skills

Poor mental health can take away our interest in life itself, resulting in a stagnation of thoughts and interests. Art can reopen pathways of interest and become a rich journey of enquiry.



Structure

A regular weekly activity can bring order to an otherwise chaotic existence. For some, a reason to get out of bed, have a shower or a shave. A focus point in an otherwise blurred week. “The highlight of my week used to be putting the bins out”. The highlight of your week shouldn’t be putting the bins out!



THE OPEN ART SURGERY

At the centre of all we do is our communal art studio. 'The Open Art Surgery' is a bungalow in a council estate. Often described as a tardis, you enter and immediately feel like you have arrived home.



You are greeted at the entrance by Frank and his friends.

The mat at the doorway says 'You are Loved'.

The whole building says 'Welcome'.

Inside you are surrounded by creativity. Wonderful artworks, music, poetry, textiles, carvings and ceramics, all designed to inspire.

Creativity isn't just about producing art, it's also about expressing emotions, rediscovering joy and finding new ways to view the world and your place in it. It is a language which can provide people with a new life narrative.

"RT is such a special place...it's because you don't have to change who you are to fit in...you can just be...you can breathe and the sense of acceptance brings a release. It's one of the first of places I felt a sense of almost unconditional love I guess from outside of my home...the first environment I didn't have to try too hard."

Things you won't see in
The Open Art Surgery:

- Bare white walls
- Office furniture
- Lanyards
- Posters telling you how to behave

CORE ACTIVITIES



We believe that no one should face their struggles alone.

At its heart RTMinds is a community.

We actively bring people together through weekly arts and mental health sessions to support each other through shared experiences.

We help people to reintegrate into their community after periods of crisis or isolation.

Sessions are staffed by highly experienced mental health practitioners who introduce participants to evidence-based self-help strategies and provide non-time-limited one-to-one support. One-to-one support addresses a broad spectrum of mental health and well-being needs, including, but not limited to: emotional support, self-help, financial, welfare, debt & energy advice. We also provide advocacy support for Pals throughout meetings with external services.

“It was so much fun to hang out and be with friends in such a cool environment. I'm full of gratitude and love for what RT has given me”

OUT REACH

Through working face to face with people we see first hand the impact we have, but we are aware that the problem is much bigger than what we can tackle from our small studio in Gilesgate.

We believe that everyone should be aware of the problem and should develop some understanding of how we can tackle it.

To this end, we deliver training and host suicide awareness events each year. In this way we can empower society.



NEVER GIVE UP

Suicide prevention campaign

“We need to talk about suicide.

As a nation. As a community. As a friend.

As a fellow human.” Beano



'Never Give Up' The Song

The song can 'reach out' to those who may be going through a tough time.

You can help, by getting the song to as many people as you can. The more people that hear it the higher the chance of saving a life.

www.rtprojects.org.uk/about_us/never_give_up

'Never Give Up' The T-Shirt

You could look supercool in a 'Never Give Up' T-Shirt!

By wearing the T-shirt you will become one of the 'Never Give Up' team.

You will be raising awareness of our campaign.

Never be afraid to say the word suicide.

You may save the life of a person you never even met.

Order yours at

www.rtprojects.org.uk/support_us/shop



'Never Give Up' Rocks

How can we save the life of someone we have never met?

How can we spread the word?

How about we leave rocks all over the place with a link to a facebook page which offers support to people at risk?

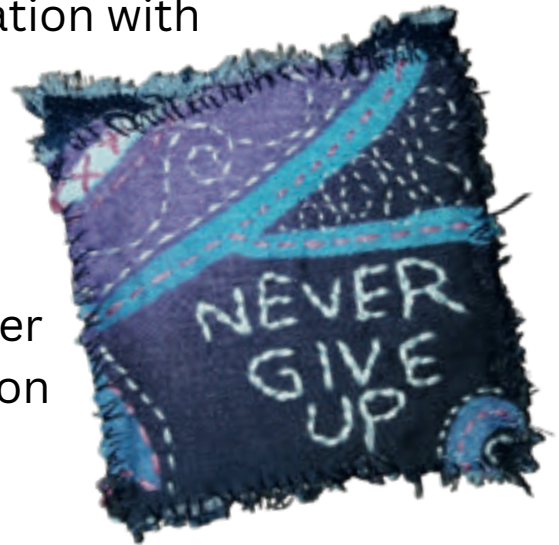


NEVER GIVE UP



One such event, now in its 5th year, is Never Give Up which takes place in the historic Assembly Rooms Theatre in Durham City. A key element of the show is our collaboration with Durham University's music society.

This partnership strengthens the sense of community, as students, service users and locals come together to share their stories, talents and support for one another through music and creativity. Performing on stage, students and locals stand together united in one cause.



The event is an important one in the local calendar. Whilst it might have a serious topic, it's a joyful event, full of music, art and laughter woven in with hard hitting facts, information and support.



LANTERNS OF HOPE



Lanterns of Hope was a wonderful collaboration with the National Trust's Crook Hall Gardens, involving a range of local people and community groups.



The lantern parade was a resounding success, blending art, community spirit, and hope.

Leading up to the event, local participants crafted beautiful hand-made lanterns in a series of workshops. On the night, the glowing procession moved through ancient trees, accompanied by the haunting sounds of a hang drum, carrying lanterns inscribed with messages of resilience, recovery, and unity in multiple languages.



The evening culminated in a powerful performance of music and poetry centred around hope, featuring Durham University students, local artists, and RTMinds Pals. The event was a true celebration of community and creativity.

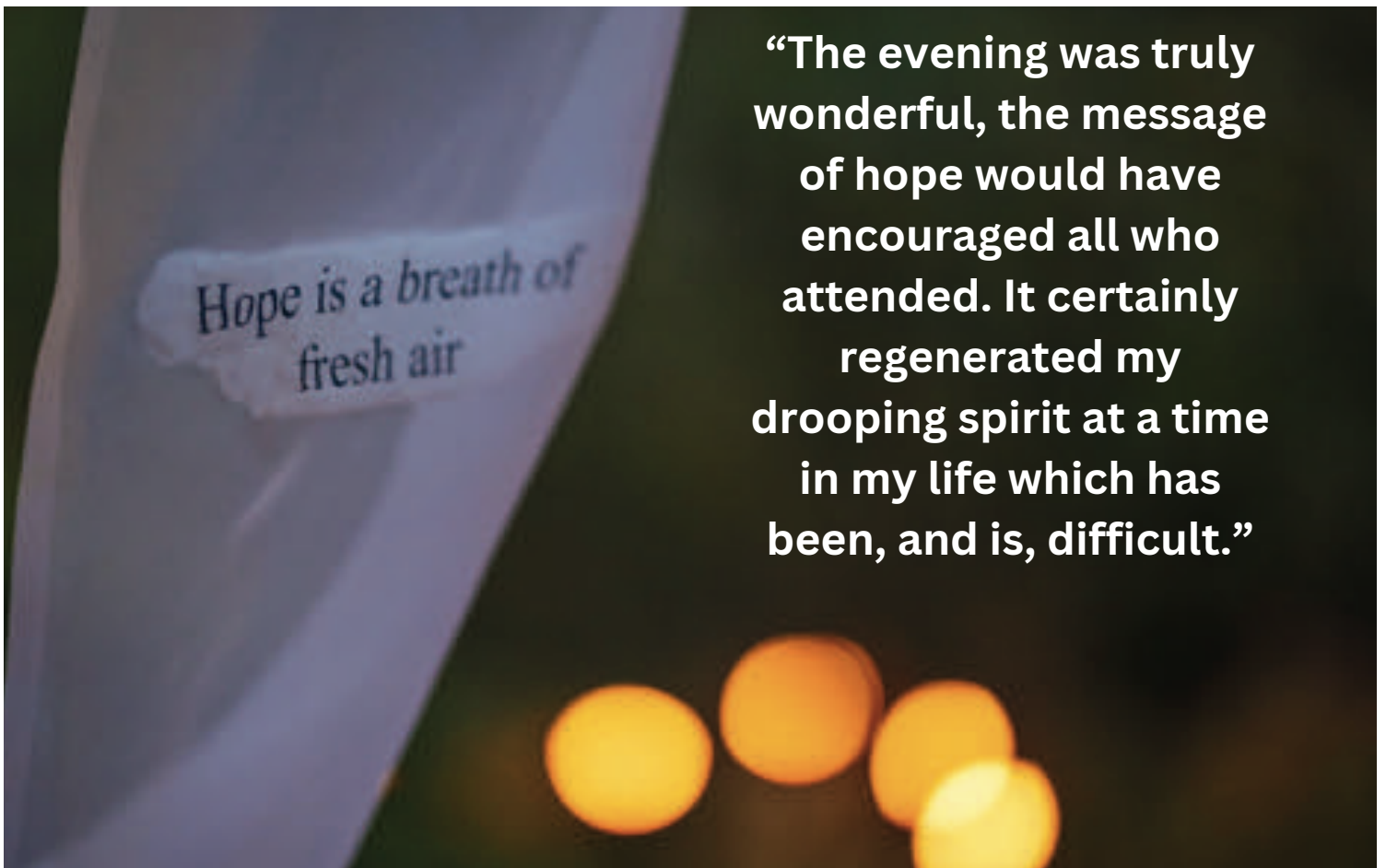
“We all left with hope in our hearts. We need more of this.”

LANTERNS OF HOPE

Lanterns of Hope



“..it has really renewed my hope in humanity and seeing so many different people there was lovely to see”



“The evening was truly wonderful, the message of hope would have encouraged all who attended. It certainly regenerated my drooping spirit at a time in my life which has been, and is, difficult.”

THE TEAM

We are fortunate to have an amazing, dedicated, caring team of staff, volunteers and trustees all of whom understand the challenges facing our Pals.



“There is such a team spirit here. Everyone looks out for each other and despite the serious nature of the work, there are many laughs and so much joy”



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