

## **New Service sees Volunteers Helping Bereaved Relatives at Inquests**

Going to an Inquest and being told about the last moments of your loved one's life can be a hard day for anyone to have to go through but having someone there to help can make the process far less traumatic.

The Exeter and Greater Devon District Coroners' Court is now setting up a Support Service which will be run by volunteers from the Coroners' Courts Support Service (CCSS). The CCSS is a charity that started in 2003 and their volunteers will be there to listen and offer emotional support and practical help to bereaved families, witnesses and others attending an Inquest at County Hall in Exeter. The Exeter and Greater Devon District Coroners' Court had 2955 deaths referred in 2018 and held 333 inquests in the same year.

Beverley Radcliffe, Director of the CCSS, said: "Each person is affected by bereavement in their own individual way and, as a volunteer, you really have to quickly assess what their needs are and respond to them.

"Some people want emotional support and the volunteer will be empathic and supportive, while other people want to be given information in which case the volunteer will explain the process and procedures of attending the Inquest.

"Before the Inquest starts the volunteer can show people the courtroom if the room is available, so they can see the layout, where people will sit and what their role will be during the hearing.

"When an Inquest happens, they might have been given information and read reports, but actually hearing it can be quite distressing.

"The first time you have to go into a Courtroom can be very daunting, let alone if it is something as distressing as an Inquest. It is really important that bereaved family members feel they have taken part in the proceedings rather than it happening around them, as this is their opportunity to find the answers, they might need in determining what happened when their loved one died.

"Generally, people are unaware that they may be asked to attend an Inquest at a Coroner's Court if they have witnessed a sudden, unexpected or unexplained death of either a family member or even a stranger.

"To have to attend an Inquest is an additional burden to the grieving process and the CCSS volunteers are there to help during the inquest itself and have supported thousands of bereaved families, witnesses and others."

As one witness who attended put it:

*"As it was my first experience in a Coroner's Court, it was very nice to see a friendly face and someone who explained the entire procedure and made me feel very much*

*more comfortable and relaxed. Attending Court is a very frightening experience for anyone."*

The charity is dependent on raising money to keep the Service going and to expand in further Courts and is always grateful for any donations. If you wish to learn more about the work of the CCSS or wish to make a donation please visit our website at [www.coronerscourtssupportservice.org.uk](http://www.coronerscourtssupportservice.org.uk)

Volunteers are now being recruited for the The Exeter and Greater Devon District Coroner's Court and anyone interested should apply for an application pack by sending an email to [info@ccsupport.org.uk](mailto:info@ccsupport.org.uk)

Or calling 07534 149 962

For more information go to [www.coronerscourtssupportservice.org.uk](http://www.coronerscourtssupportservice.org.uk)

Closing date for applications will be 9<sup>th</sup> August 2019, interviews will be held 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> August. The closing date may close early if numbers of applications are reached before this date. Training will be held in September.