Simon Says

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

Latest Information and Updates from Simon Says

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Simon Says

A MESSAGE FROM THE COO

As always, the writing of the annual report provides time to reflect on the year just gone, and the impact the charity has had on the bereaved children of Hampshire, their families and the others who support them.

It never ceases to amaze me what can be achieved with the dedication of our volunteers, staff, and supporters, who are so creative, flexible and dedicated to the work we do.

Although the year has been financially challenging, seeing the children and young people who attend our groups find hope for their future, begin to laugh, and gain confidence in sharing their feelings drives us on. In summary, the 235 new children registered, the 769 calls to the helpline, the 1098 attendances across all Groups and the 50 schools now on programme all testify to the maximisation of the use of our limited resources and the continued importance of our volunteers.

CHANDRA MCGOWAN
COO

1. SUMMARY

This year Simon Says has created a new position in the staff team to address the needs of parents and carers who support bereaved children; further developed its innovative package for schools to enable bereavement support throughout a child's time in education; and commenced plans for our 25th anniversary celebrations in 2026. We have also been focused on replacing core funding as our National Lottery grant came to an end after 5 years of wonderful support which has underpinned our development and improved our reach to children who have been bereaved in Hampshire.

2. SUPPORT FOR BEREAVED CHILDREN

Support Groups are at the heart of what we do to give grieving children a chance not to feel so alone. At the beginning of the year there were some very large numbers of newly registered children. As a result, the management of attendance in relation to the capacity of volunteers to provide effective support was discussed, and subsequently a booking system has gradually been rolled out across all our Groups. This means the scope of activity in groups this year has seen a levelling off of attendance, and this is reflected in the numbers below. It does however mean that the quality and safety of running in-person, child centric support is much improved. Alongside this we commissioned a piece of work to gather the views of all 8 volunteers who Lead our Support Groups, to see where further improvements could be made. Recommended changes are being prioritised by the Board and will be implemented next year.

2.1 Scope of Work

In 2025 we have...

235 Registrations for Groups

769 calls to the Helpline

55 enquiries from schools to join the Champion Schools Programme.
Of which 12 have been supported to gain Champion status, 43 are in the process and all schools within the town of Andover are working across the education system to support all their pupils.

17 Fundraising events have raised income in the region of £51,000 (with final totals from other events outstanding).

16 local grant applications made, of which 5 have been successful (income = £20,250).

1 Trustee Away day was held with all the Board in attendance.
The topic of the impact of AI on the charity was discussed following a presentation from an “expert” working for a global consultancy, giving the Board a chance to explore how the future might look as AI develops. There appear to be opportunities and possible risks in relation to both the administrative functions and operational delivery. These will be considered further by the Board.

2 Activity Days, 1 Family Fun Day Picnic and Family Christmas Party.
These additional activities are often the time and place where there is more space to explore in depth with a young person just how they are coping following the death of a loved one. Whilst having fun and sharing experiences with a whole new set of young people just like themselves.

20

Number of New
Volunteers
Recruited and Trained

80

Number of Group Sessions
Held Across the County

1098

Number of Attendances
at Those Groups

235

New Families Registered
This Year

2.2 STAFFING

2.2.1 New Post – Family Lead

Following a review of needs we decided to implement a restructure to enable more focus and support for parents / carers to enable them to cope better at home, after attendance at a support group session. This review led to the creation of a new post and the subsequent appointment of a member of staff to lead this work.

2.2.2 Staff Costs

Changes to National Insurance contributions for staff have had some impact and increased the salary bill. Added to which we also made the decision to pay for a Group Lead (usually a volunteer role) for one of Groups where the leadership has been very problematic for the last 18 months. This has stabilised the local Volunteer Team, and is a small, but necessary addition to Staff costs.

On average each month, half of what we spend goes to pay the wages of our 6 Part Time staff. These salary costs are the most significant financial commitment for the charity, not only to ensure the stability of the work we do in communities across Hampshire, but to maintain the skills and dedication of key staff who are critical to our plans for future development.

3. RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS

3.1 Family Focus

Plans are underway for recruiting specific "family" volunteers to provide support at Groups and share experience with families who may be struggling. This is going to enable a more structured approach across all support groups for families and provide them with the tools they need to navigate grief at home after a session.

3.2 Helpline Development

As the first point of contact for anyone wanting information or direct support, this element of our service is vital in terms of making sure all Helpline Volunteers are well trained and supported themselves. This year we have instigated a more robust element of CPD for the helpline team to ensure confidence, and consistency of messaging to families and professionals. As part of this development, we are gathering feedback more regularly about the help we provide and collating from callers their experiences of our initial contact with them.

The Board are considering potential changes to our constitution to encompass more formally the significance (and potential increased impact for a child) by having an acknowledged focus on carer support.

4. GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

4.1 The Board

We end the year, having had one retirement from the Board and are in the process of recruiting a new trustee with a background in Education. The chair has had 121 reviews with all existing trustees and redone the skills audit to ensure the charity has the right combination of experience to govern effectively.

4.2 Risks

The Risk Reregister has been reviewed, and the key risks remain …….

> Money: the final accounts show a big improvement in income in December, which has to some extent helped us meet our initial income predictions for the year. The ending of our National Lottery Grant was something we had planned for; however, unforeseen circumstances led to a decline in our capacity to fundraise for that difference as planned. One major grant however was obtained from the Garfield Weston Foundation. Our plans for the anniversary events in 2026 should produce further new income and will be monitored regularly throughout the year.

> Volunteer turn-over: this year has seen the moving on of 2 experienced Group Leads, which is always sad for us and the families. We have been fortunate that 2 local volunteers already attending these groups have been happy to step into the lead roles and will carry on running the sessions. The commitment and support of loyal volunteers is something we try very hard to support, in order to preserve the continuity of relationships for all our attendees. We are continually exploring ways to ensure they have the support they need, and to refresh our training so that the high-quality group work is not affected. We have a special event planned for February in which will be seeking their views about how to make volunteering even more attractive.

4.3 Accounting

Our accounting processes have been developed into a more robust system during 2025, with the introduction of QuickBooks and more specific account codes. This makes monthly accounts more accurate and gives us a better understanding of where, and when, key amounts are being spent. It improves governance of the finances on a daily basis, enables better decision making across key lines of spending and increases accountability for staff.

4.4 Archives

In anticipation for the 25th anniversary celebrations next year we are digitally archiving all the records we have, which will be a long-term resource for telling the story of our development and illustrating the significant changes to governance that have been made over the years. This timeline of historic decisions related to the charity captures its growth and the changing environment over the last 25 years. It is a rich resource for governance today and into the future.

5. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Our immediate plans for 2026 revolve around the 25th anniversary celebrations. There are some key events prepared for a range of people connected with the charity.

-Volunteers - Thank You and Well Being Day.
-Long term supporters and donors – Thank you and celebration of impact.
-Family Fun day (reaching out to all past and present users of Simon Says support) – a day of memories, reflection and fun!
-Conference for professionals – to expand our thinking about different ways to support bereaved children in the future.

Each planned event is focused on meeting a need, some are specifically an opportunity to fundraise, others to curate memories and observe our impact over the years.

6. FUTURE RISKS

6.1 The Right Staff

Fast-moving developments in technology, the small (multi-tasking) team and modest budget are significant factors when employing staff. Our current team have well-aligned skill sets and flexibility, as well as sharing the right values, which are all key to our successful delivery across every aspect of the charity.

6.2 The Right Volunteers

Our volunteers provide support across many different functions and always aim to build consistent relationships, with children, families, professionals and funders.

This year we undertook a specific review with Support Groups Lead Volunteers, which has provided some interesting findings for the Board to consider and build on going forward.

Alongside this, the variety of volunteer backgrounds and personal life experience is of huge value to delivery of support, and increasing the diversity of our volunteer base is seen an essential element for the future.

6.3 The Right Trustees

Currently our Treasurer functions and payroll are internal services and rely on the expert support of a Trustee. We have a wide range of background experience to draw on across the many facets of the charity, and will be appointing a new trustee with a career in education very shortly.

6.4 The Right Funding

This fundamental necessity is a high priority for action both now and during 2026. A level of core funding is required to ensure sufficient stability to maintain service delivery and to plan for the future. It is a top priority for Board attention and the newly revised Fundraising strategy approved by the Board in the autumn provides guidance and action plans as to where our efforts are best placed for success.

6.5 The Right Reserves

To date we have set aside, as per our reserves policy, the equivalent of 6 months funding, and will not go below that threshold.

80%

of our volunteers stay with us for 2 years or more.

100%

of our trustees either have personal experience of bereavement or the expertise to support.

7. KEY PROJECTS

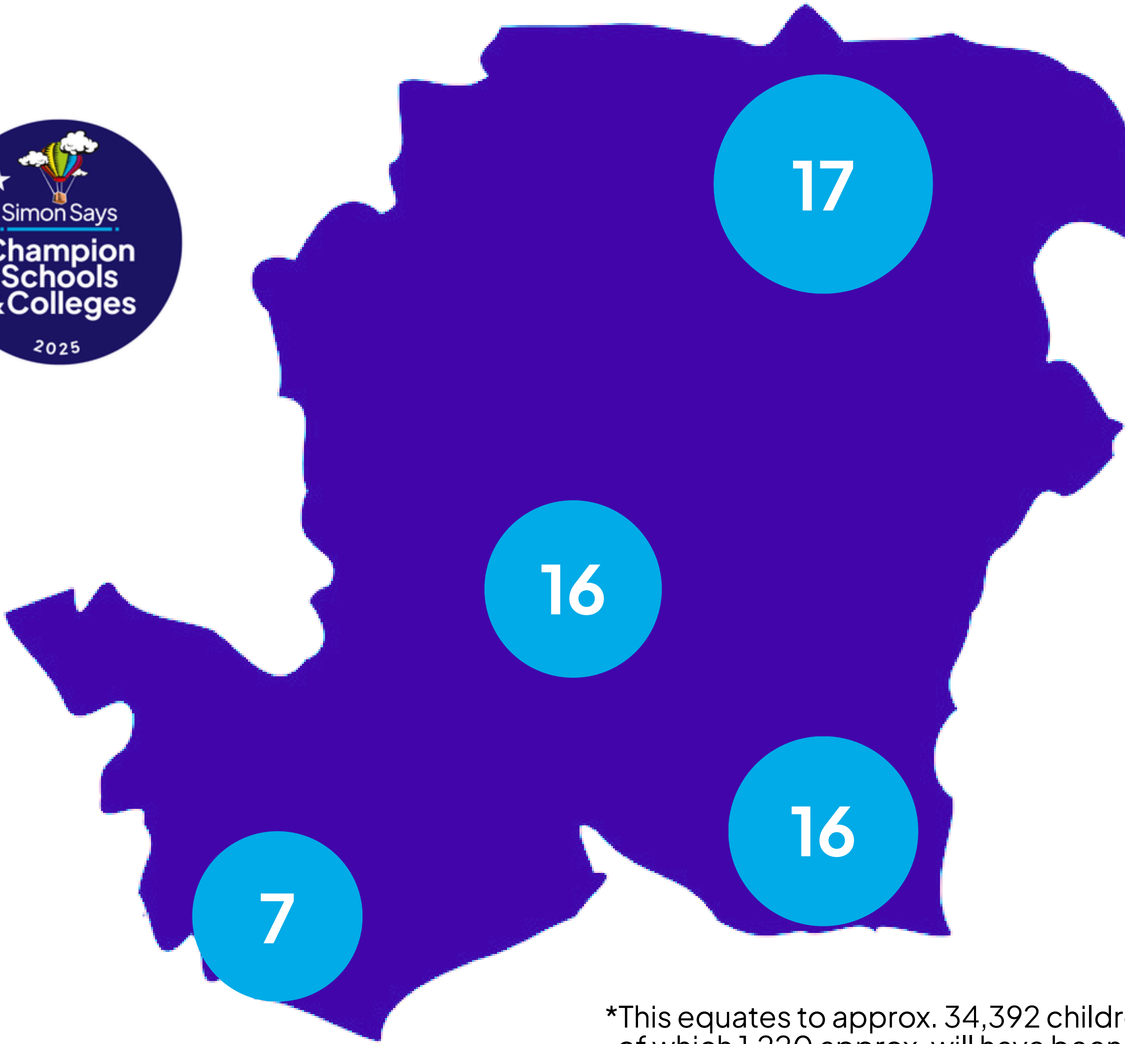
7.1 Champion Schools Roll-out

It is our aim to embed our Simon Says Champion Schools programme in schools across the whole of Hampshire, as it has the potential to change the life course of all bereaved children in the county. The inclusion of "bereavement" as a topic in the Relationships and Sex Education element of national curriculum this year (a campaign that Simon Says supported on the All-Party Parliamentary Group) is the vehicle for such significant change and Simon Says is pivotal change-maker.

7.2 Support for bereaved Parents / Carers

This programme of work is in the early stages of development, and we are conscious that this targeting of help to adults could be formally acknowledged through an amendment to our Constitution. This is under consideration so that we ensure that whatever support is put in place, it sits comfortably aligned within the original intention of the Founder.

- 30 families – have received direct support from the Family Lead
- 8 Group Leads have received Resource Boxes for their Family Room (with dedicated resources)
- 2 Parent Focus groups have been run
- 170 parents gave us feedback about our impact, of which 98% said our Support Groups were either extremely beneficial, very beneficial to their child's wellbeing



*This equates to approx. 34,392 children covered, of which 1,220 approx. will have been bereaved.

CURRENT EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS ON THE CHAMPION SCHOOL PROGRAMME

7. KEY PROJECTS

7.2.2 Feedback from parents and carers about the support we currently offer to families:

“I think you sort of need someone to unite you. Because maybe by ourselves we're all a bit vulnerable.”

“As child bereavement is a new journey we are on, I have loved having our experience normalised, which I have through speaking to a group volunteer and yourself via email and found it incredibly reassuring.”

“We find the group incredibly beneficial.”

“I wonder if the biggest impact on the children is not the bereavement, but it's the surviving parent and how we can parent them, and that's terrifying sometimes. I think all parenting is hard. You're just so much more acutely aware of it when you're grieving.”

“My daughter and I love this group and it is a bit of respite for me.”

We are now collecting feedback after a family has registered via the Helpline and when they book to attend a Support Group. This will enable us over time to identify patterns and trends for continuous improvement.

7.2.3 Plan for future: Family Support Volunteers

With feedback already gathered, we have highlighted a need for there to be a dedicated Family Support Volunteer in every Family Room. This additional support will be developed throughout 2026.

8. FUNDRAISING

8.1 Fundraising Activity This Year

8.1.1. Donations

Donation arrive from a diverse range of sources. In this regard personal connections remain as important as ever, e.g. Volunteer connection with Pennington Social Club; an ex-employee's husband (firm) and a long-standing private donor who has been involved with the Stanley family from the beginning.

8.1.2 Local Community Organisations

Connections with local fundraising groups such as The Roundtable, Masons and Sporting Bears remain critical to income. There are also ad hoc opportunities and this year specifically, the Andover Carnival proceeds were won after a successful campaign starting with a face-to-face pitch in January from a local volunteer & Head of fundraising, in competition with 11 other local charities.

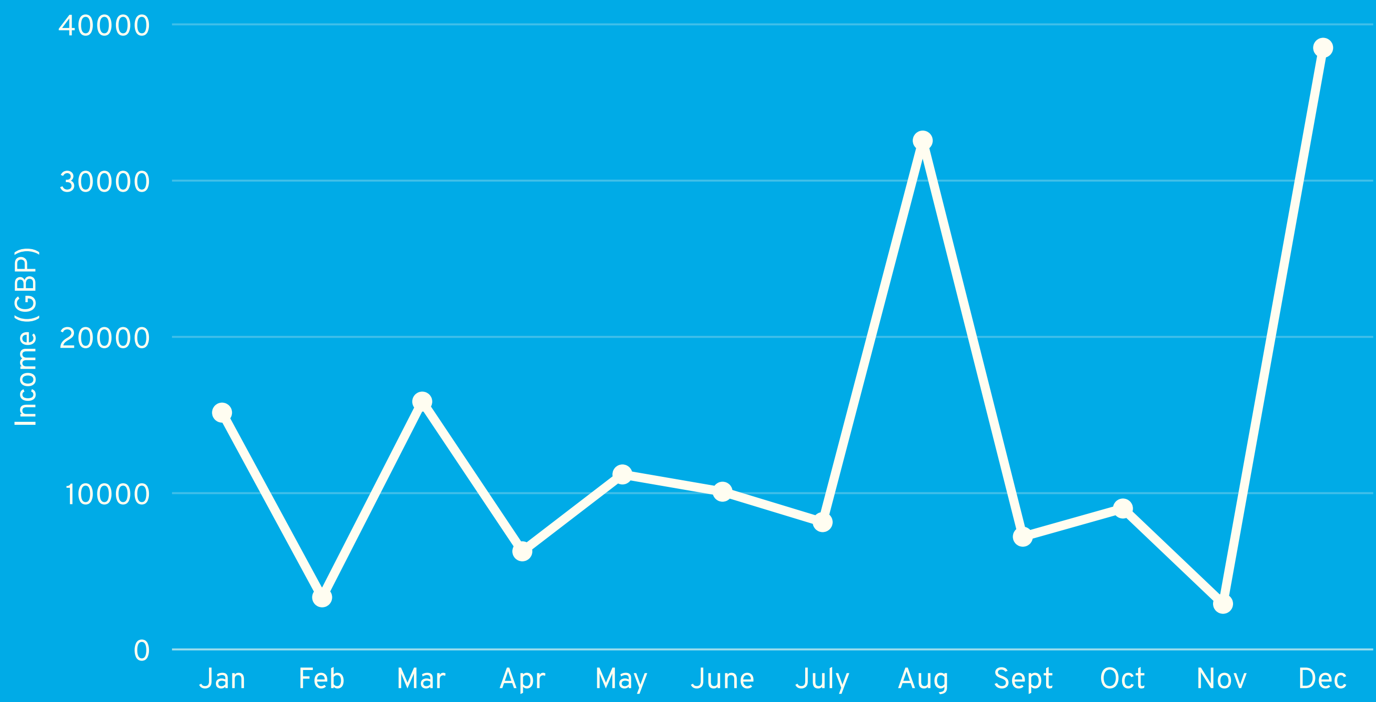
8.1.3 Corporate Sponsorship

We also bid for and won opportunities for becoming the Charity of the Year with two active Corporates in total raising £16,785 for the charity and helping us raise our profile with other local businesses.

8.1.4 Future Plans

The main outcome of the full year of Simon Says 25th anniversary events in 2026 is to provide a platform from which to obtain further funding opportunities, from individual regular donors, and larger local companies. We are also exploring how best to run a legacy campaign and how to engage a patron who can help us with this. The whole of 2026 is about raising our profile and therefore our ability to engage with new supporters. As such, we expect there to be a considerable investment in our fundraising activities in 2026, from which we hope to see significant returns over the next couple of years.

INCOME 2025



9. IMPACT OF OUR WORK AND HOW WE TRACK THAT

This year we have made some small, but helpful steps toward gathering more regular feedback on impact.

Examples -

- New booking system for groups – the adoption of this new technology allows us to ask for feedback from the session last attended. It is quick and easy for any parent / carer to use and gives us almost immediate notice if anything is going awry from a parental perspective, or indeed if something is going well.
- Welcome email for new families – this has been adapted and now includes two questions regarding the advice and help given to them on their initial call to the Simon Says Helpline for whatever support is needed (by a family member , professional, school). This is enabling a better training package to be developed for new Helpline Volunteers and giving us a better understanding of the needs of callers.

9. FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

	2023	2024	2025
	£'k	£'k	£'k
Income			
Donations	146	146	111
Grants	39	39	40
Other income	30	30	66
Total Income	215	215	217
Expenditure			
Charitable activities	134	133	209
Raising funds	24	24	23
Other Costs	-	2	2
Total Expenditure	158	159	234
Net surplus/(deficit)	57	56	(17)
Net Assets	245	228	185

CONCLUSION

This year has seen a significant change to our small staff team, a refining of systems to enable better management of Support Groups, and further development of our unique support for schools.

Although we maintained previous levels of income throughout this year, we hope that the 2026 celebrations will offer a unique springboard from which to gain a level of core funding far into the future.

As ever, the charity relies on the goodwill and support of many volunteers, donors, and professionals to assist with our mission and we look forward to continuing these collaborative relationships into the future.

DAVE SMITH
CHAIRMAN

Simon Says
Child Bereavement Support