Memory Elephants
Unique to patients and families

A way for families to remember loved ones and support hospice care

brought to you by

Trinity Hospice
Compassion and care
We are delighted to be able to share with you our extremely successful Memory Elephants, which have been a great fundraising tool as well as a wonderful way of growing our database, increasing donor relations and providing a unique keepsake to honour the lives of those passed.

Our elephants started as a way to remember the husband of one of our supporters. They soon caught the attention of the local media and, following a brief report on a national news programme, we saw orders coming in at a volume we never could have expected. It meant within days we had a waiting list of four months!

We are unable to meet demand for these elephants, and are therefore offering the concept to hospices across the country.

We may even have your first orders as our waiting list covers all corners of the UK!

We have put together a handy information pack to get your Memory Elephants off the ground, and have created an online portal on our own website where you can download our sample order form, welcome pack and sewing patterns.

Please take the time to read Lorna’s story to understand how our Memory Elephants came to be, and how important they are for Lorna, for our supporters and for our hospice.

We are inviting you to be a part of the Elephant in the Room movement.
What are Memory Elephants?
Our Memory Elephants are soft keepsakes, made using the clothing of a person who is sadly no longer with us.

They were created by one of our supporters, Lorna, who didn’t want to throw her husband’s shirts away, and who had recently joined a local sewing group. It was here she came across a pattern for a cushion elephant, and the Memory Elephants were born.

As well as being a unique way of remembering and treasuring a lost loved one, it has been a way to encourage conversations about death and dying – dealing with the Elephant in the Room.

What do you need?
To make your Memory Elephants a success, you need a team of keen volunteers who have the time to commit to cutting and sewing treasured items of clothing according to the elephant pattern.

Be prepared for orders to come flooding in once you start to promote your elephants! Make sure you have the resource within your hospice to deal with enquiries, send out information packs and receive orders.

We only ask for the material to make the elephants, and don’t charge for the stuffing or thread. Please see Lessons Learned for stuffing and thread materials and suppliers.

In the first 12 months Elephant in the Room raised more than £10,000!
Hi,
my name is Lorna.

In December 2011 my husband Iain was diagnosed with a very rare form of cancer called Pseudomyxoma Peritonel. This cancer is only treated by two sites in the UK, Basingstoke and The Christie in Manchester. After many trips and two surgeries, we were given the devastating news that there were no more treatments they could offer Iain. This is when our local hospice came into our lives. Iain spent six weeks being looked after by the wonderful staff in their In-Patient Unit, he was even able to return home and we were lucky to have the care and support of their Hospice at Home team. They were only a phone call away and nothing was too much for them.

Sadly Iain passed away at home on Tuesday 2nd December 2014, with his family by his side. In the weeks and months that followed I tried to keep myself busy. I found my inspiration at a sewing group, which I had recently joined, a pattern for an elephant. Using the pattern, I decided to make elephants for my family and friends using Iain’s old shirts. I knew I wanted to do something special with Iain’s shirts, feeling that each one held a special memory of a night out, party with friends or family gathering. By mixing different shirts and patterns I was able to make each design completely unique.

To me and my family the elephants represent the love we each have for Iain, and the love he had for us. They have given us all great comfort that part of Iain is very much still with us, with the saying ‘an elephant never forgets’, this couldn’t be any truer.

Since starting to make these special elephants I have also found that they have also enabled people to talk more openly about death and dying, in some cases having those often difficult conversations about our personal wishes. None of us wants to think about our own mortality, but it’s so important to share your thoughts and wishes with your loved ones.

Since Iain passed away we have raised many thousands of pounds in his memory and are committed to supporting the vital work of our local hospice.
Lessons learned
In the process of setting up our Memory Elephants, we have learned a few lessons which we are happy to share.

Pricing
We don’t want supporters to feel as though our elephants are unaffordable, and therefore miss out on a very special keepsake. We initially set a ‘suggested minimum’ of £20 per elephant, which worked well on a local level and quite often people were donating extra.

After conducting some online research we have found that similar elephants sold commercially cost around £25 so have increased the cost of an elephant to this price.

Postage
Postage needs to be set at a realistic price. Each elephant weighs around 350-400g and one can easily be sent in the post as a small package (£3.80 2nd Class Signed For) with Royal Mail. Two elephants can be squeezed into a small package. We charge donors £9 postage and packaging for up to four elephants to take into account the time it takes to create and mail each order.

A larger package is more expensive with Royal Mail so we have found it more cost effective to use a courier firm. We strongly recommend you sign up with a reputable firm rather than using one ad hoc, if you have not already done so. Otherwise you risk losing items in the post and having no named contact to speak to in order to resolve the issue.

We use UKMail.

Material
Your supporters must be clearly told that the majority of the elephant is made using cotton shirt material. Other materials may be distorted in the production process. This information is included in our welcome pack to supporters, which is available to download from our online portal.

Stuffing...
We use Cotton Mills polyester hollow fibre toy stuffing/filling by Cotton Mills.

Supplier: Sleep & Smile (PSTATION S&S) 1 North Street, Manchester, M8 8RE. 0161 839 6886. We order via Amazon and it can be bought in various weights.

Cotton...
Our thread is cotton and natural, bought in white, blue and grey.

Supplier: Gutermann 876 yd natural cotton thread solids. We order via Amazon.

Wait time
When we first launched our Memory Elephants, the wait time was around 6-8 weeks. Following increased media activity this increased to 4 months! This was discussed with supporters at the point of enquiry, and they were not put off. Our elephants are so important and special to those ordering they are prepared to wait for them.
Testimonials

Steve’s story

“There is an elephant in the room, and his name is Phil

I first saw the elephants while I was in the hospice visiting my best friend Phil. I went into the shop hoping to buy the one on display, but was told that they are specially made using the clothing of loved ones. I thought this was such a fantastic idea.

I took the keys to Phil’s home and while his wife Kath was still at the hospice with him, I went and got three of his shirts. The day after that Phil took his last breath, surrounded by his family at Trinity Hospice.

It was really emotional when Kath received the elephant but she’s so grateful for it; we all are – it takes pride of place in the room. It is just stunning.

Phil was a great guy; he was a real joker and he really enjoyed life to the full. It’s been incredibly hard; I lost my best friend. There’s a void that’s never going to be filled and he is so missed. We will never stop talking about him. Never. That’s why the elephant means so much to us – it means he is always there with us.”

Ann’s story

“Even if we have nothing else, we have our elephants

My beloved husband of 37 years, Campbell, fell asleep after a nice and quiet – normal – Friday night. But he didn’t wake up in the morning. It was a horrendous shock to myself, our children and to everyone who knew him.

For years I didn’t know what to do with his clothes. I didn’t want to get rid of them; I couldn’t get rid of them! It was too hard. Then last year a friend had an elephant made after her husband past away having spent some time at Trinity Hospice. When I saw her elephant I decided to have some made from Campbell’s clothes.

Campbell absolutely loved golf, so I had two elephants made for the children using his golfing trousers and shirt. For my own elephant I used two of his favourite shirts which he wore on our last holiday together in Salzburg.

Both sets of clothes have wonderful memories for us all. My elephant sits on the dresser in my bedroom, and the children each have a special place for theirs. They are so nice to look at and can be cuddled – which is nice. The grandchildren sometimes give them a cuddle when we talk to them about their wonderful grandad.

These elephants really are a great idea.”
If you are interested in joining the Elephant in the Room movement please visit our online portal for everything you will need to set up your Memory Elephants.

This can be accessed at...
www.trinityhospice.co.uk/elephantintheroomportal

The portal includes:

• Lorna’s story
• Elephant in the Room logo

Sample welcome leaflet and order form
• Sewing pattern
• Sewing instructions

We kindly ask that you use our specially designed Elephant in the Room logo (below) to make these wonderful creations into a nationwide movement to support hospices across the country while encouraging those hard-to-have conversations around death and dying.

We invite you to share Lorna’s story to give your supporters the background to these wonderful elephants, inspiring them to order one of their own and treasure their love and memories.

Once you are ready to go with your Memory Elephants, please give us a call on 01253 359362 to see if we have your first orders on our waiting list.
Encouraging discussion

Helping families to talk about bereavement

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