

Witness Name: Helena Jean

Rossiter

Statement No.:

Exhibits:

Dated: 20 October 2023

UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF [HELENA JEAN ROSSITER]

I, [HELENA (JEAN) ROSSITER], c/o Broudie Jackson Canter Solicitors, 3rd Floor Walker House, Exchange Flags, Liverpool, L2 3YL will say as follows:

1. I am a member of Covid-19 Bereaved Families For Justice UK (CBFFJ). As Matt Fowler and Joanna Goodman have explained in their statements for Modules 1 and 2 of the Inquiry, the organisation came into being in 2020 after Joanna lost her father, Stuart Goodman, on 2 April and Matt Fowler lost his father, Ian Fowler, on 13 April.¹ An article was published about Joanna's loss on 30 April and Matt left a comment. As a consequence, Joanna contacted Matt and after that they formed the group.
2. CBFFJ now has almost 7000 members from across the UK who have lost loved ones to Covid-19. The aim of CBFFJ has been to establish a UK-wide inquiry into the handling of the pandemic, as well as inquiries in each of the devolved nations. The group aims to ensure that the personal, first hand experiences of those who suffered the ultimate loss to Covid-19, are learned from in order to prevent families from losing loved ones and to improve and shape future policy.
3. I joined the group after I lost my son, Peter. I saw an article online and decided to join. I had been looking for support but also, I felt there were so many unanswered

¹ The statements of Matt Fowler (INQ000182709) and Joanna Goodman (INQ000281297) have now been published by the Inquiry and are available on the Inquiry's website.

questions. The group have been a wonderful support network and I hope that our status as CP's in Module 4 will help us address some of the issues that remain outstanding surrounding vaccines and therapeutics.

4. CBFFJ members have a range of personal experiences and concerns in respect of preparation for and response to the pandemic. In respect of the scope of Module 4, members have particular concerns with regard to: Vaccine availability and safety; Development, trials and use of new therapeutics; Communication regarding availability and use of therapeutics, Barriers to Vaccine access, Equitable access to vaccines and therapeutics; Vaccine safety and messaging; Pace of research for new therapeutics and effectiveness of existing medication.

5. **My Son Peter**

Peter was the youngest of two boys and grew up in St Helens, Merseyside with his big brother Michael and two loving parents. Despite not coming from a musical background, he developed a love of piano and became a classically trained pianist. His nan had bought him a small electronic organ as a child, and it went from there.

6. Peter went on to win Young Musician of the Year in High School and that led to being accepted into Chetham's School of Music in Manchester. From there he went to the Royal Northern College of Music and onto the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest.
7. After completing his classical training, he decided he wanted to teach and went to Royal Birmingham Conservatoire School of Music to complete his PGCE.
8. It took him a while to get a full time teaching job, so he worked as a supply teacher and also performed in many charity concerts up and down the country.
9. He eventually got a job initially covering maternity leave in I&S School in Leamington Spa. At the time of his death, he had worked there for 7 years and achieved the position of Subject Leader for Music. He lifted the music department from nothing and created an amazing extra curricular environment. He was fantastic with children, he knew how to get down to their level.
10. Following his death, his family, friends and colleagues raised a huge amount of money to create a fund in his memory. This was to enable students who need extra support to be able to buy an instrument that they would not otherwise be able to afford. The

school wanted a create a legacy to continue the enthusiasm for music that Peter created.

11. Every day Peter would play a different piece of music as the children assembled and he would tell them a little bit about the piece he had played, giving them experience of different genres of music, including classical. The Head said on the Memorial page, that he could never believe quite how lucky they were, as a State School, to have a concert pianist play during their daily assemblies.
12. Peter was 39 years old when he died. He was fit and well and healthy. He had no underlying health conditions. He had previously run marathons and as he did not drive, ran and walked everywhere. The only thing of note is that he was visually impaired. He was born with cataracts which were removed, but his strength of vision was only in one eye.
13. Peter had a partner, Hannah. He had just bought his first home and they were due to move in together and start a family. He had his whole life ahead of him.

The Pandemic

14. My mum was alive at the time and although living independently, she had a fall which led to a trip to hospital and then a care home. She was one of the first to have the vaccine and had it in hospital.
15. My husband and I observed all the rules and were very careful. Neither of us were clinically vulnerable.
16. Peter worked throughout the Pandemic. His school remained open for the children of Key Workers and they also took in some other children with special educational needs. He never once complained about working, he wanted to do his bit. He wanted to help.
17. Despite being a key worker, Peter was not offered the vaccine early or given any prioritization. I started to worry about him being around children all the time, there was lots of news stories about children being the main carrier. I had heard there were 'bubbles' in school but of course, the minute they walked out, the children all fell out of any 'bubble'.
18. Peter's school provided him with standard PPE which included a mask. There was also a one-way system in place. He had to test twice weekly. We weren't able to visit a lot due to lockdown periods and the restrictions, we as a family abided by all the

rules. We kept in touch via zoom and phone only. We missed two Christmases. Our last Christmas together was 2019.

19. Peter had the first dose of Pfizer vaccine on the 14th May. He had to wait until they called up his age group for vaccination. The initial advice had been that the second dose of the vaccine should have been 3 weeks after the first one. Peter had to wait until 12th July. Over 8 weeks. He could not even get an appointment for his second vaccine and had to chase them and ask why he had not had it.
20. Four days after his second vaccine, Peter called us. It was a Friday. He always used to ring on a Friday after school. He looked tired, he was looking forward to the school holidays, he told us he had just done his routine test and it was positive, his partner, Hannah was negative, he had a PCR and that was positive too. He was sent home to isolate.
21. Peter didn't feel unwell, but he did develop cold like symptoms. We spoke every day. The UK was experiencing a heatwave during this time and it was incredibly hot. He told me he couldn't sleep and was exhausted. He didn't feel unwell enough to seek any extra help and was just taking paracetamol.
22. On 24th July he felt so uncomfortable that he rang 111 to get some advice on being able to sleep. The operator was concerned about his breathlessness and called an ambulance. He walked into the ambulance and into A&E.
23. The diary of events I later received told us that his white blood count was almost zero. I spoke to him and he couldn't really speak through his oxygen mask. He looked so tired and was breathless.
24. Within 24 hours he was in the Intensive Care Unit. On the 1st August he was intubated and placed on a ventilator. He never recovered. He passed away on 11th August. We were by his side.
25. I cannot fault the hospital care that Peter received. The staff told me it was the worst case of covid they had seen. They didn't know what the variant was. They said he couldn't have a post mortem, despite his young age, as they knew it was Covid that killed him. He had organ failure and two blood clots in his hand and leg, despite them turning him. They told me if he had lived, he would have lost three fingers.
26. I don't understand why Peter, as a Key worker, protecting other Key workers' children, was not prioritised for the vaccine.

27. I don't understand what advice our government followed when they changed the amount of time between dose 1 and dose 2 of the vaccine. My son Michael, lives in the US. He was vaccinated, but his doses were three weeks apart, as per the manufacturers' guidance.
28. I don't understand why my son was not given a date for his second dose and only got one when he chased it up.
29. The advice was that the first dose of the vaccine gave you some protection. Not for Peter. Was there something wrong with the vaccine batch that he had?
30. After his positive test, no one checked that he was ok isolating at home. Test and trace, however, continued to contact him even after death.

The Funeral

31. This was July /August 2021 so the rules were starting to relax. Despite this there were still inconsistencies. We wanted a celebration of Peter's life in music – many of his friends from the music world wanted to attend and one friend (an opera singer and pianist) wanted to perform. The crematorium would not allow us to bring a in a piano, nor would they allow an opera singer to perform. We decided to find a church to hold the service prior to the committal. The first funeral director we went to would not allow us to dress Peter, or allow us to see him or touch the coffin. The second funeral director said they would arrange this but they could not find a church with a piano, so we had to arrange this ourselves. This was in Leamington Spa, an area we did not know well.
32. We wanted an Oval willow coffin (Peter was vegan) as we felt this was what he would have wanted. The funeral director said that they could not get the willow coffin we chose as it was out of stock, but we could supply our own if we found one online. We sat in the funeral directors office on our phones trying to buy a coffin, before deciding it was ridiculous and opted for another willow coffin in a traditional shape, that they did have in stock. Peter was sent to Northampton for specialist embalming and by the time he came back it was the day before the funeral.
33. Peter was transferred to a Chapel of Rest. We went to see him and were shocked to find him in a standard oak coffin, not the willow one we had ordered. The staff member there was wonderful, she said she would find the right coffin, even though it was nearing closing time, she said she would not leave until she had fixed the situation.

The next day at his funeral there was indeed a willow coffin, but we had not seen our son in there.

34. The funeral was, fortunately, wonderful. We had all of Peter's friends there, famous musicians, colleagues and a friend who was an Opera singer, who sang at the service. Peter even played at his own funeral, having recently recorded a piece by Chopin. The cortege drove through the school where he taught and all the staff and students, past and present, plus their families, lined the street and the roadway to clap and say goodbye. It was the best send off we could do and brought us some comfort.
35. Peter was the closest family we had. My other son lives in the US. We see him and his family twice a year. My husband and I do our best, we travel and try to keep busy as we know that is what Peter would want us to do. Life has changed. It will never be the same. I have lost a child, in circumstances that I feel were preventable. The grief is still overwhelming.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief of its truth.

Signed: Personal Data _____

Dated: _____ 15 DECEMBER 2023 _____