

**Greater Manchester**  
**ASBESTOS**  
**VICTIMS SUPPORT**  
**GROUP**



**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**2019-2020**

---

# FOREWORD

Vera Rigby

**Chair of GMAVSG trustees**

The AGM is an opportunity to thank the staff and trustees for all their efforts over the past year.

Our year started quite normally with our trustee's meetings at the Windrush Centre, Jeff Eaman retired in September, Graham Dring reduced his hours, Rob Rayner took on the role of group coordinator and we welcomed our new employee Reginald Opara.

Then along came Corona virus, but with the help of technology we have been able to continue with our scheduled trustee's meetings.

Thanks to our staff, GMAVSG has continued to give help and advice to asbestos victims. They must be thanked for their dedication particularly during the past difficult months, especially Rob who has coordinated everything.

Thank you to all the trustees for their valued time and commitment. Tony Whitston remains a trustee in spite of moving to Cornwall, again thanks to technology Tony is able to join us at the trustee meetings with his wealth of knowledge. A special thank you to Caroline Bedale who voluntarily does all the finance and accounts. You are all very much appreciated. Thank you.

This annual report covers the period 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020.

# ADVICE WORK

**GMAVSG offer free advice on benefits & compensation to asbestos victims & their families. We offer home visits for people in our area, and phone advice for people further afield.**

Our specialist knowledge of industrial injuries benefits, and of the local employers and industries that used asbestos, is vital to the advice we offer. In 2019-20, we helped 275 people newly diagnosed with an asbestos-related disease, 121 of whom had been diagnosed with mesothelioma. Of these people, 253 were signposted or referred to us from hospital consultants or lung cancer nurses in Greater Manchester hospitals.

Nationally, the number of annual deaths from mesothelioma remains stubbornly high, at around 2,536. More people die of mesothelioma in the UK than are killed in road traffic accidents (around 1,870 annually). Around half the people we help have mesothelioma. We help people with other asbestos-related diseases too.

*2019-20 GMAVSG cases (275 in total)*

Mesothelioma	121	44%
Asbestosis	64	23.3%
Pleural Thickening	44	16%
Lung Cancer	21	7.6%
Asbestosis & Pleural Thickening	17	6.2%
Lung Cancer & Asbestosis	8	2.9%

# SUPPORT GROUPS

**GMAVSG runs the Bereaved Families group, for people who have lost a loved one to mesothelioma.**



Vera Rigby, chair of the group, says what the group means to her: “We continue to campaign on asbestos issues, and provides advice, support and friendship. During 2019 we enjoyed our regular meetings in Manchester, often followed by a long lunch in the Slug and Lettuce.

Some enjoyed shared holidays and many attended the Mesothelioma UK’s International Women’s Day Lunch on the 8th March. We attended Worker’s Memorial Day in April, Action Mesothelioma Day in July. We also enjoyed our summer outing boat trip later in July, sailing from Castlefield to Media City and return with lunch on board and free time at the Lowry. In September we said farewell to Jeff Eaman with a gift and best wishes for a long, happy and healthy retirement.

We welcomed our new employee Reginald Opara and attended an event at the People’s History Museum to mark 20 years since the ban of Asbestos in the UK. Our Christmas Lunch was enjoyed once again at the Manchester Halls, little did we know what 2020 had in store for us. Most of us haven’t seen each other since our last meeting in March, we have all been very much in each others thoughts and certainly not forgotten. Until we can meet again stay safe and well. Very best wishes to you all.”

**GMAVSG also helps to run the Living Well group,  
for people with mesothelioma.**

We run this group alongside Mairead Dixon & Lisa Clarke, two specialist mesothelioma nurses based at Wythenshawe hospital. The Living Well group's monthly sessions give people a chance to meet others who understand what they are going through, and to learn more about the help it is out there.

## **ACTION MESOTHELIOMA DAY 2019**

Our Action Mesothelioma Day event in Manchester was held on Friday 5th July 2019. Hundreds attended to remember those who have lost their lives to this aggressive cancer caused by asbestos, and to call for justice for asbestos victims.

The event was attended by mesothelioma sufferers, and people who had lost a loved one to the disease, as well as trade unionists and campaigners. The outdoor rally in Barbirolli Square was chaired by Mavis Tong, who lost her husband to mesothelioma. The rally was addressed by local MPs Kate Green, Tony Lloyd, and Rebecca Long-Bailey.

After the MPs' speeches, doves were released in memory of those who have lost a loved one to mesothelioma.



After the end of the outdoor rally, a public meeting was held in the Friends Meeting House in Manchester, which was addressed by Andy Burnham (Mayor of Greater Manchester) and Lorraine Creech (of Mesothelioma UK).

# CAMPAIGNING 2019-20

## **GMAVSG has continued to play a leading role in the national campaigns of the Asbestos Victims Support Groups' Forum UK.**

Graham Dring of GMAVSG chaired the Forum until September 2019. On 29th July 2019, after a 2 year battle in the courts, the Supreme Court ruled that the Forum can access certain documents relating to asbestos manufacturer Cape Intermediate Holdings Limited. The battle to access additional documents is still ongoing.

Graham Dring of GMAVSG, on behalf of the Forum, applied in 2017 to access documents from a legal case against Cape, which were due to be destroyed.

The documents will contain valuable information about what the asbestos industry really knew about the dangers of asbestos, and about how it used its influence to water down health and safety standards in the UK. The documents should help asbestos victims pursuing compensation cases in court.

Graham & the Forum would not have been able to pursue this case without the agreement of its legal team to act pro bono. Our thanks go out to Harminder Bains of Leigh Day Solicitors and Rob Weir QC, Jonathan Butters and Harry Sheehan of Devereux Chambers.

GMAVSG also helped to co-ordinate the Forum's ongoing campaign to equalise lump sum payments made under the Workers Compensation Act 1979 & the 2008 Diffuse Mesothelioma Payments Scheme. Widows & orphans forced to claim these payments after their loved one's death receive far too little. Thank you to all the MPs who have supported the campaign so far.

# DONATIONS

**We would like to thank all those who made donations to our charity in 2019-20. Many of you donated in memory of family and friends who have died from mesothelioma. Without your support, none of what we have achieved would have been possible. Thank you.**

Due to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), we can no longer list the names of those who have donated to us in our annual report. Please let us know if you are happy for your donation to be acknowledged on our website and social media instead.

## NEW FACES AT GMAVSG

Rob Rayner took over from Graham Dring as GMAVSG co-ordinator in September 2019. Graham is still with GMAVSG, but he has gone part-time. Jeff Eaman retired in September 2019. Reginald Opara, an experienced welfare rights adviser, has joined the team. On our trustees, Barbara Eason has stood down, and Lorraine Creech of Mesothelioma UK has kindly agreed to join in her stead.



# MEETINGS 2019-20

1st April 2019	Living Well meeting
16th April 2019	Asbestos Victims Support Groups Forum meeting
17th April 2019	GMAVSG trustees meeting
8th May 2019	Bereaved Families meeting
8th May 2019	Rally against the asbestos trade at the Russian embassy
13th May 2019	Living Well meeting (Dr Paul Taylor on clinical trials)
15th May 2019	Diffuse Mesothelioma Payments Scheme (DMPS) committee
16th May 2019	Meeting with Lord Alton about Isle of Man asbestos victims
3rd June 2019	Living Well meeting (canal cruise)
5th June 2019	AGM / Bereaved Families meeting
28th June 2019	National Centre for Mesothelioma Research exhibition
1st July 2019	Living Well meeting
5th July 2019	Action Mesothelioma Day
17th July 2019	GMAVSG trustees meeting
24th July 2019	Bereaved Families summer outing (canal cruise)
5th August 2019	Living Well meeting (Dave Brown, mesothelioma patient)
2nd September 2019	Living Well meeting (nutrition & mesothelioma)
11th September 2019	Launch of CLASAG (Cumbria & Lancashire asbestos victims)
20th September 2019	Mesothelioma conference, Wythenshawe hospital
7th October 2019	Living Well meeting (Joanne Gordon, exercise & mesothelioma)
4th November 2019	Living Well meeting (Rob Rayner on 1999 asbestos ban)
13th November 2019	Bereaved Families meeting
22nd November 2019	20th anniversary of UK asbestos ban event



2nd December 2019	Living Well Christmas lunch
3rd December 2019	Asbestos Victims Support Groups Forum meeting
17th December 2019	Diffuse Mesothelioma Payments Scheme (DMPS) committee
18th December 2019	Bereaved Families Christmas lunch
8th January 2020	Bereaved Families meeting
13th January 2020	Living Well meeting (trip to the pub, as our venue was shut!)
22nd January 2020	GMAVSG trustees meeting
30th January 2020	Trade Union Congress (TUC) Pensioners meeting
3rd February 2020	Living Well meeting (Dr Judith Lyons & Sue Jackson)
17th February 2020	Asbestos Victims Support Groups Forum meeting
2nd March 2020	Living Well meeting (Tai Chi with Marie Leddy)
11th March 2020	Bereaved Families meeting

# FINANCE UPDATE

1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020

**Provided by Caroline Bedale - Treasurer**

**Our finances continue to be very satisfactory.  
We had been saving a bit each year to add to our reserves,  
to ensure that we would have enough to keep us going if we  
lost any of our main sources of funding.**

When COVID-19 struck at the end of the financial year, our prudence proved well justified, as one of our main future fundraising events – Action Mesothelioma Day in July 2020 – had to be cancelled.

The panel of six firms of solicitors provided our main income (£90,000). We are very grateful for their continued financial support, and for their work for our clients who use them.

Sponsorship and donations for Action Mesothelioma Day in July 2019 raised nearly £14,000, and donations throughout the year over £40,000. Our donors keep us going, and the level of their generosity shows how much they value our help.

During the year we also received a grant of £24,000 from MAPS Benevolent Trust, which aims to address and raise awareness of industrial causes of illness and disease and support those affected, as this year they are concentrating on asbestos. That work funded by MAPS continues into 2020/21.

Our main expenditure is to pay the workers, about £82,000 in total (not each!) including oncosts. We also upgraded computer equipment (about £3,000, funded by the MAPS grant). This was absolutely vital given how much our work involves maintaining databases of information, searching the internet, and communicating with official bodies. General running expenses and organising events accounted for the rest of the non-staffing expenditure of £30,000.

# COVID-19 UPDATE

At the time of writing, all GMAVSG staff are working from home to help limit the spread of COVID-19.

For the same reason, we have suspended home visits, and we are offering phone advice only. Our Action Mesothelioma Day event in 2020 was held virtually. Some of our support group meetings have had to be cancelled, others have had to be held virtually.

Despite this, we are still taking referrals. As always, we aim to offer an appointment to people with mesothelioma & lung cancer within a few days of being referred to us.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the members of our solicitors panel for their support in 2019-20: Thompsons; Irwin Mitchell; Slater & Gordon; Leigh Day; Field Fisher; and Asbestos Law Partnership.

Thanks to our volunteer trustees, who have supported and directed our work in 2019-20: Caroline Bedale; Anthony Coombs; Barbara Eason; Ann Oldham; Vera Rigby; Lauren Ross; Geoffrey Tweedale; Tony Whitston; Lorraine Creech.

We would especially like to thank Barbara Eason & Jeff Eaman for their many years of dedicated work on behalf of asbestos victims. Barbara & Jeff's dedication & compassion have been truly inspiring.

Yours faithfully

**Rob Rayner, Graham Dring &  
Reginald Opara (GMAVSG Staff)**

August 2020