Chair of Manchester children's hospice retires after 31 years as a trustee

Friday 6 October, 2023

Chris Roberts steps down after more than three decades at Francis House Children's Hospice.

Mr Roberts joined the charity as a trustee in 1992, quickly becoming part of the fabric of Francis House. He took over as Chair in 2014 following the retirement of Robin Wood.

Francis House was established in 1990 to benefit the families of children with life-limiting conditions from across Greater Manchester. The hospice opened in 1991 - only the fifth children's hospice to be built in the UK.

During his nine years as Chair, Chris has overseen a period of significant growth with the development of two residential properties providing a place of permanent residence for young people with life-limiting or life-threatening conditions.

The ground-breaking projects in Didsbury and Heaton Moor, operated by Francis House Families Ltd, offer a comfortable and supportive living environment to a dozen young people.

Chris stood down as Chair at a trustee meeting on October 5 with Jane Kempler taking over the position having been voted in as the new Chair.

As a chartered accountant in the early 1990s, Chris was visiting Wardley Hall, the Bishop of Salford's residence and the finance office for the Diocese of Salford, when Father Thomas Mulheran, told him that the Bishop was looking for an accountant to join the Trustees at Francis House and was requesting volunteers. Unable to refuse, Chris has served on the main trustee body and the finance sub committee since its inception.

> "It has been an honour and a privilege to be involved at Francis House. The devotion of the staff to the young people and their parents is inspirational to say the least.
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> "My first impression of Francis House was walking into the reception to see a young girl running with a long tube attached to an oxygen tank, this being carried as fast as he could by a carer.
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> "This was Kirsty Howard whose spirit and enjoyment in life embodied much of what Francis House is about. Whilst of course there are sad moments at the hospice, it is evident from the reactions of the young people and their families, and the testaments they give that it is a place they look forward to coming to and which provides a service not available elsewhere.
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> "When I joined the trustees, Sister Aloysius was running the hospice and Robin Wood was Chair, sister was a true force of nature to whom nothing was impossible and let little stand in her way.
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> "In more recent years the development of Francis Lodge and the residential accommodation has proved to be an outstanding project. Once more this is largely down to the vision and hard work of David Ireland and his team.
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> "Thank you to David, all the staff, young people and volunteers that have and continue to make Francis House a truly wonderful place. Thanks also to the other trustees who willingly give up their time and expertise in many areas to help make Francis House what it is today. An especial thank you to Martin Lochery who is retiring with me. I am positive that Jane Kempler as the new Chair will be an asset to the hospice, the trustees and the chief executive."

Jane Kempler joined the board of trustees in 2020 having recently retired from corporate life with experience in operational management of call centres, sales and customer service.

> Jane said: "I would like to thank Chris for his many years as a trustee and Chair of the trustees and guiding me into this role. Francis House plays a key part in the community on so many levels, as well as the clinical care there is the physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual care that can never be underestimated.

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> “I am looking forward to working with the Francis House team and my fellow trustees in taking Francis House through the next phase in the history of the hospice, continuing the excellent delivery of care and working through future innovations.”

David Ireland, chief executive of Francis House said: “Francis House has been fortunate to attract so many people who have given time and expertise freely in order to benefit our many families. Chris and Martin have been part of the fabric from the very beginning and Francis House has benefited so much from their guidance and leadership.

“Whatever the situation I have personally relied on their wise advice and unerring support and will miss having them on the end of the telephone particularly in the difficult times, I’m sure that Sister Aloysius felt the same way. We wish them long and healthy retirements and look forward to the next phase of our history as we move forward with Jane as Chair.”

To find out more about the work of Francis House visit www.francishouse.org.uk

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