

“From the Chair” for BHA News:

As you will see announced elsewhere in this edition of BHA News, our Chief Executive for the past eight years, Hanne Stinson, is stepping down from the role in a short time.

Hanne came to us at a time when the BHA was a lot smaller and needed to develop in many ways. She has brought the BHA from a few staff and revenues of under £300,000, to 12 mostly full time staff and, in 2008, income approaching £1million. Hanne joined us from the Red Cross, where she had worked for 16 years, including on the development and implementation of an education programme relating to the principles and values of the Red Cross, the Geneva Conventions and human rights law, and in management development, experience which she has used well at the BHA.

When she first arrived, Hanne said:

“When I first heard the word I thought there was something positive about being a humanist and that is a message I would like to help put across”.

She was looking for a more campaigning role and said that her targets were a higher profile for the BHA, more effective lobbying, better education materials, professional support for the ceremonies network, and improved media management. These targets have certainly been achieved in the past eight years.

The BHA’s impact within the field of equality and human rights has been dramatically enhanced and, particularly with last year’s Atheist Bus Campaign success and the Darwin events this year, we are punching well above the weight that might be expected from an organisation with our membership numbers. We now have significant profile and influence, even if there are key campaign wins that we are still fighting for.

In 2003 Hanne moved the BHA head office to “Godless Gower Street” and in 2004 she was appointed to the Religion and Belief task force and later the Stakeholders’ Reference Group for the creation of the Equality and Human Rights Commission. By 2006 a MORI poll had indicated that there were up to 17 million potential British humanists and the Parliamentary Humanist Group became all party, and we started attending party political conferences in 2007. A key contribution was made by the BHA to the successful pressure for the abolition of the UK Blasphemy law in 2008.

Alongside these increased activities, Hanne has built a strong team of key senior staff across many areas of the BHA and overseen the rebuilding of the Ceremonies Network. The BHA Board of Trustees, on behalf of all British Humanists, recognises a great debt of gratitude to Hanne for the dedication she has shown to our cause over the past eight years - a dedication that even lead to her being tattooed with the BHA’s Happy Human logo in the cause of fundraising. I am sure that the staff will miss her greatly and we all wish her well in the next challenges that she will no doubt take on.

As part of our review of BHA plans at this time of year, the Board of Trustees will be conducting a review of our medium to long term strategy with staff. Clearly this will inform the targets for a new Chief Executive, whom we hope to have in place early in the New Year. I and my colleagues are

confident that we can continue to gain momentum with our public awareness and key equality and human rights campaigns, at the same time developing inspiration and support for all humanists in Britain.

Robert Ashby