

Mark Waller

Doctor of Civil Law

Durham Cathedral, 7 July 2022

Charlie Waller, a Durham University graduate, was a strong, funny, popular, kind young man, with a close and loving family. He was the life and soul of every party, a talented actor with a mesmerising stage presence and a formidable rugby player. He was also flying high in his chosen career in advertising. To the outside world, he had everything to live for.

Yet in September 1997, at the age of 28, Charlie took his own life. Suffering from depression, he felt he no longer had the strength to continue. There had been few outward signs of a debilitating mental health difficulty that appears to have been actively concealed from everyone.

Denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance are typically experienced by all who lose a loved one. However, the ways we react to severe grief over time are highly personal and can vary substantially. For some, traumatic grief results in a state of demoralization that critically impairs any sense of personal agency. Others may seek distraction by engaging vigorously in various pursuits, yet nevertheless fail to escape the persistent sense of dysphoria or anhedonia that are often by-products of concealed grief.

Sir Mark Waller, Charlie's father, together with his wife, Lady Waller, followed neither of these paths. At Charlie's funeral, they resolved to do whatever they could to help ensure that their tragic experience did not befall others. This goal proved challenging at a time when many educational organisations still considered the provision of mental health support to be someone else's problem, or not a problem at all. However, a quarter of a century later, the Charlie Waller Trust, one of the UK's most respected mental health charities, offers a vision of a world where people understand and talk openly about mental health, where young people, and those who support them, are equipped to maintain and enhance their mental health and wellbeing, and have the confidence to seek help when they need it. To help achieve this, the Trust offers

education and training free at the point of need to young people and those with responsibility for their wellbeing.

Born and bred in the North-East, Mark studied Law at Kings College, Durham University, based in Newcastle. He became a QC in 1979, a judge in 1989, and was appointed to the Court of Appeal and the Privy Council in 1996. He served as Commissioner of the Intelligence Services from 2011-16, a clear indication of the respect and trust he engendered at the highest levels of Government.

Mark considers himself to have been 'phenomenally lucky' despite being a lifetime supporter of Newcastle United Football Club. This perspective is derived not only from his happy experiences of family and professional life but also from the satisfaction of knowing that he and his family, have helped to change awareness and understanding about mental health on a massive scale. In focusing upon serving the needs of others, rather than his own misfortune, Sir Mark is a credit to our region and our university.

Chancellor I present Mark Waller to receive the degree of Doctor of Civil Law honoris causa.