

'I organised my daughter Kate's funeral...and people said it was inspirational'

ON Saturday, July 12, Diane Mitchell received the worst news a mother can ever hear.

"A nurse at the University Hospital of Wales called me and said: 'Your daughter died 20 minutes ago'."

Diane's daughter Kate Stephenson was just 44.

Diane, well known in Barry as an artist, was devastated – few parents expect to be faced with the tragedy of saying a final farewell to their child.

Amid the trauma following her daughter's death, Diane took on the

by TIM CHAPMAN

responsibility of working out the funeral arrangements.

"We thought there was insurance to help with the costs of a funeral, only to find out Kate had accident cover and not life cover.

"I was faced with the huge worry of how to raise money to pay for the funeral."

The University Hospital of Wales had handed Diane a bereavement book with practical advice for people who had lost a loved-one.

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Mum's inspiring funeral service for her daughter

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One paragraph stood out, emphasising that families don't have to hold a funeral ceremony, or use a religious minister or funeral director.

A telephone number quoted in the book was for The Natural Death Centre (01962 712690) and Diane gave the centre a ring.

She told the woman that she had noted the points made regarding a minister and funeral directors.

"The lady said: 'Is it a revelation to you?' I said 'absolutely'.

She explained that if I could find a suitable vehicle, I could pick up the body and take it to the crematorium."

In fact, Diane discovered that as long as she followed some simple rules she could organise the whole funeral herself—effectively organising her own family send-off, and drastically reducing the costs.

Friends and family gave vital help and support throughout the process.

Diane obtained the relevant form from the coroner's office so she had permission for the cremation.

"My cousin Nicola



The coffin Diane prepared for Kate's funeral which featured one of her daughter's passions – her love of cats.

and her partner Graham were very supportive. Graham acquired a new van to pick Kate up from the mortuary.

"I already had a coffin in my work room which I'd started to paint for myself. I thought 'it's silly not to use it' and changed the design for Kate.

"The men at the mortuary said it was the most beautiful coffin they had seen. My friend Antonia had lined it for me."

Diane led the funeral service at Cardiff and Glamorgan Crematorium on Port Road East.

"Jane and her colleagues at the crematorium were very helpful. As people

arrived, Faure's *Requiem* was played."

Diane gave the eulogy, describing Kate as "beautiful, talented, intelligent, adventurous, creative, feisty, unafraid, happy, loving, generous, and funny".

She concluded by saying: "I did a meditation on the day Kate died, and had a vision of her dancing and saying – 'I'm free, I'm free'."

Other members of the family also made contributions during the service.

Diane said: "People described the service as 'powerful, spiritual, inspirational, and, above all, personal'.

"When people are grieving and their

emotions are raw, they don't want to be worried about how they are going to pay for a funeral – I hope my experience may help them.

"I want people to be aware that there is an alternative to the traditional funeral.

"I also want to thank all my dog walking friends on Nell's Point for their kindness at such a difficult time."

At some stage in the future, Diane, Kate's son Dylan and family members will make a pilgrimage to an area that held a special place in Kate's heart

"We plan to scatter her ashes over the Malvern Hills, a place she loved and where she had been so happy."