

# New memorial for the Botanics



A new memorial for Scottish organ and tissue donors is to be situated in the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh.

The memorial will be designed as a lasting tribute to Scottish organ and tissue donors who generously made the decision to donate their organs after their death so that others might live.

The memorial will allow the families of donors, transplant recipients and others whose lives have been touched by donation or transplantation a place for quiet contemplation and to celebrate the kindness of giving and sharing.

The artist appointed to carry out this task is Alec Finlay. Scottish born Alec is an internationally acclaimed artist who is currently based in Edinburgh. His work reflects on human interaction with the natural environment.

Minister for Public Health Michael Matheson said:

“We are delighted to have an artist of Alec’s calibre and reputation involved in the creation of this memorial. We are also very grateful to the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh for their support and for giving us a home for this project

“Through the selfless generosity of organ donors and their families, who at a time of great tragedy honour their loved-ones wishes, many lives are saved and transplant recipients go on to lead full and active lives. It is right and fitting that we should acknowledge the gift that is given through organ donation with a public memorial.”

Artist Alec Finlay said:

“I really wanted to be involved in this project, there is no better task for an artist or poet than to respond to complex and deep emotions, which this memorial is bound to bring up. It will be challenging, of course, because you are dealing with people’s experiences.

“I remember something the writer Jenny Diski said about weakness being a part of life. Illness, loss and death, we all need to come to terms with these. But when it comes to organ donation, this takes on a specific intensity because in our time, and never before, we have evolved through medical possibility. There is a relationship between life and death through the gifting of organs. It’s a remarkable thing and yet it exists within a health system that belongs to all of us in Scotland.

“No one involved in organ donation thinks this is a simple concept but it is a reminder that we are all connected to one another, and that we can, potentially, help one another.”

Donor families, transplant recipients and healthcare professionals are working closely with Alec Finlay and also with experts from the art world to develop this beautiful and lasting tribute to Scottish organ and tissue donors. It will be a living memorial which will involve planting and landscaping that will fit perfectly into the beautiful surroundings of the Garden.

Organ and tissue transplantation touches the lives of young and old and the memorial will recognise this. Importantly, it will also reflect the themes and values of organ donation and transplantation such as generosity, sensitivity, thoughtfulness and the giving of the gift of life.

Director of Horticulture at RBGE Dr David Rae said:

“The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh is proud to host this memorial and the exact location has been chosen jointly by Garden staff, the artist Alec Finlay, and representatives of

donors and recipients. It is a quiet, tranquil site surrounded by Scottish native species. We are sure that the artwork and its location will create a sensitive and inspiring memorial for all those affected by transplantation and donation and are pleased that the whole project has developed in a truly collaborative way involving all concerned."

The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh was chosen as a home for the memorial because of the beauty and tranquillity of the surroundings and because of its world-wide reputation as a base for contemporary art.

A working group has been established for the memorial made up of those who have donated loved one's organs and those who have received organs.

Sandra Warden donated her 11-year-old daughter Rachel's organs, saving three lives, she explained:

"Having a national memorial to recognise and remember all those who, in death were able to give the greatest gift of all – that of life – is very important.

"I hope it will make people think about organ donation and discuss with their loved ones what they would like them do if anything ever happened to them. From when she was very young Rachel understood organ donation and made me promise we would donate her organs if anything ever happened to her and we fulfilled her wishes."

Gill Hollis, who is the recipient of a lung transplant and also on the working group, said: "The national organ donation memorial is very important to me. My transplant anniversary is now more important than my real birthday and I try to make the most of every day, not just for me and my family, but also for the person whose life saved mine.

"It's impossible to thank my donor enough for the gift they gave me, but I'm really looking forward to having a place that

recognises and remembers them.