

“I wasn’t immune to grief ... I cried unmanly tears for hours everyday ... I learned how to smile and be optimistic in my son’s presence and to cry and sob in private ... Nowadays it is me who disintegrates at the drop of a hat.” Greg Crooks Author of “Can I take my Panda Daddy?”

Tuesday 14th September 1999 dawned as a typical mid-north coast spring day. It was a weekday, a working day, an everyday kind of day. Not the sort of day for a family tragedy.

Though my son, Sean, had been sick off and on for weeks, and getting worse, my wife, Jane, and I had no idea he was terminally ill. As a nurse with a zillion years of experience, I should have been alert to the signs. Severe headaches, dribbling, slurred speech and stumbling gait are not normal in a healthy four year old.



When Sean and I walked hand in hand into the Coffs Harbour Base Hospital that Tuesday for ‘tests’, I did expect a serious illness diagnosis. What I didn’t expect was a brain stem tumour diagnosis. Though it was couched in terms like ‘mass’ and ‘lesion,’ I knew instantly that my beautiful little boy’s days were numbered.

The grief I experienced at that moment knew no bounds. It was energy sucking, heart stopping and soul destroying. Worse, it was not a once only thing. Horrible information just kept coming. Bang, bang, bang; so fast that my pain grew exponentially. With great difficulty, I told Jane, our daughter, Sophie, and our families about Sean. Then Jane and I had to leave our home, our jobs and Sophie. Soon we were agreeing to brain surgery, life-extending radiotherapy and a million other things. For a while the pain in our hearts kept growing. ‘All they ever tell us is bad news’ Jane grew accustomed to saying.

We, Sean, Jane and I, spent almost nine weeks in The Children’s Hospital at Westmead. Each of us developed new behaviours during those weeks of general anaesthetics, radiation and rehabilitation. To cope with the onslaught of changes in our lives, as well as the physical and emotional pain those changes caused, we found ourselves falling into rigid roles.

Though struck dumb by his condition and treatment, Sean matured into a very brave little boy. He became tolerant of the worst kind of assaults. Naso-pharyngeal suction, cannulas and blood tests were his daily lot. Sean, that formerly kind, generous and caring little fellow, also discovered anger, with doctors mainly – ‘the doctors made me sick Daddy,’ he told me much later. For a time he forgot how to smile. For a time he even blamed Jane and I.

Jane became Sean’s chief protector. She guarded him from unkind medicos. She kept conversations on his condition at a distance. She held his hand, stroked his forehead, read him stories and never showed any doubts in his presence. Jane spent all her waking hours at Sean’s side. She only left him in the day to eat or pray, and then briefly and only if I was there to relieve her. And when Jane left him at night, it was to spend hours crying and praying.

In contrast to Jane, and from the beginning, I was overcome by a need to do something. Unable to cure Sean or to repair the situation, as any father or home handyman or nurse should, I raced around doing. Where Jane returned to basics, to nurture, protect and love, I asked questions, sought and dispersed information, organised, paid bills and shopped – for provisions and for anything that could possibly please Sean. Like Jane, I learned how to smile and be optimistic in Sean’s presence and to cry and moan and sob in private. Unlike Jane, I became the provider. I hunted prey and filled the larder. I was a nurse, and a man, but out of his territory. I became a father and a husband in the truest sense of the words.

Yet Sean still died. Four months after our air ambulance flight south and just into the new millennium. We pretended to Sean that he was going to get better right up until his last few days. At times we fooled ourselves into believing he had a chance. To think otherwise meant discarding our parental roles. To think otherwise meant giving up on the only son we knew we would ever have.

Yet Sean still died. All our love, all Jane’s tender ministrations and all my tearing about, amounted to nought. In the final judgement we were unable to protect and save

Contents

Director’s Report	4	Bereavement Counselling Service	8
Education Program	5	Courses	10
International educator Program 2006	6	New Publications	11

him. He died and we were left with his cold and pale body to kiss and anoint. Jane was left to wail uncontrollably over him and I was made to carry his stiffening form to a waiting funeral vehicle. And then the world went quiet.

I made a decision to write a book early in our hospital stay. Where Jane blotted out tragic thoughts to give her strength for each challenge, I stored everything that happened for future reference. I turned my brain into a diary. I kept shopping lists and jotted down names. I photographed everything.

The first words I wrote after Sean died were of a religious nature. Though I had seen death many times, I had little idea of what went on in the immediate aftermath (I have since learnt that few do). I was certainly unprepared for the effort involved and unaware of the decisions that had to be made. Neither was Jane. Like me, Jane wanted Sean's final public appearance to be perfect and memorable. But her strength soon ebbed. Jane prepared the flowers and discussed the program. She was unable to write Sean's prayer. This meant that I, a lifelong atheist, had to. Surprisingly, my efforts were appreciated by all.

After that, the words came easy. They were not cathartic as everyone imagines. I wrote less about feelings and emotions and more about facts and figures and people and places. I was writing a book for Sean. I was telling his and our story.

My writings kept me busy. They made me feel I was doing something for Sean. I was keeping his spirit alive, if you will. Where Jane locked herself in our bedroom and let grief reign, I wrote. Later, when Jane created memorial gardens around our bushland home, I delved into textbooks and hospital records. Don't think I was immune to grief, I wasn't. I cried unmanly tears for hours every day but, unlike Jane, I didn't wish death upon myself, not then anyway. I had a job to do.

Jane said last night that her grief is different to mine because she 'gave birth to Sean.' She is right. I was there for Sean's delivery. I changed his nappies. I packed his preschool lunch. I answered his philosophical questions and read him stories. But he wasn't part of my physiological being. I didn't share his hormones, his blood and his soul for thirty nine weeks.

We are holidaying in a cabin at the Crescent Head Caravan Park. I had a great surf on the point late yesterday. This morning it is raining and the ocean is messy. Yet the rain is somehow cheering.

Today is Father's Day. It was very mean of me but a short time ago I rejected my daughter's attempt to present me with a gift. I smiled and said 'In a little while darling.' My typing must not be interrupted. Today is also Sean's tenth birthday and I must again pay tribute to him.

Our lives still revolve around our son. They always will. We give far more of our time and affection to Sophie than before but never enough. We do our best but our happiness, our joie de vivre, went with Sean. I don't even know if Sophie remembers what we were like before. She has learnt to be quiet and independent. I know she tries to avoid comparison.

As we do every year, Jane, Sophie and I will climb a hill for Sean today. Later, this evening, we will light a candle and make our wishes. Jane doesn't pray these days, she has lost her god. However, like me, she will remember Sean as he was and wonder why. Sophie will withdraw a little, as always, and then ask 'What's for tea?' We will all grieve, individually and differently but together and as a family.

I had, and still have, a lot of trouble explaining grief. I spent weeks, months actually, trying to describe my feelings on paper. In the end I gave up. Everything I wrote seemed inadequate. Some novelists can convey deep emotion with seeming ease. I could not. That was why I chose to tell my story simply and without embellishment. I reasoned that way readers would experience our journey vicariously.

One thing I can tell you is that if your child dies from a terminal condition your grieving will commence at diagnosis. I can also tell you that even though grief affects each of us differently and to differing degrees, if your child dies you will grieve forever. Grief following the death of a child may lessen over time but it will never go away.

During the last twelve months, my father, an auntie and an uncle died. I cried for none of them. No matter the cause of death, they had lived their lives. My father, especially, had been sick for some time. I had already grieved for him.

Some months ago, a close friend died in the prime of his life. Cancer again. My tears were such that I drew curious (and knowing) glances. I cried those same tears when our old dog, Sean's Red, was put down. Sophie was far more stoical than I. Jane couldn't watch.

Jane cried the most after Sean died. Nowadays it is me who disintegrates at the drop of a hat. A piece of music, a ray of sunshine between dawn clouds, an act of kindness heard or seen, is all it takes. However, Jane's calm mannerisms and easy smiles are just for show. My wife has built a wall around her Sean memories. Sean was her 'perfect little boy.' He was the one who made our family 'complete.'

Though unable to read or contribute information to my book, Jane was, and is, very supportive of my endeavours. She encouraged me to extend our mortgage so I could self-publish. She puts her arms around me when I cry after difficult interviews.

Today, Sean gave me a battered Kombi Van with surfboards on top. It looks like the one I travelled from Asia to Europe in decades ago. The shoe box-sized model came with a card. It read, 'Happy Father's Day. I'm sure our little boy is very proud of you for telling his story. Love Jane, Sophie (& Sean xxx).'

Photo courtesy of The Daily Examiner, Grafton NSW

Moving into their Comfort Zone

“As part of our programs we were providing support groups open to either gender as well as one specifically for fathers. Few men were attending any of the groups. The poor attendance over the years indicated that very few men were comfortable in these settings. Osterweis, et al 1984, “Men use self help groups less than women”, and that the male role “as protector, provider and problem solver makes accepting and receiving help difficult”. This did not mean that the death of a child had any less impact on a man. Their expression of grief just takes different forms.

In bereavement support which assumes the expression of feelings in words and discussion, a man’s grief can be unrecognised and unacknowledged. It is not uncommon for fathers to find the focus is on the mother’s grief following the death of a child. They are often asked, “How is your wife?” – not “How are you going?”

What was clear from the literature was the importance that activity played as a means of helping men process their grief. Martin and Doka (1998) wrote, “when men respond behaviourally to loss they often resort to activity”. There had to be an alternative means of offering bereavement support to men. It was decided to develop ways to engage men in a manner that was supportive of their grieving style.

So we had to devise some activities that would have more appeal to bereaved fathers than what we currently offered. Golf was suggested by one father as having appeal to men. Fishing was another. It was to be a normal and familiar activity that was not taking men out of their comfort zones – they were activities to which fathers could obviously relate.

The first activity was 18 holes of golf followed by lunch of nibbles, sandwiches and beer or soft drink. Twelve men attended. Some brought a relative or mate, others came alone; they were given that option. This was important for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it made it easier for father to come knowing that there was someone present whom they knew. Secondly, this male companion, be it their father, brother or mate, may be the closest male in their lives who had been there to support them through many painful times since their child died. The largest attendance so far was the fishing trip held in February this year where twenty two men came along, including fifteen fathers.

Could simple activities such as golf or fishing be of benefit to the participants in any other way than the obvious? How could participation in these leisure pursuits be of benefit to grieving fathers? These activities were bringing together men of various social and economic backgrounds across a broad spectrum of the community. Of course, the common thread between them all was that all of them had experienced the death of one of their children. They had come together with their prime focus being on the activity. They were literally “all in the same boat”. There was absolutely no pressure or expectation on them to talk about their child. The

activity provided an opportunity for bereaved fathers to get together with others in a setting where they would not feel self-conscious. Everyone knew this was no ordinary golf day. They would not be there if their child had not died. It was akin to being a member of a club that nobody wanted to belong to. The essence of the experience was being with others who had all been through the something equally as tragic without really having to articulate it. Each father knew that the man who was teeing off ahead of him had probably suffered a loss as equally as painful as the one he had experienced.

On the fishing boat for 4 hours, fathers get plenty of time to think and reflect. Talking to the man next to them about the one that got away may be a good ice-breaker. It may lead to more serious conversation; perhaps to talk about their deceased child or it may not. Again this may occur at lunch time back on shore over a sandwich and beer. The activity seemed to give legitimacy or “the green light” to talk about their child with others. In some cases fathers would not talk about their child at all and that was perfectly okay too. Perhaps it could best be described as a support group without the typical conventional structure of a support group.

The overwhelming feedback provided by fathers in the evaluation was that participating in a fishing or golfing activity provided the stimulus for them to go home afterwards and talk to their partners. It indicated that the activity was not just experienced and enjoyed in isolation but, more importantly, it was taken back into the father’s “ordinary” lives and relationships.

Other fathers talked about the activity as providing “a chance to talk to others about what happened”. As one father said, it provided “an opportunity for fathers to tell their story which may not have been told for a long time”. It was the activity, golf or fishing, that provided the forum or means for fathers to tell their stories. Fathers also commented on the benefits of being with people who have had a painful experience similar to their own. You feel “less alone to know that ordinary blokes have gone through it”. “Ordinary blokes” who have all experienced in different ways extraordinarily painful losses that the average male does not experience.

Facilitating a golfing or fishing day for a group of bereaved fathers certainly took me out of my comfort zone. I am not the “blokey” sort of person who feels particularly comfortable in pursuing these sort of activities with other men, even more so when it is my task to facilitate them.

Facilitating these activities challenged my thinking. As a bereavement counsellor, I was certainly more at home in a more traditional counselling situation - listening, acknowledging, normalising expressions of grief in a “one to one” or a support group setting. It changes the power relationship that can exist in more traditional counselling relationships. It is also a great equaliser when the counsellor finds difficulty in casting his rod.

At first, I questioned in my own mind the therapeutic benefit of fishing in Westernport Bay. Was this professional bereavement counselling work? Was it nothing more than a social activity?

It is professional work and it is not just social. While activities are relaxed, informal and pleasurable and it appears to be just a social activity, there is more to it. There is absolutely no pressure on anyone to talk about their situation but the reality is that most men do so without being self-conscious or they go home and talk to their partners. It provides a setting that is very comfortable for the fathers - **it is in their comfort zone**. However, it is a setting much less comfortable for the counsellor. Part of the discomfort I felt and the dilemma I faced was coming to terms with the fact that this really valuable professional work was taking place in a setting that was comfortable for the clients, but not for me.

What are the lessons to be learnt out of these successful Fathers' activities?

Small, but very valuable windows of opportunity to talk to grieving fathers on a boat whilst waiting for a bite. The activities provided a chance for a few Dads to develop friendships they have maintained over time. A clear lesson to be learnt also is to ask fathers what they want and not to presume that we know what is best for them. What started out as activities that nobody was sure would work or have any appeal are now an accepted part of our bereavement program provision. Finally, for the counsellor, the challenge is to cope with his discomfort, the sort of discomfort that clients feel when they come to see a counsellor. It is trying to think a little laterally in the provision of programs for bereaved fathers."

*Extract from "Moving into their Comfort Zone
Support for Fathers following with death of a young child.
Kevin Carlin, Counsellor, Sids and Kids Victoria*



From the Director Christopher Hall

In this final edition of *Connections* for 2005, it is appropriate to look back on the year that is almost complete and pause to reflect.

This year has seen a change in the name of the organisation from the Centre for Grief Education to the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement. This change is both a reflection of the expanding scope and broadening nature of our work. There has been a significant increase in demand for our programs and services throughout Australia in the past few years. Many years ago we extended our annual international educator program nationwide as a result of this demand. We are now working on providing a greater range of opportunities to participate in short courses and intensive learning opportunities. This change of name also reflects that our work extends beyond education alone with the Centre having a significant engagement in bereavement counselling and support initiatives, research activities, the production and dissemination of resources and publications, consultancies and information and referral services.

Early in 2006 the Centre will respond to the Department of Human Services tender for the provision of specialist bereavement services. With a strong and effective committee of management, a skilled and capable staff along with a strong track record in providing a broad mix of specialist services over the past ten years, the Centre is confident that it will be able to produce a compelling case for the Centre to continue to develop and provide a range of specialist interventions and innovative education services, informed by evidence based practice, for grieving people who are at risk of adverse outcomes and to build the capacity of the universal health services to provide bereavement supports and responses.

An important role that the Centre has taken up is the provision of advocacy and representation on grief and bereavement issues in order to inform policy development, raise community awareness and support universal access to mainstream grief and bereavement services.

This final edition of *Connections* for 2006 opens with Greg Cooks moving story of the death of his son Sean. Kevin Carlin from SIDS and Kids Victoria then writes about his innovative work in supporting bereaved men. You will also find details of our 2006 education program, the visit of Dr. Kenneth Doka as our eighth international educator program in 2006, a review of our journal *Grief Matters: The Australian Journal of Grief and Bereavement* and details of our bereavement counselling and support services.

May I take this opportunity to thank the staff and committee of management of the Centre for their wonderful work and support this year. Their leadership, talent and support have helped us to achieve some excellent outcomes throughout 2005. On behalf of the committee of management and the staff of the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement I wish for you a joyous Christmas and a safe and happy new year.

Annual Education Program

Members who attended our recent Annual General Meeting would have received the news that the last financial year (2004/2005) saw an increase of 18% (from the 2003/2004 period) in education programs delivered by the Centre for Grief Education. Over 973 hours of education was delivered during the financial reporting period, with a total of 2,197 participants.

The breakdown of the overall participation figures goes on to further explain the types of training that makes up this figure. A combined total of 1,061 participants attended education programs from our training calendar (including seminars, workshops and courses) and other education activities (eg. conferences other than those organised by the Centre), and a total of 1,136 participants attended customised training sessions.

These statistics highlight the increase in the Centre's reputation and profile as a pre-eminent loss and grief education centre, not only in Victoria, but throughout Australia.

The first half of the new financial year has seen the trend of high participation numbers and great interest in Centre activities continue.

2006 Education Program

The 2006 Education Training Program will be available on the Centre's website in early December. Please be sure to download the program and read about the exciting initiatives scheduled for next year. Apart from some of the many popular programs, such as *Providing Effective Grief and Bereavement Support*, *Exploring Dimensions of Grief Within Disability*, *Loss and Grief Nurses Program*, *Complicated Grief and Managing Intense Emotions*, to name a few, the Centre will also be offering the following new programs:

A new seminar series to be presented by the Centre for Grief Education in association with St Vincent's Hospital. These seminars will be held at St Vincent's hospital and comprise of the following sessions:

- Grief and Adolescents
- Supporting the Grieving Child
- Compassion Fatigue
- Men and the Grief of Separation and Divorce
- Palliative Care and End of Life Issues
- Death of a Parent
- Companion Animal Grief Support Skills (a new two day workshop)
- Spirituality and Bereavement Counselling (one day workshop)

- Music and Grief: A Powerful Connection (half day workshop)
- Creativity in the Wake of Loss (forum)
- Attachment Theory: Understanding the Process of Attachment in Coping with Loss and Grief
- Reflections on Grief and Trauma in Migrant and Refugee Communities
- Crisis Intervention and Sudden and Unexpected Death
- Carer Loss and Grief
- What's Hot and What's Not: Recent Developments in Bereavement Theory

As well as these programs that will be held in Melbourne, the Centre is pleased to announce that a new two-day workshop will be presented in Sydney during the second half of the year. *Contemporary Issues in Bereavement Counselling: From Theory to Practice* is a direct result of the feedback and requests the Centre has received from people working in the loss and grief field in New South Wales. Further information on this program will be available in the new year.

For further information on the 2006 education program please contact Pam Buscemi, Manager – Education Programs, on (03) 9545 6377 or email p.buscemi@grief.org.au.

Eighth International Educator Program 2006

Dr Kenneth Doka, USA



The Centre for Grief Education is delighted to present the Eighth International Educator Program in 2006. This will be a unique opportunity to hear Dr. Kenneth J. Doka present two sessions on current theoretical perspectives on loss and grief and differences in grieving styles.

Dr. Kenneth J. Doka is a Professor of Gerontology at the Graduate School of The College of New Rochelle and Senior Consultant to the Hospice Foundation of America. A prolific author, Dr. Doka's books include *Living with Grief: Ethical Dilemmas at the End of Life*, *Living with Grief: Alzheimer's Disease*, *Living with Grief: Coping with Public Tragedy*; *Men Don't Cry, Women Do: Transcending Gender Stereotypes of Grief*; *Living with Grief: Loss in Later Life*, *Disenfranchised Grief: Recognizing Hidden Sorrow*; *Living with Life Threatening Illness*; *Children Mourning*, *Mourning Children*; *Death and Spirituality*; *Living with Grief: After Sudden Loss*; *Living with Grief: When Illness is Prolonged*; *Living with Grief: Who We Are, How We Grieve*; *Living with Grief: At Work, School and Worship*; *Living with Grief: Children, Adolescents and Loss*; *Caregiving and Loss: Family Needs, Professional Responses*; *AIDS, Fear and Society*; *Aging and Developmental Disabilities*; and *Disenfranchised Grief: New Directions, Challenges, and Strategies for Practice*.

In addition to these books, he has published over 60 articles and book chapters. Dr. Doka is editor of both *Omega* and *Journeys: A Newsletter for the Bereaved*.

Dr. Doka was elected President of the Association for Death Education and Counselling in 1993. In 1995, he was elected to the Board of Directors of the International Work Group on Dying, Death and Bereavement and served as chair from 1997-1999. The Association for Death Education and Counseling presented him with an Award for Outstanding Contributions in the Field of Death Education in 1998. In 2000 Scott and White presented him an award for Outstanding Contributions to Thanatology and Hospice.

**Melbourne, Canberra, Adelaide, Sydney, Brisbane
27 July – 15 August, 2006**

**New Zealand – Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch
18 – 29 August, 2006**

Cost per day

Standard Rate
\$200 payment after 1 May)

Early Bird / Student Rate
\$175 (payment to 30 April)

CGE member \$165

Morning and afternoon tea provided

Registration closes 13 July (Registration is essential)

**For further information contact the Centre for Grief Education on
(03) 9545 6377 or email p.bussemi@grief.org.au**

Grief Matters: The Australian Journal of Grief and Bereavement

Recipient Survey 2005

The journal *Grief Matters: The Australian Journal of Grief and Bereavement* has been published by the Centre for Grief Education since 1998, and encompasses both academic and applied aspects of grief and bereavement. *Grief Matters* is published with a central theme for each issue. Themes covered to date have focussed on:

- Grief and bereavement: Profiling recent Australian bereavement research
- Aboriginal grief and loss
- Children and grief
- HIV/AIDS and grief
- Trauma and grief
- Suicide and grief
- Disability and grief
- The interface between self-help and professionals
- Disability and grief
- Creative approaches to loss and grief
- The grief of separation and divorce
- Developments in loss and grief research and practice
- Rituals
- Families and grief
- Grief of children and adolescents
- Grief of domestic violence and sexual abuse
- Loss, grief and the older person
- Grief and acquired illness
- Support groups

Members of the Centre for Grief Education (organisational, individual and student/concessional membership) automatically receive three copies per year of *Grief Matters*. Subscriptions to *Grief Matters* are also available to individuals, organisations, institutions and libraries outside Victoria and overseas. The Centre for Grief Education website (www.grief.org.au) contains details of current membership and subscription rates.

In 2005, recipients of *Grief Matters: The Australian Journal of Grief and Bereavement* were surveyed to find out whether the journal meets the needs of those working with grieving and bereaved people. A prize incentive was offered to respondents. Congratulations to Mark Gibney of NSW who received \$50 of resources from the CGE Resources Guide.

A total of 69 completed surveys were returned.

In summary:

- 29% of respondents were counsellors, and 24% were social workers.
- *Two-thirds of respondents belonged to relevant professional organisations, with the top four organisations being AASW (Australian Association of Social Workers), APS (Australian Psychological Society), ACA (Australian Carers Association), and NALAG (National Association for Loss and Grief).*
- Respondents possessed an average of 14 copies of *Grief Matters*. One quarter of respondents had all 22 copies. Half the respondents had at least 12 copies.
- 68% of respondents were satisfied with receiving three editions per year of *Grief Matters*. 32% indicated they would prefer more editions per year.
- 81% of respondents prefer to receive a hard copy of *Grief Matters*. 15% would like to receive a pdf file as well as a hard copy, and 4% would prefer to receive a pdf file only.
- Three-quarters of respondents were happy with the balance between Australian and overseas authors. 16% would prefer more Australian authors.
- 91% of respondents were satisfied with the length of articles.

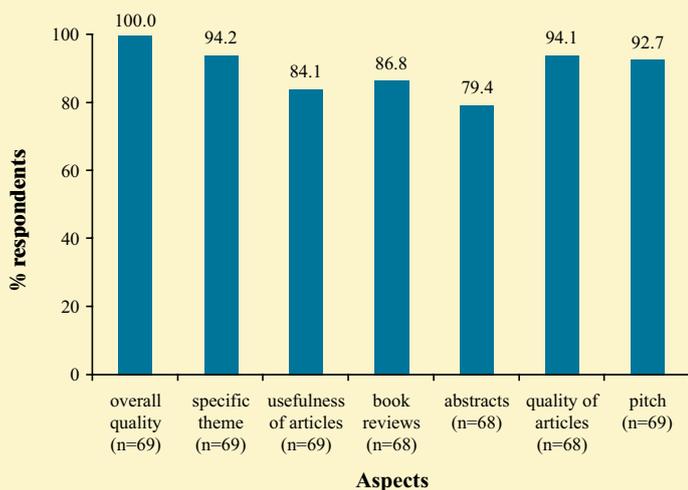
Respondents were asked to indicate their satisfaction with seven stated aspects of *Grief Matters* on a 5-point scale where 1 = not at all satisfied to 5 = extremely satisfied.

The seven stated aspects were:

1. Overall quality of the publication.
2. The focus in each addition on a specific theme.
3. Usefulness of articles.
4. Usefulness of book reviews.
5. Usefulness of abstracts.
6. Quality of articles.
7. Pitch of articles (e.g. accessible language)

Grief Matters: The Australian Journal of Grief and Bereavement

The figure below shows the percentage of respondents who were 'very' to 'extremely' satisfied with the stated aspects, with all respondents satisfied with the overall quality of the publication.



“Grief Matters” is an excellent journal to read and I enjoy the articles.’

‘Fantastically interesting publication that brings much further thought, communication and conversation. Congratulations. Thank you.’

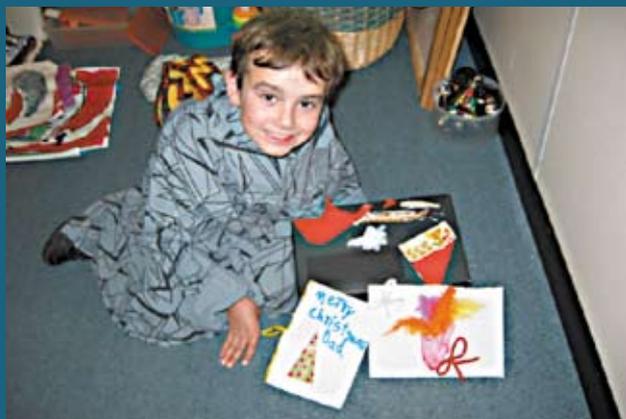
‘I find my on-going education relating to grief is greatly enhanced by reading your journal – I also train volunteers with sessions on grief and pass specific articles on to them. Grief Matters keeps me abreast of current thinking on this subject.’

‘I refer many health professionals and services to subscribe to Grief Matters – it’s an excellent Australian resource.’

Bereavement Counselling and Support Service

Bereavement Support Groups

Bereavement Support Groups provide a valuable option for people seeking help and support after bereavement, and they complement the face-to-face counselling work done within the Bereavement Counselling and Support Service. We have a terrific group of volunteers who work with the YBP and KG2 groups, and we have been fortunate to enlist additional help with the kids group from students from the Graduate Diploma in Child and Adolescent Counselling.



Kids Grieve Too Volunteer, Sue Earley, talks about why she volunteers and why it is important.

Kids Grieve Too, or KG2, is a support group designed for children between the ages of 4 & 14 who have experienced the death of someone significant in their lives. It is facilitated by a team of volunteers under the guidance of Marg Bailey and Anne Giljohann. We provide a safe and welcoming space that enables the children to look at their own experience of bereavement. When a loved person dies, children can feel overwhelmed and quite powerless. At KG2 we help give the children some power by exploring ways to work with their grief in a manner that builds resilience.

We meet once a month and have a program based around a theme, e.g. a seasonal theme like Mothers’ Day, Fathers’ Day, Christmas, or other themes such as Memories, Continuing Bonds and Self-Care. Volunteers meet with Marg for an hour before the children arrive. We are briefed about the theme and activity and also about any new children that may be joining the group. The children gather in one large group for an introduction from Marg where she checks on any birthdays, anniversaries or other special events that have occurred since we last met. The kids can often be rowdy and fragmented but this brings them together, settles them and creates the focus for the evening.

We usually then break into smaller groups. Most evenings we have an artistic activity, painting, making a memory box, decorating a candle. We talk about what they may like to do and often they express their emotions through the artwork. We ask them about their work and that is when the stories come out. They tell us about the impact of the death and the changes it has caused in their lives. There is no pressure, but this gives them an opportunity to share their feelings and concerns. By listening attentively, we help encourage this sharing. **They lead and we follow.**

We finish each session with a brief ritual. Each child lights a candle, says the name of their person who has died and, if they wish, they can say something they have learned from the group that evening. This ritual creates a calm, quiet focus to signify the close of our session. Most sessions last one and a half hours. All the children then join together in the large group for supper. When the children leave, the volunteers have a debriefing with Marg.

So, why do I do this work?

I find it enriching and meaningful. And it makes me realize I can make a difference, just by being there and listening to the kids. To see a child, newly bereaved and often bewildered and shy, come into a group where others are experiencing similar grief and then slowly start opening up and trusting is immensely moving. And I love to watch the relief on their faces as they start to relax when they realize it's OK to talk about this stuff. Some kids have been coming to KG2 for years and it is wonderful to see their development unfold over a longer period. To facilitate that process is a privilege.

Another reason I love to do this work is the team I work with. The volunteers are very committed, some have been doing this for many years. All come straight from the heart and are genuinely interested in the children. The kids pick this up quickly and that helps them feel secure. And Marg, Bailey is a terrific leader, incredibly enthusiastic and energetic and with a daggy sense of humour that endears her to kids and volunteers alike.

Another reason I love this work is because of personal experience. Many years ago I lost my precious husband to suicide. We had 4 very young children and I wish KG2 had been around then because it could have saved them a lot of heartache. There was no one except me to listen to their concerns, and I was severely traumatized myself. There was no place where they could be heard, in fact they were told by many that they had to keep the suicide a secret. And, like many kids at KG2, they tended to protect me as the surviving parent, not wanting to add their worries to mine, because they feared I might die too. My kids carried unresolved anxieties for years, especially a sense of shame and guilt that they had somehow caused the death, until they were finally able to articulate this and I was able to help them. This caused major disruption for some of them in later years. KG2 provides early intervention

and can help prevent kids carrying such unresolved anxieties that can undermine their confidence and harm their emotional development. My kids are all independent adults now but they would have benefited enormously from early intervention via KG2. And they all are really supportive of me doing this work.

Why is KG2 so important for kids?

KG2 gives kids a sense of belonging. Kids often tell us that this is the only place where they can talk about these issues, often they feel isolated at school, with their friends and even in their families. It is immensely comforting and reassuring for them to realize there are other kids also grieving in similar circumstances. Each kid's story is unique, each grief is unique but by sharing their experiences they can all learn from one another and know they are not alone. Kids need a special group separate from their parents and family, so they can feel free to say what they want without any fear of judgement. We have a rule they quickly learn, that what is said in the room stays in the room, so they know confidentiality is kept. KG2 is important to their well-being. By giving kids a special support group, we acknowledge their needs and validate their experience. We can help them identify concerns and intervene early so they do not carry unresolved anxieties that can create challenges later in life. Unexplored and unresolved grief in childhood can later result in depression, drug addiction and even criminal behaviour. Early intervention can help prevent this.

The loss of a loved one can create a loss of meaning, a loss of confidence and often a lost child. At KG2 we try to balance some of those losses with some gains. Our kids gain support, we help them gain self-confidence and inner strength, they gain new friends and, best of all, they regain part of themselves. The loss does not go away, but the child is helped to gain the skills to manage it. By supporting the child and enabling the grief process to take its course following a death, KG2 encourages the birth of a new and stronger self.

The Bereavement Counselling and Support Service aims to provide a safe space for bereaved people to share their experience and discover personal strengths to continue their bereavement experience. It is necessary to contact the Bereavement Counselling and Support Service at the Centre for Grief Education to talk to a member of staff about any support group before you attend for the first time.

If you would like further information or book a place, please contact Anne or Claire – Bereavement Counselling and Support Services on (03) 9543 9449.

Courses

Educators

Without this dedicated group of educators, none of these Courses would be possible. They make it so very easy to come up with new and interesting ideas for Courses and assist me ensuring they come to fruition. They are always willing to give of their time and expertise in brainstorming exciting new initiatives that the Centre can pursue. I would particularly like to mention, Chris Hall, Anne Giljohann, Michelle Grimshaw, Wayne Lynch, Ros Chandler, Banu Moloney, and Philippa Gemmell who have been the very backbone of all the Courses I have run over the time I have been with the Centre. My whole-hearted thanks to you and best wishes and blessings for the Christmas period.

Short Course in Companion Animal Bereavement

The Course ran again from August to October this year. This year we had increased number of vets and vet nurses undertaking the Course, as well as some people from the human nursing sphere. The Course was redeveloped and refined from 2004 and as such was reduced to 10 weeks. As a result of feedback from a range of people in the animal care and welfare arenas, the Centre is going to look at the possibility of running it as an Intensive in 2006, as well as the usual 10 week Course. More news on that early in 2006.

Animal Loss Support Group

The new Animal Loss Support Group convened for the first time on Saturday 12th November at the RSPCA in East Burwood. The Group was established in response to feedback from graduates from the Short Course in Companion Animal Bereavement 2004 year. The Group aims to provide a safe space for those who have lost a loved companion animal to: share their stories and experiences; support and encourage each other; feel understood; and, share ideas of how to cope at difficult times. The Centre for Grief Education is facilitating the Group in partnership with the RSPCA. Many thanks to Anne Giljohann who has been instrumental in training and orientating volunteers, and to our volunteers who have so compassionately committed themselves to facilitating the Group: Barbara Allen, Vanessa Rohlf and Dianne Lees. Thanks also to the RSPCA - in particular, Jo Lindley and Chris Thurgood who have been supportive and enthusiastic from the outset, and continue to promote the Group to the community at every opportunity.

Graduate Certificate in Bereavement Counselling Methods 2005.

18 participants from the 2005 Course competed the year on November 23. It has been a successful and inspiring year, and we very much look forward to celebrating their success when the Graduation Ceremony happens in late January 2006.

Graduate Diploma in Child and Adolescent Grief Counselling.

We will also be celebrating the Success of 15 participants from the Graduate Diploma in Child and Adolescent Grief Counselling, who completed their studies in June 2005.

Introduction to Bereavement Support

Once again this Course filled very quickly and ran from October to November. Already the next Course to be run in February 2006 has started filling. People from a diverse range of professions and life experiences come to this Course – its appeal seems to lie in the comprehensiveness of the content over a reasonable time commitment of 5 weeks. This Course will of Course run as a Weekend Intensive in April 2006 – which is always a benefit to those from rural and interstate areas.

Student Stories

As promised in the previous *Connections*, we will continue to provide you with brief stories of students (current and past). In this edition we would like to introduce you to Jude Michaels, a participant in the Graduate Certificate in Bereavement Counselling Methods.



“My name is Jude Michaels and I have almost completed my Graduate Certificate in Bereavement Counselling Methods at the Centre for Grief Education. I had previously completed a Short Course in Animal

Bereavement at the Centre. I have found this to be a year that has enriched my life as I have met wonderful people, facilitators and fellow students who have been incredibly generous in their support and encouragement of my education throughout the year.

I began the courses never knowing just what it would bring to my growth however, I knew that it would be a journey that I was ‘destined’ to do. I didn’t have any expectations apart from a need to learn more about the skills of bereavement counselling and to allow myself to enjoy and learn what was before me in the months ahead. I had no idea what was/is behind the words; Grief /Loss & Bereavement. The depth of bereavement is deeper than any ocean. I have often thought in the past when someone has experienced a loss of any kind it would be similar to ‘swimming/floundering in the ‘ocean of emotion’ never knowing when the waves will subside, however I now understand that in time, eventually with support and understanding from genuine people it is possible for life though forever altered to continue.

During the year I have found the course complimented my knowledge of loss and grief experienced by those bereaved over the loss of a much loved animal and the intense sadness that can occur for many when this takes place. I was very privileged to have been educated in grief and loss in this context last year and have a passion for ensuring that those seeking counselling in this regard are treated with utmost empathy and respect. The death or loss of a pet can be a life changing event as the bond that exists between people and their pets is often profound, for many the relationship they share with their pets is more than that of an animal, but rather an intrinsic part of the family structure and every day rituals who is deeply missed when no longer there.

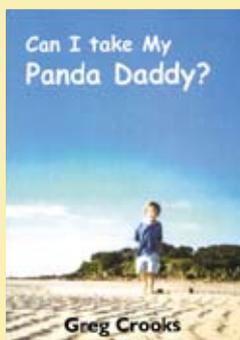
I was drawn to the short course in animal bereavement due to my own experiences in loosing many animals that I deeply loved. I experienced the various stages of grief including disbelief, guilt, anger and a sense that life would never be the same again. Gradually I moved through the various stages however; to this day miss the unconditional love, loyalty and happiness each and every one of my beloved pets gave me. It is this empathy that has motivated me to focus primarily on bereavement counselling in this context."

**A Willingness to Listen Attentively & Empathetically,
May be the Greatest Gift we can offer Each Other'**

New Publications

Can I Take my Panda Daddy

Greg Crooks (2004)
ISBN



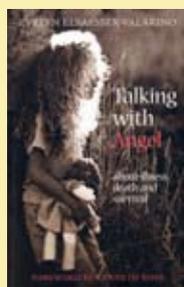
With a loving family and a pretty bushland home, Sean Crooks' days were full of wonder and excitement. When, at age four, Sean was found to have a malignant brain tumour, his life and the lives of those around him were changed forever. Within hours of that unexpected diagnosis, an air ambulance was flying him to The Children's Hospital at Westmead in Sydney for an extended course of palliative radiotherapy.

Simply and beautifully written, *Can I Take my Panda Daddy?* follows the physical and emotional journey taken by Sean and his family through to the first anniversary of his death. In writing this memoir, Greg hopes that those who have suffered childhood loss will know that they are not alone.

Can I Take My Panda Daddy? can be ordered from Greg Crooks directly on (02) 6654 2163 or crooksgj@ceinternet.com.au

Talking with Angel about illness, death and survival

Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino (2005)
Floris Books
ISBN 0 786315 492 1



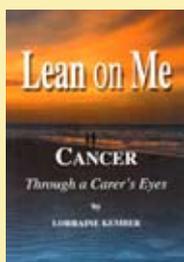
This is a moving story of a young girl battling leukaemia who eventually realises she is going to die. She receives hope and comfort through nightly conversations with her favourite doll, Angel, who helps her to embrace a new perspective on dying, and the possibility that consciousness could survive after death. Her fear of death is ultimately lifted by her new-found spiritual wisdom and by the account of a near-death experience told to her by a young companion.

Talking with Angel can be ordered from Astam Books directly on (02) 9566 4400 or info@astambooks.com.au

New Publications

Lean on Me – Cancer Through a Carer’s Eyes

Lorraine Kember (2005)
L. Kember Publications
ISBN 0 646 49969 6



A powerfully moving and inspirational true story of a courageous man’s battle with cancer and his wife’s emotional journey as she supports him throughout his ordeal. Interspersed with diary excerpts and poems she penned along the way, this very personal account depicts the dept of their love for each other, the sense of helplessness she experienced on his

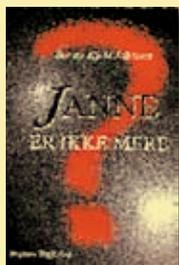
diagnosis and her growing strength as she comes to realise that there is much she can do to improve the quality of his life.

Understanding pain, pain management and symptom control is detailed throughout as well as an insight into chemotherapy, palliative care and the benefits of dying at home.

Lean on Me can be ordered from Lorraine Kember directly on (08) 9377 0355 or cancerthroughacarerseyes.jkwh.com

Janne – Beyond Life

Ilse & Kjeld Johansen (2005)
Spirit Books

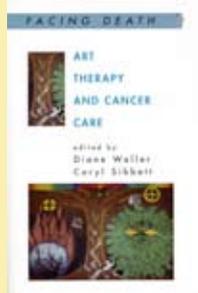


This story describes the sorrows the parents experience after the death of their daughter Janne who was killed in a traffic accident. The parents describe the inexplicable experiences that happened after Janne’s death. They also discuss messages they received via mediums and astrologists.

Janne – Beyond Life? can be ordered from Ilse & Kjeld Johnsen directly on janne_beyond_life@yahoo.dk or downloading it free from www.free-book-sorrow.com

Facing Death – Art Therapy and Cancer Care

Dianne Waller and Caryl Sibbett (2005)
Open University Press
ISBN 0 335 21621 8



Inspired by the experience of art therapists who have pioneered work with people with cancer and including those who have experienced this devastating illness at first hand, this book acknowledges the outstanding work of the Corinne Burton Trust which has supported the development of art therapy services in hospices and clinics.

Narratives, case studies, new theoretical insights contribute to the strength and originality of the book. It demonstrates the importance for the art therapy service of being understood, supported and valued and how the lack of this can impact adversely on patient care.

Facing Death can be ordered from Paul Yanon of McGraw Hill directly on (02) 9900 1836 or paul_yanon@mcgraw-hill.com.au

Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement Inc.

ABN 22 038 903 478
McCulloch House
Monash Medical Centre
246 Clayton Road
Clayton, Victoria 3168
Australia

Telephone 03 9545 6377
Freecall 1800 642 066
Facsimile 03 9545 6399
Email info@grief.org.au
Website www.grief.org.au

Bereavement Counselling and Support Service

McCulloch House
Monash Medical Centre
246 Clayton Road
Clayton, Victoria 3168
Australia

Telephone 03 9543 9449
Facsimile 03 9545 6399
Email counselling@grief.org.au
Website www.grief.org.au

Staff

Director	Christopher Hall
Manager – Business Operations	Sandra Romero
Manager – Education Programs	Pam Buscemi
Education Programs Administrator	Danielle Ricato
Courses Coordinator	Fiona Heylan
Research & Development Coordinator	Rhonda Gordon-Brown
Manager – Bereavement Support Services	Anne Giljohann
Counselling Service and Support Coordinator	Claire Ewart

Mission Statement

The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement has a mission to build the capacity of individuals, organisations and communities in order to enhance well-being following adverse life events.