

Editorial

Imagine if every teacher felt confident in supporting bereaved children in school; if every GP could offer reassurance to a parent about how a child's grief might manifest itself; if every social worker knew about their local childhood bereavement service and referred children to it quickly.

Of course, many professionals in the children's workforce are doing this and more already. But equally, we all know of cases where children haven't received the support they needed from the non-specialist services around them. In theory, all this could be about to change now that the government has published its *Common Core of Skills and Knowledge for the Children's Workforce*, which states that everyone working with children and young people should have an understanding of the likely impact of bereavement on their lives, and should know where to refer them for services. To start with, this guidance will affect inductions, in-service and interagency training, but in time it will inform professional qualifications as well.

This will have huge implications for training, and CBN members are in an ideal position to share their specialist expertise and experience with colleagues across the children's sector. Many members already offer comprehensive tailored training packages to teachers, social services, police family liaison officers and others. But this responsibility can only be shouldered if adequate resourcing follows the drive for new knowledge. Childhood bereavement services need funding, not just to respond to the call for training, but also to provide the direct, specialist services to children and young people which complement improved awareness of bereavement in schools, hospitals and other community and care settings.

CBN will be running a series of regional conferences in the autumn, which will address the issue of building a sustainable funding base. Using top tips from CBN members on various aspects of fundraising, and interviews with commissioners and other sources of funding, we hope to give everyone some new ideas about securing support for their service.

For details of the CBN Autumn 2005 Regional Seminars, please call the CBN office on 020 7843 6309 or email cbn@ncb.org.uk. The Common Core of Skills and Knowledge for the Children's Workforce can be viewed at www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/deliveringservices/commancore

CBN Conference 2005

The CBN Conference 2005 brought together two key speakers from the US - Grace Christ of Columbia University and the Fire Department of New York 9/11 programme, and Donna Schuurman of the Dougy Centre - with CBN members representing the UK perspective.

Grace Christ, familiar to many CBN members through her book *Healing Children's Grief*, spoke on the intervention she has developed as Director of the New York Fire Department's post 9/11 family programme, supporting 48 families with 118 children whose firefighter fathers were killed in the World Trade Centre. Discussing particular aspects of this bereavement, such as constant public



Sarah Willis and Grace Christ

scrutiny, FDNY culture and the slow process of finding remains, Grace outlined some of her key findings. She noted that some children who were toddlers at the time of 9/11 showed more grief symptoms during the third year of their bereavement, and linked this to their entering a new stage of cognitive development. Recognising the challenges of building trust with families, she explained how helpful the mothers had found a home based, family focused intervention.

Using anecdotes to keep her talk true to her philosophy of listening to children's stories, Donna Schuurman discussed risk and resilience factors in children bereaved of a parent, and their implications for the ways services should be developed. She saw the inclusion of families and the need to help parents improve their skills as key, arguing that children don't need to be taught to grieve so much as allowed to grieve.

Julie Stokes, Chief Executive of Winston's Wish, spoke about the development of services in the UK. She discussed the importance of outreach work to be able to offer support to children whose parents find it difficult to access services. Highlighting the constant battle for funds, she likened the campaign for more community based bereavement services to Jamie Oliver's recent call for improved school lunches, arguing the difference a commitment of 50p a day for each bereaved child could make in service provision.

Linking services to available resources was the theme of Frances Kraus and Barbara Monroe's presentation of the philosophy behind their new book *Brief Interventions with bereaved children* (see review, this issue).

Pictures from Life

Mike Simmons, Senior Lecturer in Photography at De Montfort University and Pictures for Life Team Member outlines a 'beacon project' using photography to strengthen communication in bereaved families.

'Death points us in the direction of all that remains hidden, unknowable, and unconquerable. It is the most profound, paradoxical, and pervasive problem we face. The artist's task is to render visible what is invisible, to explore the limits of what is known, and to master what is otherwise masterless.'

(Boyle, 1997)



Pictures From Life is a new initiative, now in its third year, which offers a unique arts led opportunity for children, young people (primarily between the ages of five and fifteen) and their families to develop

relationships in family death and bereavement, helping to strengthen family communication and reduce isolation.

Organised by Tracy Wilson, the Child Bereavement Co-ordinator for The Children's Fund Lincolnshire and hosted by the United Lincolnshire Hospital Trust, Pictures From Life incorporates the skills of Mike Simmons and Bridget Skanski-Such, two qualified and experienced visual artists and teachers.

Using objects, photographs and other mementos, the children work with the artists individually and in small groups, where they are encouraged to research, plan, and create a considered piece of artwork, which speaks of their personal experiences of loss.

Research involves interaction with family members at home, through discussion and the selection of objects and photographs important to their memories.

Planning incorporates social communication within the workshop group, and the sharing of ideas through oral histories and discussions about the chosen objects and photographs.

Creating original artwork is the culmination of these processes. The children are given the opportunity to work with a diverse range of traditional and digital photographic techniques, including Photograms (one of the earliest photographic methods) and the latest photographic and computer technology to produce images of high quality, depth and eloquence, which allows them time to celebrate their ideas and value their memories.

Children and young people often feel isolated in their experiences of loss and grief, and families can find it

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difficult to communicate with each other about their feelings surrounding death. Misunderstood grief can significantly affect a child's education, relationships, and self-esteem. Bereaved families constantly request help in the opening up of lines of communication.

By taking part in Pictures From Life the children construct for themselves a new and continuous relationship through their memories, bridging the gap often encountered between emotion and expression. This process may endure as the child or young person grows through their lives.

Feedback from the children, and their families who have taken part in the workshops, has demonstrated the success of the Pictures From Life project. It underlines the important contribution that visual arts provision can make as a medium for bereavement care by providing an opportunity for the expression of grief.

'Tracy, Bridget and Mike really worked hard to help us through this sad time and I feel that we have really benefited.'

'I hadn't realised that my children's grief was different from mine, I just assumed they felt the same.'

'When can we have something like this for adults?'

'It has really helped made me feel better about my bereavement.'

Pam Rycroft, Immediate Past President of the Victorian Association of Family Therapists Inc. (Australia), has written of *'the significant role that photographs and treasured, familiar objects can play in the experience of loss and grief, a context in which words often fail us, and our clients'*

Children's bereavement projects nationally are sporadic, and much of the work already achieved elsewhere in the UK has been through support programmes, with less emphasis placed on the recognition of visual arts as a medium for bereavement care.

The Pictures From Life project is the first of its kind in Lincolnshire.

To promote the initiative, and to enable discussion of visual arts practice as a means of

strengthening communication within bereaved families, a half-day seminar, which encouraged an interdisciplinary audience was recently organised to coincide with an exhibition of work from the Pictures From Life workshops in Lincoln.



Sarah Willis, Director of the Childhood Bereavement Network, who hailed *Pictures From Life* as 'a beacon project', chaired the seminar. Guest speakers also included Paul Hill MBE, Professor of Photography at De Montfort University, Leicester; Gordon Riches, Senior Lecturer at the University of Derby and Mike Simmons, Senior Lecturer in Photography at De Montfort University, Leicester and *Pictures From Life* Team Member. Delegates said

'Pictures From Life would seem to be a very valuable contribution to the community and helping children come to terms with grief. Very useful and interesting and well presented.'

'I can now see the benefit of photography as regards bereavement. On a personal note, it has helped me to have a clearer picture of my own losses.'

'Fantastic, exciting work. It's really great seeing a quality standard of work for children and young people to treasure.'



For further information about *Pictures From Life* please visit <http://www.picturesfromlife.org.uk>

Resources

Young People, Bereavement and Loss: Disrupted Transitions?

Jane Ribbens McCarthy with Julie Jessop

This review surveys available literature on the prevalence and impact of bereavement among young people, usefully highlighting some of the less frequently discussed deaths such as that of peers as well as siblings and parents. Opening with a series of case studies, the book uses young people's own accounts to point to the need to take a long perspective in understanding the impact of bereavement on their lives, and the variation in its meaning.

The book acknowledges the complexity of the experience of bereavement, pointing out that geography and social class affect the likelihood of bereavement and that service development should take account of this. It helpfully summarises the complex and sometimes contradictory literature on bereavement as a risk factor, concluding that those who experience multiple bereavements, or

bereavements alongside other difficulties are statistically 'at risk' of experiencing negative outcomes in areas such as education, depression, self-esteem and risk-taking behaviour.

The book points out that many young bereaved people report never talking to anyone about their experiences, highlighting the need for a range of services, from counselling to peer support, to be made more available and accessible. It also considers other social contexts, suggesting the need for young people, families and communities to be enabled to respond helpfully to the many bereaved young people among them.

ISBN 1-904787-45-2 is available at £11.95 for CBN members from NCB booksales on 020 7843 6029

Jane Ribbens McCarthy will be presenting key findings from her literature review at a CBN Research Seminar on 17 October 2005 at the National Children's Bureau, London. CBN will also be showing a video presentation by her at the autumn regional seminars. Please contact the CBN Office for further details.

Brief Interventions with Bereaved Children

edited by Barbara Monroe and Frances Kraus

'Flexible and accessible short-term services delivered at the right time underpin the strengths of bereaved children, supporting their recovery rather than pathologizing the grief process' writes Barbara Monroe. This book examines the theory and practice of a variety of such services. It includes practice-based chapters by staff from childhood bereavement services and others who come into contact with bereaved families, including hospital staff and police. It also covers support for children before a death and at school, and for those bereaved in particular circumstances such as through suicide. Case presentations are used throughout.

The interventions described may be brief - for example an assessment visit, a few sessions of individual support, a one off group event, a text message - but the book brings home the message that philosophising, researching, consulting, planning and reviewing the activity require a great deal of time. The book emphasizes that a brief intervention doesn't mean that children are 'dropped' once it is over: Frances Kraus describes the 'extended warranty' allowing families to return to her service later.

The book places bereaved children in their social context, and the voice of the family is heard clearly. Contributors are mindful of the pressures which bereaved families may be under, and underline the importance of services being flexible and demonstrating their trustworthiness. The key significance of the family's ability to look after a bereaved child is emphasized and the role of services in helping members to communicate more easily is highlighted.

Contributors talk about the shaping of services around what bereaved children and young people say they want. In his chapter on traumatically bereaved children, William Yule shows a benefit of encouraging them to participate in the structure of the intervention offered: *'experience has shown that many children feel totally out of control of all that is happening to them, and this is a first step in returning some semblance of control to them.'*

Structural issues of service organisation such as using volunteers are tackled, and the book is honest on the resource difficulties facing many, making practical suggestions about how to manage this for the benefit of children and young people.

Brief Interventions with Bereaved Children is published by OUP ISBN 0-19-852909-0 £24.95

Laptop Magic

Anna Khambatta-Perkin and Jean Sherry from Release at Nightingale Hospice, Wrexham, highlight a new resource

Our fundraisers approached us last year to see if we had a 'wish list' of items required for the bereaved children we support. We certainly did, and requested a laptop computer amongst other things.

We are now the proud owners of 2 laptops! These were happily donated from a national business and a charity. Since then the children have had the opportunity to produce their memory books on the computer. Combined with a scanner and printer to reproduce children's photographs and other important documents, the new results are impressive.

We have observed that when children are concentrating hard when recording their memory books, the computer seems to enable them to tell their stories in great detail. The computer acts as a catalyst between the child and us. The child is 'talking' directly to the computer without any embarrassment whatever. This of course is nothing new; puppets serve the same purpose for younger children. The computer however seems to capture the needs of the whole age range of children.

We have also made the connection between the need for children to have a format that they perceive as 'cool'. A recent visit to one of our local secondary schools to see Chris (not his real name) highlights this. His dream is to own his own computer. He is so pleased with the laptop, that he carries it from reception to our allocated room. Chris has had three episodes of support since his Mum died in 1999. His first memory book that he made at age eight has been lost. Now that he is older he is finding that the computer is opening doors to his memories, partly because he is so pleased to work on it and have his

own file. His work at present is so full of detail, he is really impressed with how the book is proceeding.

Our new technology has transformed the way we produce memory books. The children feel very valued that this laptop is especially for them. Without this technology the memory books would still be deemed old fashioned and uncool by the children.

So, we would say next time anyone asks if your bereaved children need any new resources, shout loudly for a laptop!

Conferences

Family Grief

8 September 2005

The Grief Centre - Manchester Area Bereavement Forum 12th International Grief and Loss Conference
Speakers: Dr Marilyn Relf, Gordon Riches, John Peters, Jayne Handford, Prof Stephen Wright, Dr James Kuykendal

Venue: Hough End Centre, Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Manchester

Contact: 0161 371 8860

Hospice care - unlocking the future

27-29 September 2005

Help the Hospices

Venue: Harrogate International Centre

Facilitator: Help the Hospices

Contact: Louise Gray 7278 5668 or visit

www.helpthehospices.org.uk/conference2005

The death of a child

7 October 2005

CHUMS Child Bereavement Service for Bedfordshire annual conference

Speakers: Dave Troughton, Roger Hunt, Lesley Phillips, David Trickey.

Venue: Offley Place, nr Hitchin, Herts

Contact: 01582 707469 or e-mail chums.cbs@luton-pct.nhs.uk

BBC call for help

The BBC's BAFTA winning documentary series, ONE life, are making an observational film for BBC1 about childhood bereavement. At this stage they are researching the project and are very keen to speak to anyone going through this difficult experience or those providing support services in order to build up more of an understanding of the subject. If you would like to know about the project please contact producer Ben Anthony in complete confidence on 0208 752 6443 or ben.anthony@bbc.co.uk

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