

# Living well with Grief

## Newsletter

## Welcome to our first edition...

As I sit pondering what to write, my mind wanders to all those who have touched my life since commencing at the Leukaemia Foundation of Queensland. Not only have I been privileged to work with those who have lost a loved one, but also health professionals who work in this rewarding and at times challenging area of haematology/oncology, palliative care and community. For those loved ones reading this, thank you for allowing me to share a small part of your journey with you. Grief is never easy but having someone to offer support can make a huge difference, as many of you have told me. This is the first newsletter for this year and I am aspiring to send out two a year – in April and November.

I thought it would be appropriate, in this first edition, to tell you a little about myself. I began my career as an haematology/oncology nurse, and received extensive experience in both child and adult units. As time went on I found I was drawn to the psychosocial aspects of patients' and carers' journeys more and more. This led me to formalise my training, specialising in loss and grief issues. I was employed as a Support Services Co-ordinator at the Leukaemia Foundation, before taking up the position of Grief Support Services Co-ordinator in November 2005. I have continued my studies, in the areas of loss, grief and

counselling at Masters level. I have a special interest in bereaved parents and how best to support them in their journey of grief (see pages 2 & 3).

I would like to invite readers to have input into what goes into this newsletter. I welcome any suggestions people may have on content, quotes or if you have a story to share regarding your loss please email, or send it to me and I will try to include it in a future newsletter. (See the back page for my details).

Thank you for taking the time to read this first edition and I hope you find it informative and educational. Until next time...

**Shirley Cunningham**  
**Grief Support Services Co-ordinator**  
**Leukaemia Foundation of Queensland**



### **"He conquers who endures"**

Persius, Roman satirist and philosopher

Life doesn't always work as well as we'd like, and despite our greatest efforts, sometimes our best-laid plans go awry. It's at times like these that we must believe in ourselves more than ever. We have to choose to believe we will make it through, past, and over any and every obstacle; that no matter what, we will succeed. For it is only when we make this choice to believe that in spite of everything we will make it, that life agrees, once more, to conspire with us, and our chances of making our dreams come true are infinitely increased.

***"If you wish the world to become loving and compassionate, become loving and compassionate yourself. If you wish to diminish fear in the world, diminish your own. These are the gifts you can give."***

Gary Zukav

# 2006 in review

2006 was a very busy year. Throughout the year we have held numerous courses. These include:

# 2006

- *Living Well with Grief* programs
- A new program designed specifically for parents who have lost a child
- A *Living Well with Grief* weekend for bereaved parents in beautiful Maleny
- *Celebration of Life* event attended by over 140 families and loved ones
- Commenced staff breakfasts for those working in haematology/oncology units, palliative care, and bereavement areas, allowing valuable time to network and gain education
- Debriefing of haematology/oncology health professionals
- Continued support for those who have lost loved ones - on a one-to-one basis, in group settings, home visits and via telephone

## Living Well with Grief for bereaved parents

### Some parents share their experiences...

I have been fortunate to be invited to attend a weekend workshop. The workshop was held at 'Heaven in the Hills'. It certainly was heavenly to have a weekend where others cooked, cleaned and gave you massages. Once again it was wonderful to meet other bereaved parents, to speak of Fletcher openly and to feel totally comfortable and safe talking of the ups and downs we had been experiencing. The workshops were very helpful and revealing. I think the main benefit for me has been meeting others in similar situations and being able to share experiences of grief and realise that I am 'normal'. I would encourage any bereaved parents to reach out to the Leukaemia Foundation and let them know what would help you.

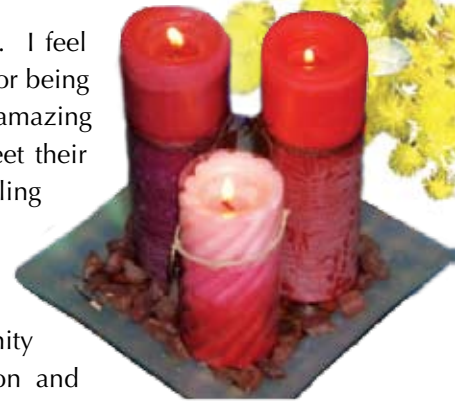
(Used with permission Amy and Wade McFarlane, parents of Angel Fletcher and Xavier)

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Jon and I were invited to the Leukaemia Foundation's *Living Well with Grief* weekend set in the beautiful hills outside of Maleny. I was very apprehensive about this weekend and only went because Jon wanted to go. Group things are usually way out of my comfort zone but seeing "Jake's blue" everywhere made me feel it was going to be OK.

There were wallabies on the lawn with joeys and the beautiful king parrots coming down from the trees. It was all breath taking and our cabin was stunning. We all met for cheese and wine by the camp fire and as each parent arrived we introduced ourselves. Sitting by the campfire was the perfect way to start the evening and there's something about campfires that seems to make

you feel safe and mellow. I feel honoured, blessed even, for being in the presence of these amazing parents and getting to meet their amazing 'Angels' and feeling like I knew and loved them all too. Thank you all and thank you Shirley for giving us this opportunity (Used with permission Jon and Deanne McCloud-Steinmetz parents of Angel Jacob, Jacinta, Johnathon and Ryan)



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My husband and I lost our gorgeous son Fletcher to AML in February 2006. We felt very isolated in our grief as we had relocated to Brisbane specifically for a bone marrow transplant and did not know anyone in Queensland. When Fletcher died we felt like there was no-one to help us. Shirley from the Leukaemia Foundation was a helpful voice on the end of the phone. We attended the first *Living Well with Grief* workshops. It was six weeks of workshops that enabled us to meet with other people that were also dealing with the loss of their child. It was helpful to meet others, to share our experiences in a safe environment and to conclude that we were not 'going crazy' and that everything we were experiencing was in the realm of 'normal'. Christine and Shirley were wonderful sounding boards and it was great to be able to speak freely and openly and not have to conceal our grief like we have to do in day to day life. My husband initially was sceptical at first at airing his grief, however he soon realised that the other dads that were there were also going through the same frustrations as him. It really opened up discussions between us and helped us deal with some difficult problems. (Used with permission Wade and Amy McFarlane parents of Angel Fletcher and Xavier)

## Friendship and support continues after the program...

Christine Douglas and I were invited to attend a special birthday lunch at South Bank Tafe by a group of ladies who are still meeting months after finishing the *Living Well with Grief* program. These beautiful women meet once a month at different venues in Brisbane and surrounding areas. They have forged a friendship out of their grief, though assured us when they meet there is a balance of laughter and tears, at the luncheon there was certainly much laughter. Two of the group were celebrating their birthdays, so a cake was brought out by the trainee chefs and staff all sang "Happy Birthday". It was a wonderful lunch.

## Celebration of Life 2006

The Leukaemia Foundation's traditional annual *Celebration of Life* event which kicked off Leukaemia Week, was held on Sunday 6 August 2006. A record number attended the event at the ESA Village South Brisbane, run by the Foundation's Grief Support Services. The celebration aims to remember, reflect on and celebrate the lives of those who have died from leukaemias, lymphomas, multiple myeloma, amyloidosis, myelodysplastic syndrome and related blood disorders in the previous 12 month period.

For many the initial thought of attending is quite daunting and it is only after the prompting from other family members and friends, that some people attend. Without exception, however, everyone who attends is always pleased they did. It is certainly not without emotion but for most families it is a chance to reconnect with other leukaemia travellers and LFQ staff, including wider members of the family, and to celebrate and remember their loved one in a safe, friendly environment.

As one initially reluctant participant commented, *"I had never done anything like the candle lighting ceremony before, and it was very meaningful and significant for me and my family. I'm so glad I came."*

More than 50 per cent of those who attend are from outside the metropolitan area, with some families travelling down from Rockhampton and beyond and from across the northern New South Wales border. *The Celebration of Life* concluded with lunch, where participants had a chance to catch up with people they had befriended during their leukaemia journey.

## When you are grieving – tips for those special days

Christmas is approaching and the stores and streets are covered with glittering tinsel, twinkling lights and the sounds of excited children and old folk alike!

What a joyous occasion this is for a majority of the population. However, for some of us this, and many other times of celebration, can never be the same. I'm talking about the deep sense of loss, the emptiness, the confusion, the anger and the weight of great emotional pain we all experience when we, or our family group has lost a loved one.

Celebrating Christmas without the one we love seems so unfair. Unfair to you and even more unfair to the one that has passed away, no longer able to see the gifts and smiling faces of the ones that still love them.

So what can you do to ease the sense of loss, to soften the anger and pain? Well, there are several steps we can all take to help us to get through this, and other difficult times.

The first step is to accept that Christmas is going to come regardless and it will be different this year. So one approach could be to do something different to what you've done in the past, like go for a holiday or have Christmas dinner at a beautiful restaurant by the ocean. If you are someone who would prefer not to change things too much, what about doing something special in memory of your loved one like, make a special toast in their honour, light a candle, buy a gift, write a letter or card, visit the cemetery, say a prayer or make a special decoration for the tree – whatever helps.

The second step is just as important as the first. Remember to plan your time to reduce your stress and check your routine. It's also important to share your memories with others, so don't be too proud to ask for help and support if you need it.

And finally, and most important of all – look after yourself, buy yourself a gift, get that massage you know you need and rest when you need to. Whatever you choose to do, remember it is your choice.

**Jenny Gallagher (Grief Counsellor)**

## 2007 planning has begun!

### We are planning to have:

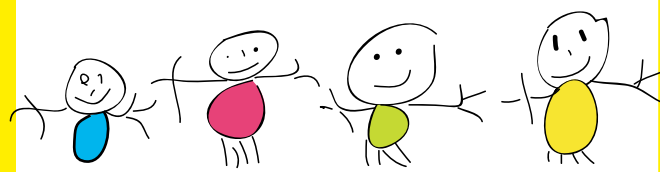
- Three *Living Well with Grief* Programs
- Two Bereaved Parents *Living Well with Grief* Programs
- Two *Living Well with Grief* Bereaved Parents Live-in weekends
- A Celebration of Life event
- A memorial event for bereaved parents
- Networking breakfasts for health professionals
- Three educational/grief support luncheons for loved ones
- Regional visits incorporating workshops for bereaved parents
- Debriefing sessions/in-services for staff working in the oncology/haematology area

The Leukaemia Foundation Grief Support Services offer one to one, group and telephone counselling, office appointments, and home visits. We tailor to individual requirements.

Have you ever noticed the similarities between the words "react" and "create"? Though arranged differently, the same letters are used in each, with only an extra letter added to the one. We can choose to see that extra "e" as standing for effort, reminding us that instead of giving our power away by reacting to what appears to be, we can use a little extra effort to create a new and better experience for ourselves and those around us. All we have to do is choose to see the situation differently.

***"When you live in reaction, you give your power away. Then you get to experience what you gave your power to."***

~ Author Unknown



## KIDS IN KAOS childrens' grief workshop

Seven reasons why your grieving child should attend this very unique and important workshop:

- Allows children to meet in an acceptable and safe environment
- Gives them the chance to share their experiences with other bereaved children
- Provides them with a better understanding and expression of their own feelings
- Teaches them to seek appropriate alternatives to express their grief
- Creates open and effective communication with other family members
- Offers a better understanding of death and its processes
- Illustrates to children that life continues on even after tragedy.

**Saturday & Sunday 2 - 3 December 2006**

**Venue: Sherwood AFL Club,  
Oxley Rd, Sherwood**

**Time: 10.00am - 3.00pm**

**For more information and to register your interest please go to:  
[www.beyondcounseling.net](http://www.beyondcounseling.net) or  
telephone Jenny: (Mob) 0407184230**

**Jenny Gallagher  
Child Grief Counsellor**

## Our vision to cure and mission to care.

The Leukaemia Foundation of Queensland is a not for profit organisation focused on the care and support of patients and their families living with leukaemias, lymphomas, myeloma and related blood disorders.

The Foundation does this by providing emotional support, accommodation, transportation and practical assistance for patients and their families. The Leukaemia Foundation also funds research into cures and better treatments for leukaemias, lymphomas, myeloma and related blood disorders.

The Leukaemia Foundation receives no direct ongoing government funding, and relies on the continuous support of individuals and corporate partners to expand its services.

To find out more about the work of the Leukaemia Foundation of Queensland and how you can help, phone 1800 620 420 or visit the Foundation's website: [www.leukaemia.org.au](http://www.leukaemia.org.au)

Disclaimer: No person should rely on the contents of this publication without first obtaining advice from their treating specialist.

If you do not wish to receive future editions of this publication please contact the Leukaemia Foundation Support Services Division on 07 3840 3840.



**Leukaemia  
Foundation**

VISION TO CURE  
MISSION TO CARE

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