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National Newsletter

Bi-annual January/June 2011

June 2011

Celebration Group Photo



Dear Friends,

Welcome to our second Newsletter of 2011

First of all, I must thank those of you who have sent in material for this second letter. I really do appreciate it, but we need a lot more so please do send me news about your group or anything you think others would like to hear.

The highlight of the past six months has to have been the 20th Anniversary Celebration of Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide when about 70 of us gathered together in Derby. It was especially good to have our founder Alice Middleton with us. In the morning we thought about the last 20 years and due honour was paid to Alice. She told us how desperate she was when



her brother died and out of that situation SOBS was born. She began with a group in her home and then started the helpline. Now there are about 42 groups throughout the country. The help line is well used and the email help is slowly growing. About 30,000 check the website daily. Alice then cut the cake.

In the afternoon we concentrated on the general running of the organisation. It was a memorable day for all of us.

Ann Culley
Surrey group Leader
sobs.news@googlemail.com

A Survivor's Report - 20th Anniversary

I went to Derby on April 16th for the 20th Year Anniversary of the founding of the first Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide meeting in Hull. The hotel was up to its usual high standard and the food, drink and staff were all excellent. We spent the day listening and learning from other survivors and everything made for a perfect day.

At the end of our 20 year celebration day we tied 20 messages and comments from our supporters to 20 shiny purple balloons. These included one from the Archbishop of Canterbury from the Thanksgiving Service that was held in Tewkesbury Abbey.

Then we went into the garden, which smelt fresh and sweet, and all held hands in a very large circle. After a few words were said we let go of the balloons and watched them float away to our loved ones. There were lots of smiles and cheers and lots of hugs and tears.



It was one of those moments that you will always remember, when shivers go up your spine and straight to your heart. As we watched them rise in to sky and disappear over the roof tops we knew that our carefully chosen messages were on their way to the ones we will always love.

Sue Baxter
Dartford group

Renfrewshire Group

The Renfrewshire Branch of Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide have been meeting since October 2008. The group continues to go from strength to strength, usually with around 3 to 8 people attending meetings each month. The group has built up a small library of resources including leaflets and articles as well as books which can be borrowed.



Some of the group have found solace in being involved in some of the awareness raising activities organised by Choose Life in Renfrewshire; in 2009 some members helped to organise the Choose Life 'Walk for Hope' as part of Suicide Awareness Week. At this event Anna Hampson from our group told provost Celia Lawson about the group's wish to get some kind of permanent memorial to those who lost their lives to suicide. The Provost and Councillor Lorraine Cameron helped the group source permission from Renfrewshire Council to adopt a tree, which is directly outside the Council offices in Cotton St., Paisley. The tree is in a small green area, with a couple of benches nearby and Co-op Funeral Care provided a small memorial plaque which our local group decided should be inscribed with the words *'In memory of those who have taken their own lives. Gone too soon.'*

For the past two years on January 19th a short service has taken place to mark the official adoption of the tree by our local branch of Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide. The council provide and maintain lights for the tree, which are switched on at the ceremony, remaining there until British Summer Time begins. This small informal ceremony involves some local clergy, the Provost and representatives from our local Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide group, and an open invitation goes out to the local community. Those attending are encouraged to put a commemorative purple heart on the tree with a message to the person they had lost to suicide. The group hope that this will be a place where those bereaved by suicide will be able to come to remember those they have lost. We have found that people contact us to have purple hearts sent out, whilst others have made their own.

This year's ceremony was attended by over 40 people from the local area. After the short ceremony there was an open invitation to go to Paisley Abbey tea room, which is adjacent to the tree, for refreshments.

This gives us an opportunity to chat to folk about the group and provide information about other resources that are available. One gentleman told us that his son had died from suicide more than 30 years before and this was the first time he had spoken about it.

The ceremonies have generated a lot of local media interest, which helps promote the group, but also helps to challenge the stigma that still surrounds suicide, as well as breaking the isolation for those bereaved by suicide.

Submitted by the Renfrewshire Group

'The survivor of a suicide bereavement faces a stark choice ... 'it is up to you ... to decide whether to be permanently hurt by the last act of a free individual or not ... this option is YOURS'. (Lake 1984)

- Know you can survive. You may not think so but you can.
- Know you may be overwhelmed by the intensity of your feelings, but all these feelings are normal.
- You may feel rejected, abandoned. Share those feelings.
- Anger, guilt, confusion, denial, forgetfulness are common responses. You are not going crazy, you are mourning.
- Find a good listener to share with.
- Do not just keep silent.
- You may feel suicidal. This is normal. It does not mean you will act on those thoughts.
- Keeping an emotional diary is useful as well as healing.
- Give yourself time to heal.
- Expect setbacks
- Try to put off making any major decisions.
- Seek professional advice.
- Be patient with yourself and with others who may not understand.
- Know that you will never be the same again.

Book Review

"A Winding Road"

By Michelle Linn-Gust and John Peters

This is an excellent little book that will be valuable for people who seek to help those bereaved by suicide. It will be especially helpful to those with no training at all in bereavement care; although it should not be seen as a replacement for such training.

The book addresses many different aspects of suicide bereavement including; Is suicide bereavement different? How suicide impacts the whole family, and its impact on children and adolescents. There is a very helpful chapter on how to set up a support group and how to provide telephone helpline support.

The chapter on working with bereaved children and the examples of Joe and the buttons was very helpful but I feel emphasis should have been made that this is a very specialised work and this chapter alone is both inadequate and insufficient for someone to start such a work with vulnerable children.

This book will be useful to those who have already had some training and to those who seek to support someone bereaved by suicide. This is a must for you if you lead or help lead a group.

Ann M. Culley
The Surrey Group

The Kentish Lady-Park and Sail

November/December 2010



Maidstone's popular Christmas Park and Sail service nearly didn't run last year because the borough council which has subsidised the service for the past twenty years decided to redirect the money elsewhere.

Fortunately the Park and Sail service (the only one in the country) was saved from the axe by a local firm RAP office contracts. RAP director Julie Anderson decided to donate profits from the sailings to charity. I was thrilled when I discovered it was our

charity she had chosen, and it was a fantastic opportunity to raise awareness.

Throughout November twenty thousand leaflets were distributed around the town advertising the Park and Sail and our charity.

November 22nd Hobo Jones and his band supplied the music at the Kentish Lay boat launch where Father Christmas, the Mayor and Bella the horse came too!

The service should have run for four Saturdays and two Sundays before Christmas but unfortunately two days were cancelled due to heavy snowfall. I know that Julie was gutted after all the months of planning and hard work she had put into it.



Despite the bad weather I was delighted to count out £47 from our charity pots that had been on board, plus there was a £20 donation from one of Julie's colleagues, but the biggest surprise of all and totally unexpected was the £1000 cheque Julie presented me with three weeks later. I was utterly amazed as it way exceeded any amount in my mind.

I cannot thank Julie and her team enough for supporting our charity and for all the kindness they bestowed on us. Without people like Julie our charity couldn't survive.

You're a star Julie THANK YOU so very much.....X

Sheila (Maidstone)

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Sandra Rickard for all the help and support she has given to the Plymouth group and wish her the very best for the future. We would like to thank the volunteers who are continuing to help run the group with Carin's assistance. The meetings will continue to be held at the Quaker House, Mutley Plain, Plymouth and the new contact number will be 07531 727881.

If you do not wish to receive this publication in the future please notify Eric or Christine at the National office on 0115 944 1117 or email us sobs.admin@care4free.net

New Groups in 2011

We were approached in September 2010 by 2 ladies who wanted to start a group in the Isle of Wight and this took 6 months to get up and running. They launched their group in April 2011.

Monday 20th June saw the launch of the Wirral group. It was a good group with ten people attending. Some were new and some came from the Liverpool group to offer support. Added to this the room was great and the coffee arrived on time! We wish them well.

Helpful Quote

I was reading the book 'When Heaven is Silent' by Ron Dunn. Ron says some interesting things but the thing that struck me most concerned asking the question 'Why?' I found this very helpful and it may help one or more of you.

Having suffered the suicide of his teenage son Ron found himself constantly asking 'why?' One day he began to wonder why we ask that question. What is so important about knowing the answers to our whys? He came up with various answers including the following:

- Knowing why helps keep the orderliness of life. We like to think that everything makes sense and to not know why upsets this.
- To know why may prevent a repetition of the tragedy. Maybe we can stop it happening again, at least to us.
- It may be that we seek absolution from guilt and knowing why could help with that.
- Maybe it's because we seek moral equalisation; 'why me?' It assumes an injustice has been done. 'Why me? Why not someone else?' We never ask 'why not me?'
- Some of us may want to vindicate God? We know God is sovereign so He can do as he pleases. 'Why didn't He stop it happening?'
- We like to know why because we don't like to live with mystery; probably the most likely reason.

Ron Dunn then goes on to say that perhaps 'why' is the wrong question to ask. Maybe we should ask instead 'What Now?' Why and why me solves nothing, we get tunnel vision and can only see the unfairness of the situation. But 'what now' opens up a future.

- It breaks the trance of self-pity and gives us something to look forward to.
- We can look into the future and make plans.

Watford Group

It is with very sad hearts that we pass on the news that Ges Reeves passed away on the 22nd January 2011. Ges, with his wife Val, was one of the founder members of the Watford group of Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide when we started in 2003. They lost their son, Mike, in 2001. We first met them at The Compassionate Friends support group in Watford, and when we were talking about starting a Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide group they were 100% behind us.

Whenever we were away and couldn't start any meeting, Ges and Val helped Anne to facilitate the group. Ges used to make the teas and coffees and wash-up afterwards. Both of them were very supportive in our fund-raising by helping organise the bric-a-brac stalls we ran at various stalls fetes and fairs.

In August/September Ges suffered a viral infection which didn't seem to clear up and when he went to the Doctors, he was diagnosed as suffering from cancer. It was eventually discovered that it was Pancreatic Cancer. By the time they had discovered this Ges had suffered a heart attack and they couldn't start treatment on the Cancer.

He is at peace now and with his son, Mike. Our thoughts are with Val, his daughter-in-law Lynne and grandson Tommy.

Bob and Lynda

Dates for you Diary

Kent Retreat Weekend 23rd to 25th March 2012 will be held at the Little Silver Country Hotel, Tenterden, Kent. The programme for the weekend will be very relaxed, to give time for those who want to explore or just chat and chill with friends. Depending on the weather people can take a walk through the beautiful Kent countryside, or take a magical 10 mile ride on the vintage steam train to the magnificent castle at Bodiam.

For more information and to book please call Sheila at the Maidstone Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide group.

Bolton Retreat at the [Franciscan Friary](#), Pentasaph, North Wales - Friday 9 September 2011 - Sunday 11 September 2011

For more information contact Janet and Noel on 01942 201 744 or email janet750uk@yahoo.co.uk

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