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NATIONAL NEWSLETTER

BI-ANNUAL JANUARY/JUNE

JANUARY 2014

Dear All,

Another year has passed and so we enter 2014. We have had many challenges this past year and have learned a lot. You will read of several who have made an extra effort to raise funds for us this past year.

You will also read of a challenge to all of us to meet the needs of the bereaved men in our community. Thank you for your contributions. There were many and I am sorry that I have had to edit some to fit them in. I am really sorry that 'Joey's Poem' has not been included in this issue but will be in the June issue.

I do hope that the New Year is a good one for you and do keep sending in news of your triumphs and hopes.

Ann

Raising Funds in Hull

Maureen Hotson writes:

"It started with me having a 'normal' bad day at work. Then I thought of all those who would be going through it like me when it first happened. I lost my son Daniel Hotson aged 21 years in 2009 – so I decided to do something about it. I asked a very good friend, Mrs Jackie Coupland, to help me, and we asked almost every shop in Hull and on the outskirts for donations.



We held our big charity event at the Spring Head Pub on the Aston Road in Hull. We had a dance group called DUNK'D to entertain and they were fantastic. It was very well attended and took place on 30th August. Prizes for the auction, raffle and tombola were kindly donated by friends, family and local businesses."

The grand sum of £1,550.50 was raised by Maureen in recognition of the support she has received from the Hull SOBS group and in memory of her son Daniel.

I too lost my daughter Lauren in 2011 and started attending group meetings. Maureen is a positive and motivated person and through her own tragic loss is able to inspire others so that they can get through this. All the members of the Hull Group are so proud of Maureen and want to extend their congratulations and a huge well done for all the hard work that went into organising this event.

Julie Johnson

The Liverpool Santa Dash

It was 1st December 2013 on a cold, grey Sunday morning when I stood dressed in a Father Christmas suit along with 10,000 fellow scousers all dressed the same for the annual 5K Liverpool Santa dash. All shapes, sizes, ages and beliefs stood together ready to run their own personal race.

Early this year after completing my counselling course and wanting to give back something to people, I stumbled across an advertisement for a suicide bereavement charity advertising their group in a local newspaper. I felt a seed had been planted and got in touch with a lady called Angela from the Liverpool (SOBS) branch who I found warm, friendly and relaxing in her conversation and instantly made me feel very welcome in attending their next meeting. The next month I very nervously attended not really knowing what to expect or how I would be received. Why I should ever have felt this way I will never know, as after the meeting I was blown away by people's courage, warmth, dignity, respect, but most of all empathy and comfort for one another. Each of these amazing people had suffered from the most awful traumatic event yet they stood shoulder to shoulder with courage and support sharing their most sensitive of stories with one another.

I felt very proud and humbled to share people's personal stories of their grief and their struggle with day to day life and how their own lives had now changed forever. Having now been part of attending the support groups for several months I have been accepted into the group and feel so very passionate, proud and protective of the charity which I feel honoured to both represent and be part of.



As I stood on the start line my thoughts were with all the amazing people I had met in SOBS during the past year and I wanted to run the race in their honour, but most of all in the memory of everybody affected, survivors and the people who were unfortunately no longer with their loved ones.

As I ran the race my thoughts continued and focused on the stories I had been part of and allowed to be able to share which enabled me to complete the race and pick up my medal at the end. I dedicate this race and the medal to the SOBS charity and to all the individual amazing people who have been affected. I hope the office has received the medal I sent as this is for everyone.

John



The Manchester Marathon

“The day was particularly special as it would have been my brother’s 60th birthday and I was doing it in memory of him. I am sure he was at the back of me all the way spurring me on the 26.2 miles, particularly towards the end when it was

really tough. My t-shirt had a picture of him on the front and the SOBS logo on the back. Many people asked me about the logo and what it represented so it was a good way of promoting awareness of SOBS and what we do to help people. I never thought I would be capable of completing it but I did, and I did it for my brother and for SOBS.”

Jeanette

The Antony Griffiths CD Project

This project was something we set ourselves to do only weeks after Antony took his life. We had access to the music he had put on the Soundcloud website (<http://soundcloud.com/antonygriffiths/>) but some pieces were not downloadable, and we wanted CDs to include the majority of his work.

Antony studied music at Lancaster University, and his main interest was music composition. This led on from an introduction to music when he started to play the cornet at First School, since he was considered too small to play a trumpet, which was his instrument of choice. In time, he played with a local reed and

brass band, being the smallest member for a long time.

He progressed to the guitar, and made some instruments with varying degrees of success, working into the night in our garage. He also taught himself to play piano/keyboard and other stringed instruments.

I thought that getting CDs made would be easy! It took some time to find a firm who could do the job. They made a demo disc, and managed to download all of the pieces from Soundcloud. Then I discovered some other pieces of music so they were added to the list. All this was very stressful, done between juggling the demands of a full-time job, the failure of a university module, the stresses of bereavement of both Antony and Mum in the same month, sorting out Antony’s finances, managing two stressed cats, trying to cope with fatigue, problems with poor memory, concentration problems and poor self-motivation and self-esteem. I was trying to involve Antony’s father and his girlfriend in the plans, and while they wanted to help, they also were battling with demands on their lives and problems of bereavement.

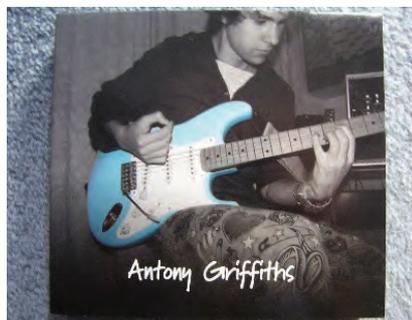
The issue of the order of the tracks needed attention, and it seemed that we needed was two CDs, not one. The packaging and artwork were the next problems. We had decided on a cardboard/clamshell type package, with an accompanying booklet of photos, which would be glued into place so it could not be lost.

The firm producing the CDs were as helpful as they could be, but of course, what we were trying to produce was not a standard product, the photo booklet would be thicker than normal. Selecting the pictures involved trawling through photos from various sources, including Antony’s own pictures. I felt a nuisance going back to the artwork department of the CD production firm so many times, to get the finished product as near perfect as it could be. They generously did not charge full costs!

Titles for the work were another issue. We had various ideas, but did not want to select anything which would not have been Antony’s choice. I had a CD of his work which he called ‘Cat Music’ so this was one choice made easily. Cats were always important in Antony’s life, and his early painting of Jesse, our black and white cat, appears on the packaging. For his Soundcloud profile, he had entered his self-portrait with his blue guitar, so ‘Blue Guitar’ became the next choice, and this photo fronts the CD package.

While all this work was going on, we missed several deadlines. I got to the point when I both did and did not want the job completed, as then there would be nothing left to do for Antony.

When the boxes of CDs arrived I was upset and dissatisfied with them. They were not perfect because of the weight of the photo booklet. I needed to accept this and then face the distribution issue. Addressing the envelopes, writing accompanying cards and sending these off was very demanding emotionally.



I held a tea party for people who live locally to come and pick up a CD and to view the two trees which have been planted in Antony's memory on the recreation ground in our village. This event was well attended, to my surprise and relief.

Response to the CDs has been varied; some people have said or emailed that they like them, others have not commented to me at all, or have waited for me to raise the subject. Someone has reportedly offered to put the music on iTunes, and I hope this is possible. Someone else placed some flowers under one of the trees. Copies are still being distributed. Thank you to Trish for encouragement to write this piece.

So, Antony, your music lives on.

Sue Griffiths: Gloucester SOBS group member.

“MALE MAN, BRING ME NO MORE BLUES!”

A challenge to SOBS groups to reach men and support them in their grieving.

I looked round the room.

It was fairly typical for a meeting of our SOBS group, comprising 17 folk bereaved by suicide at intervals ranging from 19 years to less than 3 months. At least 3 of these were attending for the first time. The number indicated the significance and importance of SOBS meetings, as well as the good work which is being done to engage with families bereaved through suicide.

What was also typical was that the total was made up of 13 females and just 4 males, all 4 of whom were, like me, regulars. That got me thinking again about something which had been bugging me for a while – if we are told how important it is that we all should allow ourselves time to grieve properly, why is there less evidence that men do so? What happens if men don't grieve, or if they suppress grief? What might SOBS do in terms of systems, strategies and practices in order better to help men grieve, especially as the standard, mixed-gender sharing and discussion group typical of a SOBS meeting does not seem attractive to

a significant number of men? How might SOBS equip itself better in order to reach out to, and engage with, men bereaved by suicide beyond the concept of the traditional discussion group?

As the meeting passed the 45 minute mark, I also noted that, up to that point, the aggregate time of male input to the discussion had been approximately 5 minutes, meaning that even those men used to the format and who had attended regularly over recent months were reluctant, or found it difficult, to contribute.

“So why do I come then,” I asked myself, “if it is not to progress my own grieving for the loss of our 35 year old son, Ian, who died in September 2011?” I concluded that, firstly I came to support Margaret, my wife, and that the main other effective personal benefit for my attending was the therapeutic value I received through offering help and support to others more recently bereaved than myself in similar circumstances.

But I do grieve and have a need to grieve. It is just that I don't find the standard SOBS format helps me to do so. To many grieving women their men may appear cold, unemotional and even uncaring. Whilst that is an image which society and culture offers and encourages men to project, it is not the truth. Behind the mask of seeming strength often lies a weak and confused, vulnerable and lonely soul. Whilst some would say that the opportunities are already out there for men to progress their grief and they cannot be forced to take them, this would seem to me not to be an adequate response. Do organisations such as SOBS need to be more proactive in reaching out to, and engaging with men, accepting that, whatever the mask is saying, the inner man is feeling very differently and will, in many cases, be suffering additional distress as a consequence?

Are you in a group which has recognised this need and has devised practices and strategies to reach out to men and to find innovative ways of supporting them in engaging their grief? I would be interested to gather together the collective expertise out there in order better to equip SOBS groups nationally to seek to address the issue of men's grief. Any ideas?

I came across the book “Men and Grief” written by Carol Staudacher and published by New Harbinger. It was so good on the subject that I bought my own copy for the princely sum of £3.39, £3.00 of which was postage and packing. It is the best £3.39 I ever spent, being a superbly structured, concise reference book about all aspects of male grieving. Every word resonated with my own grieving. Although intended for care-givers, mental health professionals and male survivors of the loss of a loved one, I would recommend it as advisory reading for anyone bereaved by suicide and compulsory reading for all women who have a male bereaved by suicide.

Being a grieving male can be, at times, like finding yourself in a condemned cell without a key. Finding yourself in such a lonely emotional place can, in addition to the feelings of bereavement, be highly distressing. The good news is that there are keys to unlock the door of male grieving and open up a stairway to improved well-being and restored relationships. If you believe that you have such a key, let us know. It could save a life or a relationship. Compassionately,

Steve Carter

GRIEF

There are days I wish I'd never met
I can't forgive, I can't forget
Emerged in utter hopelessness
Of deep sadness and regret.

There's an image of you I cannot bear
Your lifeless body lying there
You left this world so suddenly
In a moment of despair.

There's a grief that can't be spoken
And a joy that can't be woken
A multitude of tears and pain
A life forever broken.

There's an emptiness I can't undo
A nothingness I can't break through
A heavy heart, a restless soul
A silentness in place of you.

There's an ache in every part of me
That yearns to hear you and to see
To caress your beautiful face
And hold you endlessly.

There's a light of love, a burning flame
That keeps you here and speaks your name
You are the centreness within
And so you shall remain.

In memory of my beautiful son Daniel, 16th June 1983
– 6th August 2003.

Sheila Burgman

CARDIFF GROUP LEADERSHIP

Sadly, Sarah Moore has had to resign as Cardiff's Group leader. We were fortunate to have Violet Anderson take over for a short spell. John and Bronwen Coyle have offered to take on this role again. A big thank you to all who have helped keep the Cardiff Group running. Cardiff contact 07583 911129.

Thank you to all who have raised and donated funds for our organisation and a massive thanks to all our Volunteers for their hard work and commitment.

AN EMPTINESS IS ALL I HAVE

Around the house – I call it a house for it is no longer a home. It's just a space full of memories too painful to keep but too precious to lose. A memory box full to overflowing but I am unable to open. Photographs I couldn't/wouldn't be without but I walk past them without a glance. I am unable to look into the eyes of the most precious person in my life.

I wonder, after so many years of marriage, did I know him at all. His bouts of depression just seemed to creep and he wasn't one to take medication. It was a battle to keep him on an even keel. It was a battle we lost. Trying to help him without any outside help was a struggle (when I tried to get medical help none was forthcoming). The aggression, the mood swings, the tears from us both. The magic 'switch' he used when around other people (they only saw Mr Happy). Towards the end that failed. So many years spent hiding the constant inner torment eating away inside.

Now all I have are memories, but good memories are hard to remember because the depression had been happening for years. Friends have good memories but they saw Mr Happy, only I saw the shell of a man being slowly destroyed.

All that I can hope is that my 'special person' has found the peace that he so desperately needed. I wish he had realized that life could have been good in this world without moving to the next. I was desperately trying to keep my eye on the ball to prevent a terrible outcome. On the final day, circumstances meant I wasn't there. I returned home to find the vision that haunts me. Try as I had for so long, on that final day I'd taken my eye off the ball.

Now because I was late home my life has changed forever and I live in a house that's no longer a home. Who was it that said time heals? My reply – live in my world. Live in my house that's no longer a home.

Anon

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

6th April 2014 Maidstone's Group retreat in Kent.
Contact Sheila on 01622 751 976

3rd May 2014 Service for those Bereaved by Suicide at Norwich Cathedral starting at 2.30pm

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