



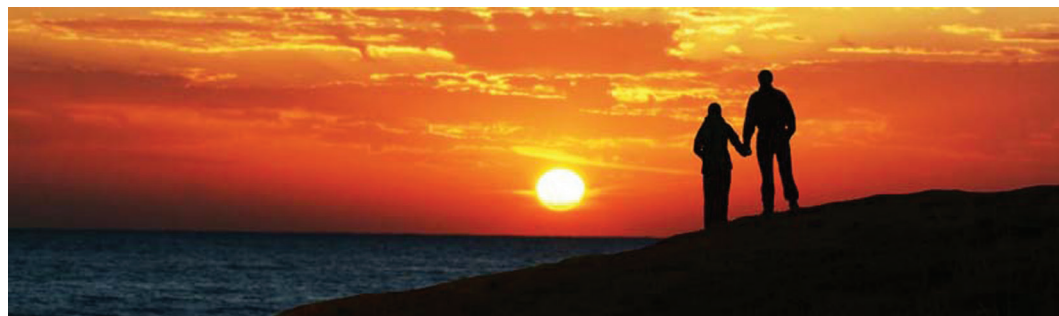
BETHANY BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUP

Walking With The Suicide Bereaved

Our beloved son Seán died by suicide in the month of May 1997. He was fifteen years old. This article is dedicated to his memory and in celebration of his young life. Our grief journey has been a long and difficult one, and in addressing you as Bethany ministers I would like to assure you that your support and guidance can be invaluable to families touched by suicide.

Suicide was decriminalised in Ireland as recently as 1993. However, the State still requires that all such deaths be investigated by the Gardaí and an Inquest held. Therefore the Gardaí will be first on the scene when a death by suicide is discovered, and statements taken from the family of the deceased. The body of their loved one will then be removed for a Post Mortem. It is then that the news of the tragedy gradually unfolds.

The experience of the suicide bereaved is very different to the experience of families bereaved in a normal death. They may be deeply shocked and traumatized, in disbelief or perhaps denial. They may be trying to recall their last contacts with the deceased and piece together the circumstances surrounding the death. It is common that the bereaved will be experiencing feelings of shame and guilt, confusion, anger, perhaps seeking to blame, and asking many questions of themselves and others such as "Why did he do this to us? How did I not see it coming, or prevent it?" It is important to remember also at this stage that the family



will be in the public gaze, and in certain cases the death may already have drawn media attention upon the family.

How can Bethany help?

Home Visitation is one of the many services that are offered by Bethany. If you are called to visit a family in the immediate aftermath of a suicide it is important to be mindful of our role as Bethany ministers. We are there firstly to offer our condolences, and to offer emotional, spiritual and practical support, that may assist the family in the initial steps of their grief journey. Our role is to listen, and to be mindful of the family dynamic which may be very difficult at that time, as outlined above. It is important to allow plenty of time when visiting and to be patient. Remember that you may be the first outsiders to offer support to the family, so tread softly. Do not be fearful, see the bigger picture, of a life lived, not just the final act. Remember that the deceased is a son, daughter, mother, father, brother, sister, relative or friend. It is important to acknowledge these relationships to family and others who may be present. It is helpful to ask to see a photo of the deceased, as this will encourage the bereaved to talk about their

loved one. You do not need to offer any answers to the bereaved, or offer knowledge on the subject of suicide, which may serve to minimise the complexity of the tragedy and is of no help to the bereaved. Do not ask questions such as "Did you not notice any warning signs?" I recall being asked that question by a well-meaning visitor and it upset me greatly at that time. Be led by the bereaved, in the knowledge that you are on sacred ground. You may be asked for advice regarding how to break news of a death by suicide to children. In my experience it is always wise to be truthful to children, in an age appropriate way, as they are sure to hear it from someone else outside of the family. It is also important to allow family and friends, including children, the opportunity to view the body of the deceased if they wish to do so, to say goodbye, before the funeral takes place.

We had wonderful support at the time of Seán's death. We were encouraged and assisted by the supportive presence of our local priests and church communities at Portmarnock and Malahide, and also by the priests from Seán's school. They advised us to focus on celebrating Seán's life, rather

than focusing on the manner of his death. Our funeral Mass invited full participation of family, friends, and all groups to which he belonged. In hindsight this was very helpful, as it helped us to begin our grief journey publicly, with honour and dignity as a family. It also afforded an opportunity to people in the wider community, who knew and loved Seán, to say goodbye and to pay their respects. The months following the funeral will be difficult for the suicide bereaved as they struggle with their grief and the daunting prospect of facing the Inquest. It is important for Bethany ministers who attended the family to continue to stay in touch. This will reassure them of Bethany's continued support on their journey.

Marian McKenna



Report on The Bethany Bereavement Volunteer Support Team

The Bethany Bereavement Volunteer Support Team was set up in September 2015 to visit individual or combined Bethany Bereavement Support Groups with the view of listening, offering support, motivation and guidance to volunteers in all aspects of their planning, delivery and review of the services they offer to the bereaved.

The initial team for the pilot scheme in the greater Dublin area comprises of four members of the GEC, Winnie Keogh, Moira Staines, Maeve Mason and myself, Anne Butler, who co-ordinated the group. The intention is to expand the scheme countrywide.

The Volunteer Support Team will report to the GEC every three months and the initial commitment is for one year. At the initial meeting of the Volunteer Support Team it was decided to divide into two teams and to invite five or six combined groups, not necessarily clusters, but groups in close proximity to one another to attend a meeting at a convenient location. Four meetings were held and a total of twenty one groups were contacted and invited to attend. Fifteen groups sent representatives and a total of forty three members attended overall. One meeting was also held as a support to an individual group who were experiencing difficulties and four members from that group attended.

A questionnaire was compiled and distributed to each of the participants for completion. The participants had the option of completing it individually or as a group. The questionnaire posed questions relating to the groups successes, challenges and concerns. In addition if groups were considering closure due to lack of

attendance they were asked what further action was needed to encourage and support the continuation of the group. The main concerns expressed by the groups were funding, recruitment of new volunteers and further training for existing members, namely group facilitation and suicide training. Perhaps the most urgent issue expressed by the majority of the members is the lack of attendance at the support group meetings by the bereaved. Some of the members felt that being a presence was sufficient but the majority expressed frustration that we were not

reaching those most in need of our services. It was felt that Bethany needs to have a higher profile in the community and to be promoted more publically on Radio and TV and on Social Media.ie Facebook and Twitter. Subsequent to the meetings and under the terms of reference we attended a Supervision session. This was productive in that it gave the members of the team an opportunity to process the information we had received from the groups and to gain a better understanding of the value of the group meetings and the interaction of the members present. Ultimately it

brought us back to the core of our work in Bethany, namely to support the bereaved in the grieving process.

Finally I would like to thank the team for their efforts and especially Winnie Keogh, who is stepping down due to illness and who we wish a speedy recovery. We are currently looking for a volunteer who would be able to devote some time to assisting the team. If you feel you would be in a position to help please contact me at **087 2050514** or **annebutler@live.ie**

Anne Butler, GEC

Knocklyon Bethany Tree of Hope



The Knocklyon Bethany Bereavement Support Group organised the planting of a Tree of Hope which took place on Sunday November 22nd, after the 11am Mass in the church grounds. This tree which is the 98th to be planted is a symbol to everyone affected by suicide, or living with any mental health issues.

Noeleen Fulham with her husband Niall and Ashling Stanley from the Tree of Hope team supplied and planted the tree. People were invited to place earth around it and many people came forward to do so. The Angelus bell rang out just as Fr. Martin was about to bless the tree. After reciting The Angelus Fr. Martin

blessed the tree with holy water and spoke some very comforting words. A reflection 'We Remember Them' was then read out. The tree was secured with a stake which was inscribed with the words 'Tree of Hope'. It was dressed with yellow ribbons and violas and a plaque was placed at its base. This completed the planting ceremony. The song 'You've got a Friend' was played with many people joining in. Balloons were distributed and together they were released into the air. This was to remember not only our loved ones who died by suicide or similar tragedy, but all of our loved ones in this the month of The Holy Souls.

Following the ceremony,

people were invited to the Iona Centre to partake in refreshments. There, people got to exchange experiences of their losses with each other. Our hope is that as this tree grows in strength, so too will the people hurting, and as the branches start to reach out, people in a dark place will reach out and ask for help. We would like to thank Fr. Martin for performing a very moving and touching ceremony and to the Tree of Hope team for all their support in bringing this very worthwhile event to fruition.

Therese McRann on behalf of Knocklyon Bethany Bereavement Support Group

General Executive Committee 2016

Fr. Myles O' Reilly - **Spiritual Director**

Margaret Chambers- **Chairperson**

Maeve Mason - **Secretary**

June Murphy - **Treasurer**

Shirley Scott - **Website/Newsletter co-ordinator**

Anne Butler - **Co-ordinator of Bethany Support Team**

Gobnait O Grady, Liz Ronaldson, Moira Staines, Martin Walshe, Leonie Masterson.

22nd Bethany AGM 5th March 2016

We had a very successful AGM with more than 120 delegates attending. It was convened by Maeve at the later time of 10.30am after which Margaret Chambers welcomed everyone and said how pleased she was to chair her first Bethany AGM. Mass was celebrated by Fr. Myles during which we commemorated members and relatives who died during the year.

The minutes of the 2015 AGM were read by Maeve followed by proposal and seconding.

Treasurers Report was presented by June Murphy who gave a detailed break-down on our considerable expenses which are mainly rents, insurance, postage, newsletter, training and any shortfall in the Orlagh week-end. Due to withdrawal of the Tusla grants many new groups need assistance in setting up. June expressed our thanks for all funds contributed by members.

Secretary's Report

We have had several changes to the composition of the GEC during the past year. Margaret Chambers took over from Moira Staines as Chairperson. Catherine Dunnion and Iggy Lyons stepped down and June Murphy and Martin Walshe were co-opted.

Anne Butler completed her 3 year term as treasurer and June Murphy took over the role.

During the year the GEC held 11 monthly meetings in order to co-ordinate all the activities. Training workshops took place in Blackrock (instead of Monkstown), Esker, New Ross, two in Drumalis.

New groups have been set up in Virginia, Marley, Annaghdown Co. Galway, Srulleen and two more in N. Ireland.

Sr. Anne, Chaplain to Clover Hill Prison has been in contact with the view of setting up a group to visit the prison. However there are considerable delays in securing Garda

clearance. The contact with Sr. Anne is ongoing.

Some groups have disbanded – Tuam, Balbriggan, Blackrock, Tallaght and Clondalkin.

Day of Reflection

This was held on May 9th at Clonliffe and we had a good attendance of over 70.

Strategy Day

All members of the GEC attended a workshop facilitated by Annette Clancy on April 24th. Its purpose was to discuss and look towards the future direction of the GEC. We had a follow-up meeting on June 9th facilitated by Margaret.

Child Protection and Safeguarding

A seminar was held on October 3rd and it had an attendance of 45.

Public Meetings

We held one in Maynooth on March 11th and another in the Clayton Hotel near the Airport on October 21th. Both talks were delivered by Brid Carroll. These talks were very well attended and it appears that there is widespread support and need for them.

Chairperson's report

Posted on-line under www.bethany.ie/members

Enclude

Shirley spoke to us about the GEC's involvement with a company called Enclude around developing a database to securely centralise and manage our membership information. Further information about how things are advancing will be included in the autumn newsletter.

Nomination and election to the GEC followed. June Murphy and Martin Walshe were nominated and elected.

Guest Speaker

Margaret welcomed our

speaker Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell. Dolores' article below provides us with a wonderful overview of all the Senator had to say to us. We adjourned to the dining room and enjoyed further chat and

discussion of the meeting.

Workshop

The majority of the attendees returned for small group discussion of our role as Bethany members.

Key Note Address

At our Bethany 2016 AGM, Marie Louise O'Donnell from DCU 'School of Communication' spoke to us on the topic of 'Death, Dying and Bereavement'. What a feast of poetry, drama, emotion, storytelling, research and personal experience was put before us to help us reflect on such a serious topic! Usually, in our Bethany Bereavement work we deal with the grief that comes from the death of others but in Marie Louise's presentation, we were drawn into the realm of our own immortality!

From the outset, it was obvious that she valued the work we do in Bethany as giving people that 'sacred space' to talk about their grief and loss giving 'sorrow words'. (Macbeth) She also pointed out that we were a symbol of meaning in people's lives

Coming from her background as an Independent Senator in the Oireachtas, her efforts at bringing compassion into politics was so encouraging. She feels that 'Death, Dying and Bereavement' are marginalised to sub-specialities and put aside as somebody else's business. Her research work on 'The Finite Lives, Part 1 – A Report on how the Civil Service deals with Death, Dying and Bereavement' in its own members is a worthwhile read. <http://www.lenus.ie/hse/handle/10147/583483>

She described how death remains as the biggest threat and that it affects all of us. My

eventual death was brought home to me in a vivid way when Marie Louise repeated the words spoken by a woman at the wake of her friend in Donegal: 'Benjie, you have it done now ... you have the death over you ... we all have it to go through.' It was obvious that Marie Louise had learned a lot about the grief process through her own experience of grief especially through the loss of her father.

As well as being so familiar with the whole area of 'Death, Dying and Bereavement', she has a great passion for presenting what she has to say on a topic she is on fire about. The combination of her personal experience and stories added to the quality of her input which was presented with the richness of her dramatic background and love of the arts and poetry.

A clever choice of speaker from the DCU 'School of Communication' I thought when our GEC has prioritised the area of 'Communications, Public Events and Visibility' as our immediate strategic goal. Inviting her to come amongst us was a reaching out to an area of Political Life that Senator Marie Louise O'Donnell is part of in such a life giving way. Let us hope that she will tell others about the great work of our 'Bethany Bereavement Volunteers' in the parishes throughout Ireland!

Dolores Brophy, Mallow.

The Time Has Come



In 2012 Winnie Keogh intimated that it would be her final year on the GEC but fortunately a few more years slipped by and we were graced with her presence and dedication. Now Winnie has definitely decided to retire from the GEC.

I first met Winnie in 1991 when Bethany began in Rathfarnham. Winnie lived in the neighbouring parish of Ballyroan and was a member of Bethany since 1987. She approached our Parish Priest Fr Joe Hanlon about setting up a Bethany Group in Rathfarnham parish. From those early days Winnie was on fire to have Bethany established in as many parishes as possible. That has been Winnie's mission all her time in Bethany. With her energy and commitment she has never tired of giving her all in development of Bethany and in supporting the bereaved and all volunteers who have come forward for training. She has been indomitable and invincible in that mission of service. We all owe a great deal of gratitude to her generosity of spirit and service.

Winnie was in the vanguard of leadership in the establishment of Bethany and has served on the GEC since

1994 when the new constitution was adopted and Bethany was renamed Bethany Bereavement Support Group. She has served as a particularly dedicated member of the GEC for 22 years and also on the preceding governing committee since 1991. A total of 25 years in all. Winnie was Chairperson from 2009-2012.

I can only say having worked closely with Winnie for the past 10 years her knowledge and personal connection with so many groups and individuals was incredible. It was built on sincerity and concern for each individual and group she encountered and ultimately the bereaved. Winnie has been an example of outstanding service. She was most influential with Bethany Bereavement Support Group spreading North, South, East and West under her constant care and support. Hers are big shoes to fill but her example must be an inspiration to us all.

Winnie has a very patient husband Victor who is almost as dedicated to Bethany by association. We owe him a debt of gratitude for his patience and always being so courteous and kind throughout the years. As long as we have Winnie on this earth Bethany will be in her heart and spirit and no doubt she will continue to inspire and motivate us all.

On behalf of Margaret Chambers our Chairperson and all the members of the GEC and Bethany Bereavement Support Group we thank you Winnie with all hearts for all you have given in service to us all. May the good Lord reward you and keep you well for many years to come.

Moir Staines

Bethany Bereavement Support Group,
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Rathfarnham, Dublin 14.

Bethany Phone: 087 9905299

Email: bethanysupport@eircom.net

Website: www.bethany.ie

Strategic Plan 2015-2018 Update

Communication, Public Events and Visibility

Progress has been consistent in our prioritised area highlighted above. Main developments are:

- Introduction of mailshots and quick response levels to queries improving our communication with the membership and public alike.
- Advertisements in a Bereavement Special Feature in three Dublin People Newspapers.
- Promotional piece in the Health Supplement of the Irish Times for Coping with Loss talk.
- Posted positive suggestions/ideas from Bethany Groups on our website.
- Bethany Stands at a wide range of public bereavement-related events which gave us an opportunity to distribute Bethany information and meet those attending.

We now request the support of every Bethany Group throughout the whole of Ireland to plan and implement at least one significant project in the months ahead that will increase the visibility and awareness of the Bethany Bereavement Support Service in your area. Imagine the impact such a surge of energy



would have on our services! Some suggestions to get you started are:

1. Distributing your leaflets/flyers in doctors and dentists surgeries, outside church gates, post offices/supermarkets.....anywhere people meet
2. Seeking out an interview or writing a short piece for your local newspaper or radio station.
3. Arranging an information evening and inviting a guest speaker to talk on a bereavement related topic. Keep the image of one person listening to another bereaved person either in a group or drop-in setting as your central theme.

I wish you the best of luck. Let me know how you get on and Thank you.

Margaret

Day of Reflection:

Presented by Fr. Myles O'Reilly and Mags Mooney Byrne
'Paths to Deeper Spirituality'

Saturday 23rd April 2016 in Milltown Institute,
Sandford Road, Dublin 6. **10.00am – 4.00pm.**

Confirmation of attendance text/phone **087 9905200** or email
bethanysupport@eircom.net

GEC Notice

Bethany General Executive Council (GEC) is seeking to co-opt two additional Bethany members onto the GEC committee. Non-Bethany members can be co-opted for specific roles eg fundraising, media etc.

If you are interested or want to hear more please email
margaretcchambers@eircom.net

See website for dates and venues of Refresher In-service Training for all current Bethany Volunteers and Autumn Training dates in Esker and Northern Ireland.