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Hope - A Life Raft in Stormy Seas

DR ELIZABETH MANN – CLINICAL DIRECTOR

As I write this, the world is devastated by the impact of COVID-19 – every news bulletin seems grim and hard to listen to. We are indeed in stormy seas. We need something to hold on to and I believe that life raft is **hope**, the essential ingredient that all of us need in order to survive and thrive in this life. Without **hope**, life can feel unbearable.

When I think about what is really important to help us feel secure and safe, to give us purpose and meaning in life, I immediately think of relationships – relationships with family, friends and colleagues. Good health, financial and job security and meaningful life roles are also important. For many people, religious faith or a belief system that gives their life structure and purpose, is comforting and sustaining.

Other important ingredients for sustaining equilibrium are structure and having things to look forward to. In normal circumstances we structure our lives with occupations, tasks, pastimes, interests, hobbies, holidays, rituals and ceremonies like birthdays, weddings, religious gatherings and other celebrations. All of these can bring joy and **hope** into our lives. Funeral ceremonies, while not usually described as joyful occasions, can be significant and meaningful occasions and generate **hope**. Whether we acknowledge it or not, most of us want to feel as if our lives have been worth living and that when we die, we too will be honoured and acknowledged for our contributions, and missed. We are all too aware of how the pandemic has changed these experiences for all of us.

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Bereavement disrupts many elements of our lives. Relationships are changed forever, finances are often stretched, our faith may be challenged and other enjoyable experiences like holidays and travel may cease. Nothing is ever the same again and learning to live in the absence of someone we love is a long and painful process. None of this is new.

However, what is new for all of us at the moment is the added stress of a global pandemic. None of us have experienced such a thing before and what we are learning is that it is really undermining the foundations of many of the things in life that keep us steady and stable. For our bereaved families this has been and continues to be an extremely difficult time, their grief exacerbated by the restrictions and changes the pandemic has necessitated.

When any of us are grieving we are helped by familiar routines, a sense that the world continues to turn and a feeling that there is some normality 'out there', even if everything in our personal sphere feels 'abnormal'. Nothing about the world feels normal at the moment. For many it feels unsafe, unpredictable, scary, and unfamiliar. Unable to gather together for significant rituals and ceremonies, leaves many people with heightened anxiety. In fact, anxiety seems to be having its own pandemic at the moment.

What can we do to survive this? What can we do to maintain some sense of **hope** and security in such stormy seas? There is no easy answer, of course.

“ I'M TOUCHED BY THE VARIETY OF WAYS GRIEVING PEOPLE ARE FINDING TO ENHANCE THEIR SURVIVAL IN A SITUATION THAT TENDS TO MAGNIFY EXISTING SADNESS, LONGING AND LONELINESS. ”

We share many common **hopes**. We **hope** that managing this new way of living will become easier; and we **hope** that the spread of COVID-19 will not last forever – that there will eventually be an end date. Maintaining **hope** is hard when we are grieving, with or without a pandemic to contend with. Like grief itself, this pandemic feels out of control, unpredictable and difficult to manage.

When we work with bereaved children, we try to help them find some sense of control over things in their world that are controllable, like finding or re-finding things they are good at. We encourage them to celebrate their achievements, no matter how small.

I'm also encouraging my own children to find something simple and positive to do each day – other than dutiful things like work and study – that gives them a sense of achievement. Sometimes that might mean contacting a friend, going for a walk or cooking something special. As a family, we try to think of something a bit bigger to do once a week – like going out for brunch together, catching up with friends or family, or going for a drive to the mountains.

Like everyone else, we are missing longer term plans, like holidays, to look forward to. Nationally and

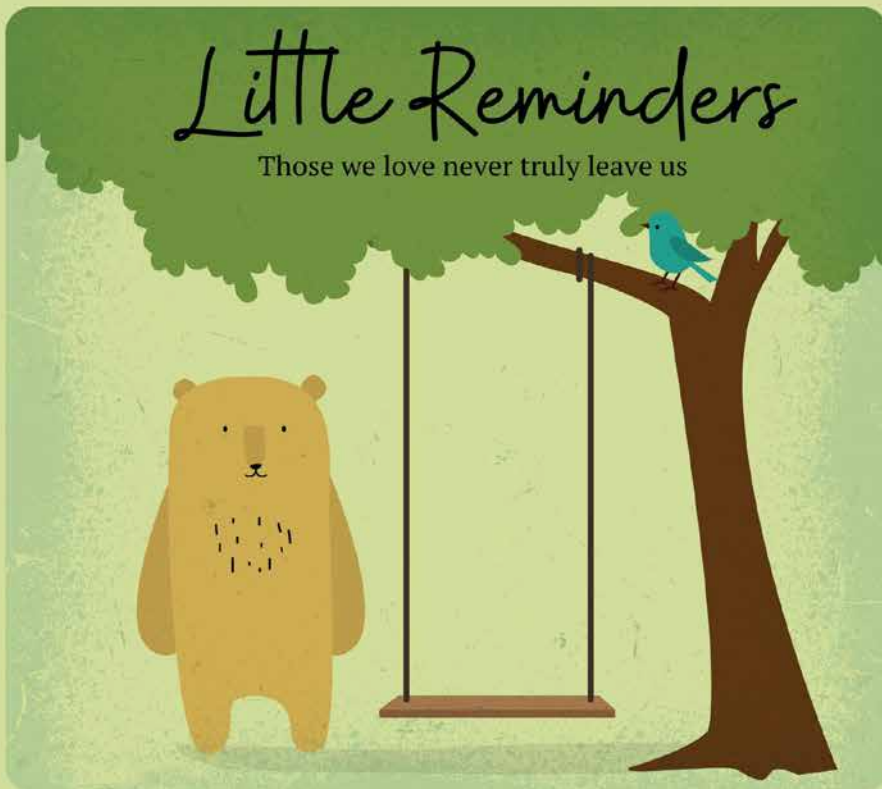
globally, we are all in survival mode and need to lower the bar to keep things manageable. Fun things often spontaneously entered into in pre-pandemic days now need to be carefully planned.

Some grieving families are finding creative ways to connect with others and to honour the person who has died. Some celebrate that person's life online, have zoom parties and memorial services, create art works or write poetry and stories. Journal writing has become popular. I'm touched by the variety of ways grieving people are finding to enhance their survival in a situation that tends to magnify existing sadness, longing and loneliness.

Support networks are sometimes more difficult to access at the moment because everyone is grieving the loss of something important to them and may not have as much in their own emotional tank to share as they have done in the past. No matter what social situation we are living in, we all need compassionate understanding and support as we grieve. You can find this at the National Centre for Childhood Grief, where the incredible team continues to earn my admiration, respect and gratitude for the way they are prepared to go beyond the call of duty. During this current crisis they have all demonstrated a level of commitment and care that is extraordinary. My heartfelt thanks also goes out to our wonderful, compassionate Board, who works hard to keep us afloat. Of course, none of this would be possible without our generous sponsors and supporters. I wish to thank each and every one of you for your continued support.

I will leave you with my own **hope**. I **hope** that every day, we at the NCCG can make a contribution to the lives of bereaved people so that in some way, however small, we are able to enhance their ability to believe that life is still worth living. We want to keep **hope** alive.





HELPFUL BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

Little Reminders

BY KATE WORRALL



'Little Reminders' photo storybook will become a treasured keepsake for both adults and children to maintain a connection with someone who is gone, but not forgotten.

This beautifully illustrated book is designed to provide comfort and support for a family suffering from grief. It is an ideal tool for helping children to process the loss of an important relative or friend from their life.

Designed for personalisation, include precious photos of your loved one who has passed away throughout the book.

What people say about this book

"This is the kind of book for young children that would ideally be read while the family curls up cosily on the sofa on a wet Sunday or a cold winter's day. Visually appealing, sensitively written, heart-warming and uplifting, 'Little Reminders' acknowledges that although people die, our relationships with them live forever and they remain a valued part of our family circle. The book is inter-active and it's easy to imagine it providing a smooth and gentle segue to other important family discussions about life and living, death and dying. I have no hesitation in recommending it to families with young children, for inclusion in school libraries, or for use in other professional settings."

Dianne McKissock OAM
Bereavement C.A.R.E.
Co-founder and Patron - National Centre for Childhood Grief

Message from our chairman

ROBERT McROBBIE



Without wanting to add to the many words already written about COVID-19 I should take this opportunity to acknowledge the hardships which many families in the NCCG community have experienced this year as well as the dedication of our team at our Centre, 'A Friend's Place'. Our staff and volunteers have

“ WITH LITTLE GOVERNMENT FUNDING THE NCCG RELIES MOSTLY ON THE GENEROSITY OF DONORS, BOTH LARGE AND SMALL, AND WE ARE ENDLESSLY GRATEFUL FOR YOUR HELP IN ALLOWING US TO CONTINUE TO SUPPORT BEREAVED FAMILIES. ”

provided almost uninterrupted service throughout the lock-down period and developed new ways of providing support to grieving kids and their families, including, of course, online. On behalf of the Board I would also like to sincerely thank the NCCG's financial supporters who have stuck with us throughout this period. With little government funding the NCCG relies mostly on the generosity of donors, both large and small, and we are endlessly grateful for your help in allowing us to continue to support bereaved families.

Kids Share: COVID-19

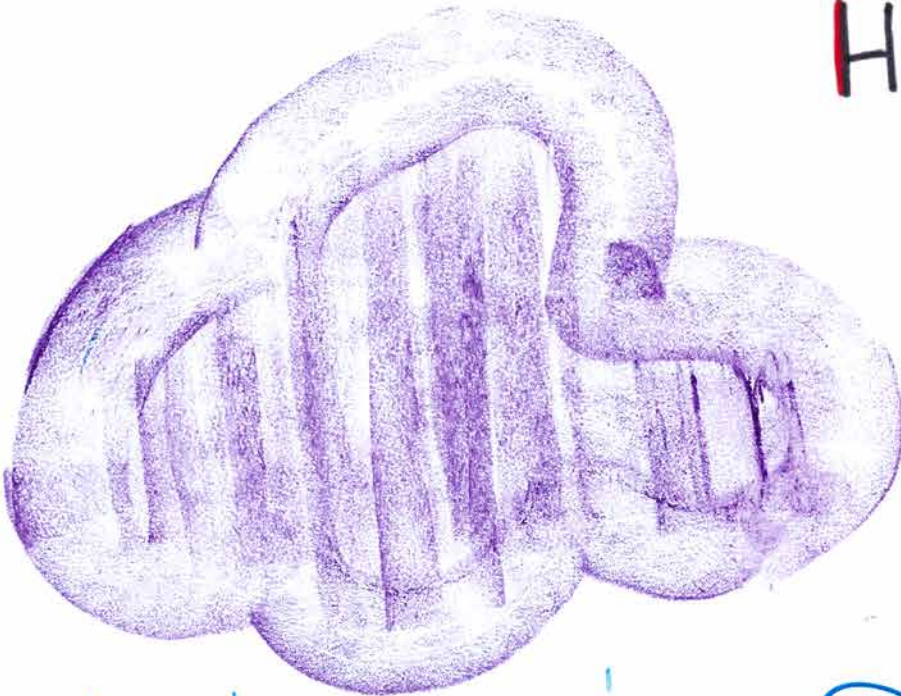
We asked our Kids Group children to share their experiences of COVID-19 and what it was like for them during the lockdown period. These are some of the drawings and pictures that the children did to express how they were feeling about their lives and loved ones and the impact the lockdown had on them.

MADDIE

All We Need is



HOPE AND
LOVE



Savannah, 10

When
Corona came
I felt seperated
from the world





“The best thing has been being able to spend time with my mum and learning to appreciate the little things in life”.

HOLLY, 14



“When you are feeling blue, give your family hugs to make you warm.”

MATT K, 12

“The thing I worry about most is tomorrow because everything changes”.

IVY, 10



“If dad were still alive in the pandemic, I think he would have liked spending more time with me.”

SOPHIE, 8

“I wish that my mummy will come back.”

LARA, 10



“The worst thing has been I can't go to the cemetery.”

KAITLYN, 9



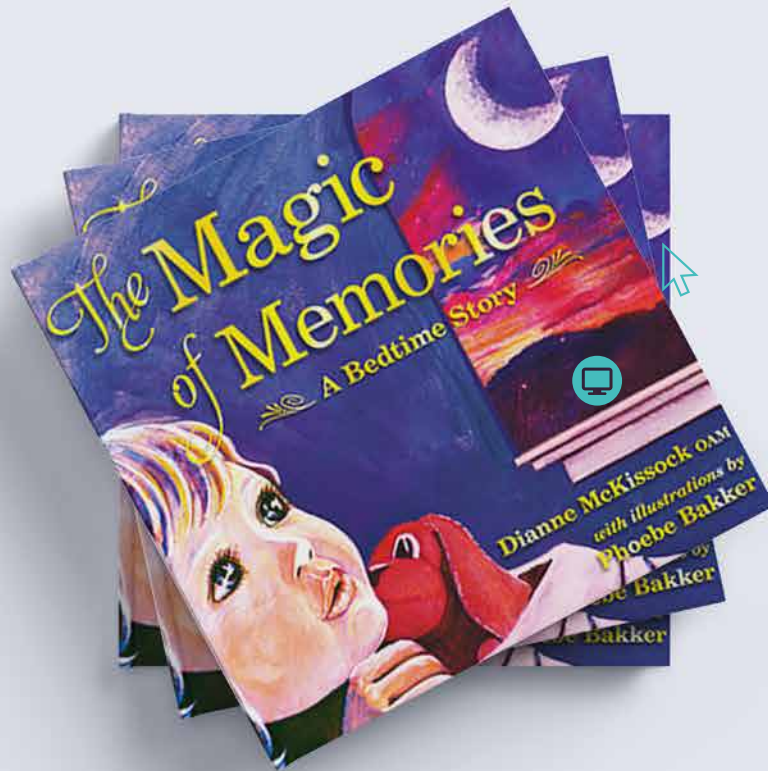
“Over the past months during Covid, family is everything.”

MATT L, 13



“Wonder what it would be like if Dad was still alive.”

HANNAH, 11



HELPFUL BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

The Magic of Memories – A Bedtime Story

BY DIANNE MCKISSOCK OAM AND ILLUSTRATED BY PHOEBE BAKKER

This timeless and magical story with its touchingly beautiful illustrations has been developed through the collaborative relationship of two creative women – Dianne McKissock and Phoebe Bakker: *The Magic of Memories* transcends barriers of age, race and belief systems, transporting the reader into a world that affirms the enduring and uplifting power of special moments of connection.

What people say about this book

“The gentle, caring soul of Dianne McKissock sings to us in this delightful and reassuringly wise story. Delightful in its simplicity, reassuring to adults and children alike in its message of hope, lasting connection, and compassion. There is genuine magic in the mythic quality of this bedtime story that resonates with a truly universal spirituality.”

Dr. Thomas Attig, Professor of Applied Philosophy, Canada

“This story is inspiring, evocative, powerful and moving ... a valuable resource for counsellors, educators and families ... an enlightening piece on the importance and value of relationships built on love and care. Reminiscent of a dreamtime story, it exudes a timeless essence.”

Ian Dodd, Educator, Sydney

“The wonder of this story never leaves us ... we can revisit it time and time again. Children can safely become part of the story, lost in its beautiful imagery. In good stories, TRUTH resounds, making little hearts and spirits sing! You hold such a book in your hands.”

Melisa Rostirolla, Artist, Three Pines Studio, Dural

“The old saying ‘a picture paints a thousand words’ rings true when you experience Phoebe’s illustrations. She brings warmth and depth to the author’s vision, adding another layer of meaning from her own life, to what is already a beautiful story. I believe that children who read this book will become immersed in the imagery as the child within me already has.”

Rachel Watts, Artist.

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Is it Friday or Saturday?

DIANNE MCKISSOCK OAM -
COFOUNDER AND PATRON



Liz Mann invited me to write a short up-date on 'life in semi-retirement for the McKissocks'. We're not narcissistic enough to believe that many folk are interested, but for those who are, this is to assure you that we haven't disappeared off the face of the earth. In fact, we're living in a beautiful part of the world – Port Stephens – and adjusting to the fact that we're old enough to live in an over 55's development. We're still relatively fit, and certainly able to continue our enthusiastic support for the NCCG team and for the bereaved people they care for.

In our delightful place of residence, Mal is a member of 'the yacht club' (remote controlled) and also has a speed-boat version for when he needs to indulge his James Bond moments. He still facilitates a couple of bereavement support groups and before the pandemic, continued to do some teaching. I read, write, provide clinical supervision, and co-facilitate a support group. Both of us walk Saffi, our small, cuddly, constant companion who consistently defies rules of social distancing.

Life is so peaceful and relaxed here that we regularly ask each other "is it Friday or Saturday?" Like the rest of the world since COVID-19, we're learning how to live meaningful lives while missing family, friends and colleagues. We've come to value the role zoom, Skype and FaceTime are playing in our ability to stay connected with important people in our lives. And, as anyone who reads the Blogs I write for the NCCG website knows, you can contact me at any time for email bereavement support. We both send loving and compassionate thoughts to you all.

Bianca's Garden

ANNETTE GURR - DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

We were delighted to open 'Bianca's Garden', our new potting shed activity recently. Children can now pot a plant or create a mini zen garden to take home and care for. Embellished with trinkets, colours and words that symbolise memories of loved ones who have died, this is definitely a favourite activity at the moment for both our children and our counsellors. Not only does it strengthen memories with loved ones, it also reminds children of the safe and loving community they are part of here. A heartfelt thank you to our generous benefactor, Rev. Eric Stevenson, daughter Jessica and Bianca's parents, Christine and Ken, for being part of such a wonderful project. Ken, Bianca's father, shares some words on the significance of this garden.

"Following the sudden passing of her mother, Bianca, in November, 2009, nine-year-old Jessica attended 'A Friend's Place' to help her deal with the grief she was experiencing following such a major change in her life.

At the time last year of the tenth anniversary of that difficult period,

Rev. Eric Stevenson, a friend of the family who had actually officiated at Bianca's funeral, stated he wanted to support something, somewhere, as a memorial to Bianca.

A subsequent approach to the NCCG found that they had been looking for an opportunity to utilise an existing structure which was no longer used for its original purpose. Discussions ensued as to how something of value within the programs the Centre runs could be created whilst acting as its own memorial to Jess's Mum. In this way Bianca's Garden came into being.

Jessica, Bianca's parents, Christine and myself, together with Eric (who actually worked with Di McKissock in the past) feel privileged, and are delighted, to have been part of this project.



The NCCG Goes Online

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in late March we transitioned our essential face to face bereavement counselling services to online. While the NCCG has always provided an Outreach Program, this was the first time we were providing our face to face services in a digital capacity. The Initial feedback has been incredibly positive with many commenting they are thankful this is now an available option. Others noting that while the preference is for in person, they appreciate being able to access the service regardless.

While we were saddened to have to cancel our weekend adventure programs and temporarily close our Centre, 'A Friend's Place', we were also so appreciative to be able to become an online provider and remain accessible to those who need our care. With 'A Friend's Place' reopened again, being able to provide sessions both in person and online ensures we can maintain COVID-19 safety guidelines as well as help our families. Now more than ever, it is critical that our existing and newly



bereaved families, who are already hurting and vulnerable, can access our programs to support their wellbeing and connection to community.

“ GRIEF DOES NOT STOP FOR PANDEMICS AND CAN BE FURTHER ENHANCED BY THE ISOLATION AND LACK OF THINGS TO DO, SO IT’S GREAT TO HAVE CONTINUED HELP. ”

Melinda, Parent

Like many organisations, COVID-19 has certainly had a financial impact. The sudden shift in service delivery and the loss of revenue in significant income generating areas was very unexpected. We would therefore like to share a heartfelt thank you to all the individuals and organisations who have made contributions. You have helped us continue this important service we provide, at a time of great uncertainty for all and we really cannot thank you enough. Your generosity is deeply felt and we sit in much gratitude to you all for your contributions and ongoing support.

