



# Helping Us Grieve

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR CHILDHOOD GRIEF • NEWSLETTER



WORKING TOGETHER TO SUPPORT BEREAVED CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

WINTER EDITION 2021



MOTHER'S DAY BOUQUETS MADE IN KIDS GROUP TO HONOUR THEIR MUMS

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## Behind the Scenes

DR ELIZABETH MANN –  
CLINICAL DIRECTOR

I recently celebrated yet another birthday and I was excited to receive tickets to see 'Hamilton', the new musical showing in Sydney. After many of us spending much of 2020 cooped up watching Netflix, I am sure many can appreciate the joy of being able to experience a live show again. In anticipation of the event, I have been eagerly following the newspaper articles on all the preparation going on in the lead up to the show. Costumes, sets, rehearsals, music... the list is long. Like many things in life, a lot has to go on 'behind the scenes' to enable something worthwhile to succeed.

This is certainly true for the NCCG. A HUGE amount of work goes on behind the scenes at our Centre, 'A Friend's Place', done quietly and tirelessly by many, many wonderful people. Our entire team, our board, our volunteers, our partners, and families, Mal and Di, many of our clients, friends and

“BEHIND THE SCENES, SO MANY TASKS, LARGELY UNSEEN, ARE CARRIED OUT BY WILLING HANDS AND GENEROUS HEARTS.”

sponsors are all working behind the scenes in different ways... we literally would not be able to continue without your incredible and generous help. I won't attempt to name and thank all those responsible for this work... there are just too many... but my heartfelt thanks go to each and every one of you who contribute tirelessly behind the scenes so that the NCCG can continue to provide loving support for bereaved families.

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SAOIRSE, 12

Behind the scenes, so many tasks, largely unseen, are carried out by willing hands and generous hearts. These treasured helpers do things like gardening, repairing damaged equipment or assembling new versions, preparing meals, cleaning, sorting, helping in support groups, attending board and fundraising meetings and activities – the list is endless.

In one of our kid's groups recently, I asked the children "who has helped you 'behind the scenes' in your grief, and how they might have done so?" The question stimulated a wonderful conversation... mostly about how appreciative they are for the love shown by their surviving parent and the countless things they do for them. They also expressed gratitude for caring nurses, doctors, friends, teachers, grandparents, siblings, relatives and of course their counsellors at the NCCG.

Several children also mentioned that not everything that happens behind the scenes is helpful. Sadly, many have encountered other children who actually make their grief worse, bullies who use their grief as a way to hurt them even more. Of course, bullies are often cowards who usually work 'behind the scenes' to cause distress.

I then asked the children to use artwork to illustrate the kind of 'behind the scenes' support they have received as they grieved. Some of these drawings

**“FOR MANY, THE NCCG IS A PLACE WHERE BEREAVED PEOPLE CAN FEEL SAFE TO SHARE THEIR DEEPEST FEELINGS, WHERE THEY KNOW THAT THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO WILL STAY WITH THEM IN THEIR SADNESS AND BE THERE FOR THEM FOR HOWEVER LONG IT TAKES.”**

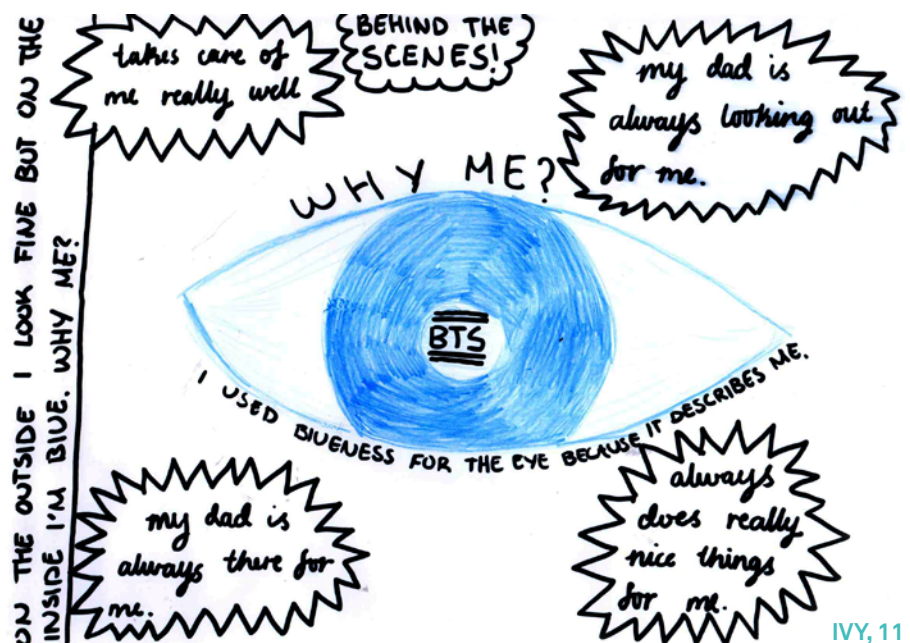
are included here and also in the Kids share section. Among the many things I love about children are their honesty and creativity, in this instance demonstrated by some children drawing themselves holding on to helium balloons, all representing supportive people who buoyed their spirits and prevented them from 'collapsing in a heap on the ground'. Others talked about how it is often emotions that are expressed behind the scenes, known only by themselves and a very few special, trusted people. All the children agreed that having a safe place like the NCCG where they could talk about all those feelings that they keep behind the scenes is incredibly helpful. Another child drew a big eye, saying that a lot of what happens behind the scenes is invisible, not known to others, but if we look carefully and deeply, we can see into the heart of the person and understand what is really happening.

We all need people who will take the time to look behind the obvious and see what is really happening in our hearts.

As bereaved adults, I think we can also have a lot happening emotionally

- some visible and a lot in private, behind the scenes, where we feel safe and protected. However, if too much is going on 'behind the scenes', it can feel overwhelming and a heavy burden to carry on our own. Grief is a lonely experience, and many of us can feel isolated and avoided, often disappointed that some of those people we expected to be there for us, are not. Best friends can vanish, family can become too busy, and we can be left feeling hurt and abandoned. Thankfully, there are others who may come from behind the scenes to help us in our time of need, perhaps those we least expected.

For many, the NCCG is a place where bereaved people can feel safe to share their deepest feelings, where they know that there are people who will stay with them in their sadness and be there for them for however long it takes. But such a special place takes a lot of special people behind the scenes to enable this to happen. Thank you to all you quiet supporters. We appreciate you, we love you, and we really value your contribution. We literally could not do what we do without you.



IVY, 11

# Message from our chairman

ROBERT McROBBIE



A key part of what happens behind the scenes at the NCCG is thinking about our impact. After 25 years of helping bereaved children and their families, the NCCG has witnessed its positive effects on individuals and communities many times. Through its counselling sessions, group-based activities, and the Peter Coupland Adventure camps, the NCCG has provided children with the means to live with their grief and carry the memory of their deceased loved ones through all stages of their lives. Knowledge of its impact has always motivated the NCCG's staff and supporters to keep helping vulnerable children at no cost and for as long as they need it.

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Anecdotal awareness of its impact is essential for the NCCG but is not enough. Financial supporters increasingly require charities to provide evidence of their impact on individuals and society, and our counsellors would benefit from receiving an analysis of the effectiveness of our programs. Most importantly, ongoing impact measurement helps the NCCG to keep developing innovative ways to help bereaved children and their families. With the assistance of long-time supporters, Turks Legal, the NCCG will soon have the means to gather, analyse and present the type of impact assessment crucial for our future.

Using an online platform called Social Suite and through consultation with Development Impact, the NCCG will shortly begin inviting clients to respond to age-specific questions anonymously, at intervals throughout their time with the NCCG. Considerable effort has

been made to design and implement an outcome measurement framework tailored to the NCCG's Vision, Purpose and Values, based on the core themes of Hold, Heart, Head and Hope. As with everything we do, sensitivity and compassion have been at the forefront of this project.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank Turks Legal for their considerable generosity and interest in making this possible. I would also like to thank and congratulate Annette Gurr for leading this program. With special mention also to the team that has supported her 'behind the scenes', Valda, Betsy, Kerri, Natalie, Scott and Liz, for the many hours they have dedicated to researching and designing a meaningful and practical impact measurement program. This initiative will be a significant milestone in the history of the NCCG.

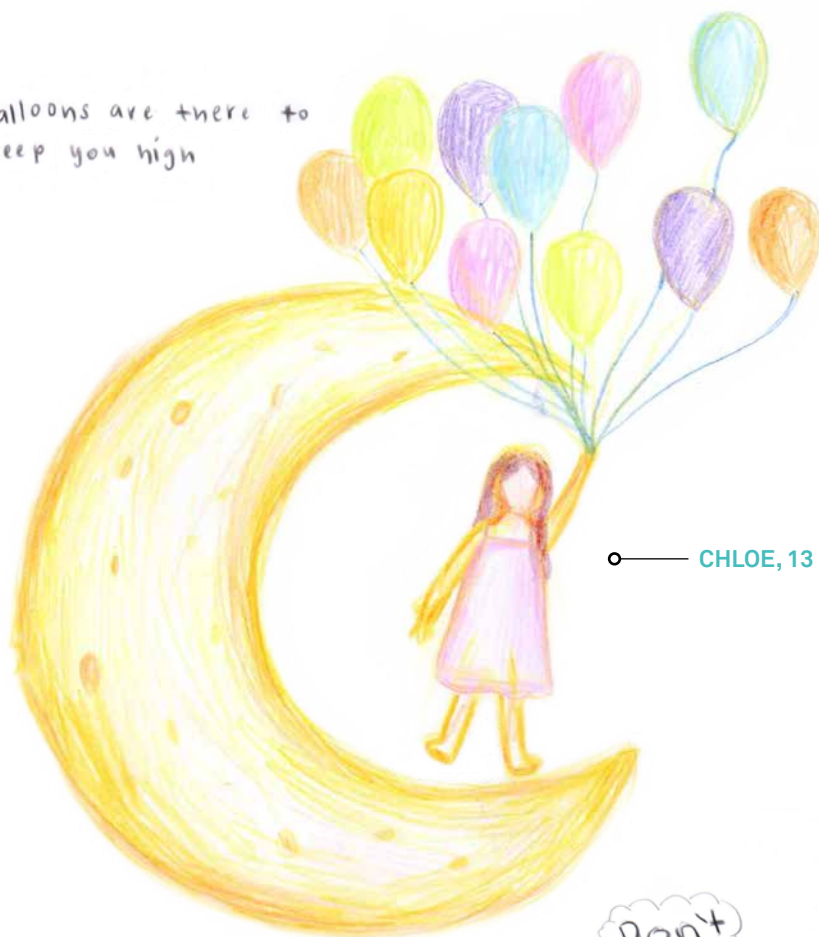


# Kids Share

## BEHIND THE SCENES

We asked one of our Kids Groups to illustrate the kind of 'behind the scenes' support they have received while grieving. As always with the children, an insightful conversation and creative process unfolded. The helium balloon artwork represented all of the supportive people who have helped buoy them in their grief. Others shared how for them, it is more about the emotions that are expressed behind the scenes, known only by themselves and a very few special, trusted people, including their counsellors at the NCCG.

Balloons are there to  
keep you high



CHLOE, 13



MADDIE, 13

This is what happens when  
I try and keep emotions to  
myself so I don't worry  
others



JAIDEE, 14

# Family Camp

BELINDA DUNN – ADULT COUNSELLOR

From 30 April – 2 May, some of the NCCG team were joined by six of our bereaved families at our second Family Camp. Having been unable to run the camp last year due to COVID restrictions, we were pleased to be able to do so this year. The camp was held at Quest for Life, a beautiful property in Bundanoon in the Southern Highlands. It is an environment which elicits a sense of calm and relaxation, a welcome contrast to the busyness of ordinary life. The autumn weather was at its best, there was an earthy aroma in the air and the many surrounding trees were awash with vibrant golden and red foliage. The property's staff welcomed us warmly and kept us nourished throughout the weekend with delicious home cooked meals. The porridge and the pumpkin soup were a highlight, and everyone enjoyed trying the wide array of herbal teas on offer.

After settling into our rooms, some fun warm up activities saw any initial feelings of trepidation dissipate. A game designed to help us get to know each other, meant it was not long before we had learnt who has a pet, who plays an instrument, who shares a birthday month, and who does not like chocolate (there was one!). Other

**“IF THERE EVER COMES A DAY WHEN WE CAN'T BE TOGETHER, KEEP ME IN YOUR HEART, I'LL STAY THERE FOREVER.”**

Winnie the Pooh

activities throughout the weekend, such as a whole group drumming session, games, cards, ball sports and Finska, produced much talking and laughing, and a healthy dose of competitiveness! A particular hit was a visit by 'Feature Creatures' on Saturday morning. Frogs, spiders, stick insects, lizards, turtles, snakes and even a baby crocodile joined our group. Much fun was had as together we faced our fears and were entertained by Jacki in a humorous and interactive animal encounter.

In addition to the many 'light' moments the weekend contained, the children and the parents also had opportunities to spend time together or in separate groups, engaging in activities and conversations that allowed them to share their experience of loss and grief, of resilience and hope. The children decorated beautiful paper hearts,

created a symbolic bush installation from natural items foraged from the property's grounds, and made a family mosaic. The children shared these activities with each other and with their parent.

A moving candle ceremony around a campfire on Saturday night provided further opportunity for the children and parents, along with the team to honour their loved one who has died. There were both tears and smiles as we witnessed and reflected each other's love and loss. Hot chocolate and flame toasted marshmallows capped off a very special evening.

Grief can be a very lonely experience, but our weekend together fostered a sense of community, and the forming of new friendships and connections. This was reflected in our final session together with the sharing of comments such as: "It has been special to be with other people who understand", "it has been wonderful to see my children connect with other children in a similar circumstance", "I am grateful to see my children open up and share". We headed back home a little weary but with full hearts!



**“IT'S QUITE SOMETHING, TO MEET STRANGERS AND YET FEEL A DEEP CONNECTION BECAUSE OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCE YOU'VE ALL SHARED. WE DIDN'T LEAVE FEELING LIKE STRANGERS - IT'S A VERY POWERFUL THING, TO FIND A HERD THAT YOU BELONG TO. IT WAS A PRIVILEGE TO BE ALLOWED INTO THE HIDDEN PRIVATE SPACES OF OTHER PEOPLE'S LIVES.”**

Skye, Parent



# Thank you

A **HEARTFELT** thank you to all our supporters. It has been such an incredibly unusual time for all, and we are deeply appreciative for all those who continue to give to our cause. For our bereaved children and families who are having to navigate daily life in such vulnerability, your 'behind the scenes' support is hugely significant to ensuring their wellbeing. Again, we admire you all for your ongoing commitment and investment in the children and families that come to the NCCG.



Gary, Resident Handyman and Ace, Quality Control Officer



Di, Patron



Greater Charitable Working Bee



First Foundation Working Bee



Kerri and Scott, Counsellors



Joke, Counsellor



Natalie, Counselling Coordinator



Turks Legal,  
Working Bee



Lil and Belinda,  
Counsellors



Steve, Volunteer, Liz, Clinical  
Director and Mary, Group Leader



Mal, Patron



Merck,  
Craft Bags



Valda, Office  
Administrator



Annette, (Gorilla) and  
Liz, Manager's Meeting



Nick, Volunteer  
Support Worker,  
Carolyn, Counsellor



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