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SQUARE. ”

In those conditions we are more likely to feel anxious, unsettled, overwhelmed, confused, frightened, and without hope. We are herd animals and many times in life, particularly when we grieve, we need our own ‘herd’, our community to give us the kind of support network that feels like a strong lifeline. We can usually find hope more easily in a collective, especially when that collective encourages creative thinking outside the square. If family and friends are not able to make us feel ‘held’, we may be able to create a new ‘herd’ via online groups, special interest groups, church groups, community groups, clubs and voluntary work.

As a close team of colleagues at the National Centre for Childhood Grief (‘A Friend’s Place’), we know the importance and benefit of being part of a special community. We also have our wonderful Board who provide another layer of support, which is so necessary because of the nature of our work. None of us could do what we do alone. The bereaved individuals, children and families who use our service become part of this caring community enabling us to create the kind of teamwork that we know works best to help people live with the pain of grief.

At the moment, many people are tired, fed up and feeling devoid of creativity after the past years of learning to live in a different kind of world – the world of pandemic. It often seems too hard to remain positive when feeling alone, but together we can generate and sustain hope. Remaining connected is important and I love this quote from Brené Brown which says it all. “I define connection as the energy that exists

between people when they feel seen, heard and valued, when they can give and receive without judgement; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship”.

For those of you who are grieving and feeling alone, I invite you into our community at ‘A Friend’s Place’. Together we will find a way through this, to find hope, one step at a time.





# Message from our chairman: Connection

ROBERT McROBBIE



However, some things are not the same as they were in the “old days”, which makes connecting with people different to how it was. One difference comes from the need to wear a face mask on public transport, which some commuters comply with, and others ignore. Of course, nearly everyone is wearing the ubiquitous earbuds, so any chance of connecting with fellow travellers seems impossible anyway. Yet, whether in the workplace or sitting beside a mask-wearing stranger on a bus, different connections are made constantly, which reminds us of what it is to be human. In his remarkable book ‘Sapiens’, historian and philosopher Yuval Noah Harari argues that through our different connections, humans find opportunities to cooperate to achieve incredible, world-changing outcomes.

At the National Centre for Childhood Grief (‘A Friend’s Place’), we have always put connections at the heart of

everything we do. Before every Board meeting, the directors enjoy dinner together and share stories of events in our lives since we last met. It seems like a trivial thing to do, but it has been done for decades, and to abandon it would be very out of step with how ‘A Friend’s Place’ works. Meaningful connections also exist among our wonderful staff and volunteers, and of course, with the children and families that we support. We also highly value our relationships with our supporters, many of whom have stood by the NCCG for years, enabling us to carry on and help the increasing number of families who require our assistance. We are a small organisation, but these connections create opportunities for the NCCG to achieve incredible, world-changing outcomes for the many bereaved children and families that we meet every day.

While my workplace has a great approach to flexible working arrangements, many of my colleagues have returned to the office over the last few months. On some days, it’s almost like pre-pandemic times when meeting rooms are full, and you can be guaranteed to be drawn into a casual conversation around the proverbial watercooler. Connecting with colleagues and friends in a personal way has been a great pleasure now that the worst of Covid-19 is hopefully behind us.

“ IN HIS REMARKABLE BOOK ‘SAPIENS’, HISTORIAN AND PHILOSOPHER YUVAL NOAH HARARI ARGUES THAT THROUGH OUR DIFFERENT CONNECTIONS, HUMANS FIND OPPORTUNITIES TO COOPERATE TO ACHIEVE INCREDIBLE, WORLD-CHANGING OUTCOMES. ”



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# LIVING WITH GRIEF with the help of a caring community

DIANNE MCKISSOCK OAM - PATRON



In 2021 Mal McKissock OAM and I commissioned a First Nations contemporary artist, P (Cill) Lawlor of Kamilaroi country, to depict in colourful symbols the depth and breadth of the service provided by the National Centre for Childhood Grief ('A Friend's Place') for grieving children and their families.

This painting, a rich tapestry of symbols that represents childrens' grief journeys and those who accompany them, is self evident in parts but our understanding and appreciation can be enhanced with further explanation.

Cill Lawlor tells us that the yarning circle in the centre represents group work with footprints  marking the pathway to help. She included a kangaroo paw  because kangaroos can't go backwards and while children can look backwards to collect and save precious memories,

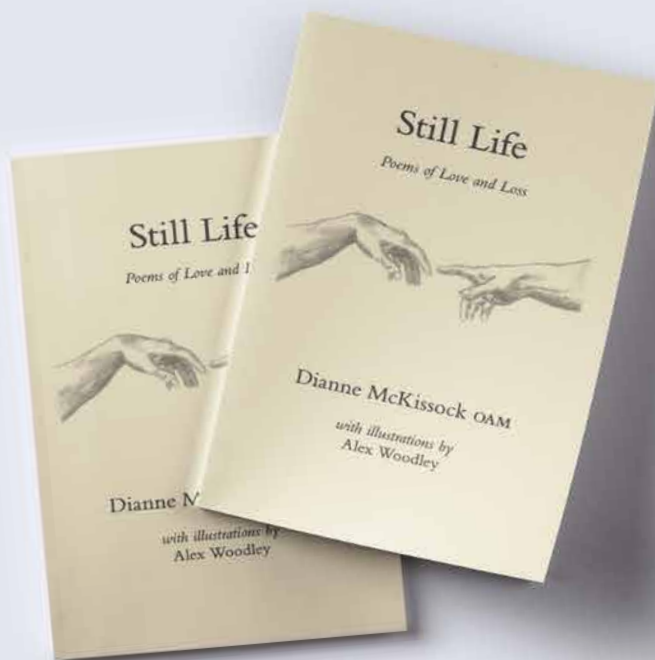
with help, they keep moving forward, into life, at their own pace.

The painting includes helpers - parents, counsellors, administration staff, Board members and other children. It acknowledges the many facets of grief from obstacles to overcome, to moments of joy and laughter as balance is gradually restored. Creative activities, remembering hearts, adventure camps, games, music, painting and drawing, enhance memories and provide respite. All these and more have been touchingly included in this beautiful painting.

We invite you to visit the Centre to see the painting for yourself. Ask one of the team to show you where other gems take their place in the healing magic of 'A Friend's Place', as depicted by an artist who understands the world of grief.







one weary step at a time,  
every limb in my body  
heavy with grief.  
Each time I faltered,  
the memory of you filled me  
with determination  
to be all that I can  
...for you

At a recent meeting of the International Work Group on Death, Dying and Bereavement in Oslo, Norway, Dianne's poem, 'Living with Grief' was featured as part of a memorial service.

Dianne's words ring true. They are affirming and empowering. She treads gently through the pain and anguish of grief. She includes themes of nature: forests, mountains, oceans and the changing seasons, offering a 'haven from pain'.

Alex Woodley's beautiful sketches add a playful, yet poignant dimension to Dianne's poems as a musician might offer a musical accompaniment. It is a pleasure to read that Alex is also a poet and musician who comes from a long line of pipers from the Isle of Skye.

As the poet Elizabeth McKim explains, "All poems are small stories of who we are, where we've been and where we are going. The poem is a small drop with many interconnected circles which keep moving outwards."

To paraphrase McKim, *Still Life: Poems of Love and Loss* is most certainly an example of Dianne's small stories of who she is, where she's been and where she is going. Her poems are small drops with many interconnected circles which will continue to move outwards.

*Reviewed by Dr Irene Renzenbrink  
PhD, DVATI, M.Soc.Admin, B.A. Dip.  
Soc. Studs.*

#### BOOK REVIEW

## Still Life: Poems of Love and Loss

BY DIANNE MCKISSOCK OAM, WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY ALEX WOODLEY

**D**ianne McKissock's recently published collection of poetry is a fine example of what Elizabeth McKim, Poet Laureate of the European Graduate School in Switzerland, would describe as 'brave poems'. Perhaps Gregory Orr, author of 'Poetry as Survival', would describe them as 'personal lyric poems' or poems that can transform crisis into symbolic and vivid language. In this way, the experiences of loss and grief are not only given a different form but made accessible to others. Dianne's poems reflect both the deep wisdom gained from helping grieving and bereaved people over many decades, but also the healing of pain and despair in her own life.

As she writes in the Introduction to *Still Life*, "These poems were born from the anguish of these experiences and the slow process of learning to live with them".

For example, in 'Of Pain and Sorrow', Dianne shares the familiar cry and question:

*'How hard it is to live  
in this new reality.  
Will I ever be free from pain?'*

In 'Courage', she explores the theme of resilience and tenacity:

*I never knew I had courage  
until I persuaded myself to keep going*

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# Kids Share

KERRI HAMER –  
CHILDREN'S COUNSELLOR

## Cupcake flower bouquets

In preparing for Mother's Day, the 'Yellow' Kids Group talked about the things their mums do or did for them. They also talked about some of the things they share with their mums, for instance, physical features, interests, things mum taught them and behaviours or personality traits. They then wrote on cupcake papers the things they are grateful for that their mums have done or shared with them. To complete this activity they turned the cupcake papers into a beautiful bunch of flowers to remember their mums.



## Hands

Recently in the 'Orange' Kids Group the children undertook an activity that was all about hands. What their hands look like, what they do with their hands, what memories their hands might hold and the things they can do with their hands to make them feel better when they are sad. They also talked about the hands of their parent who has died. For instance, any memories they have associated with their parent's hands and whether they remember what their parent's hands looked like. The kids then traced around their own hands and wrote on the fingers. On one hand were the memories of their parent's hands and on the other hand, how their own hands can help them in their grief. A powerful and lasting activity for these children that is made possible by all the donations coming in to support our children's counselling programs.







# Girls Adventure Weekend

LIZ MANN – CLINICAL DIRECTOR



In June, we took 17 bereaved girls, many quite anxious and reluctant, to Quest For Life in Bundanoon. While the ice breaking activity started as a group bonding RAT (thankfully nobody tested positive!!!), this was soon followed by many heartfelt activities and much fun. It was full and rich with craft activities, journaling, drumming workshops, photography and lawn games. Our friends from Feature Creatures brought the reptile love again.

Always a hit with the kids (and adults), and a mix of facial expressions!!! On Saturday evening the campfire was enjoyed with toasted marshmallows and a beautiful candle ceremony with the kids, where a few tears were shed.

One of the standout activities over the weekend was a scavenger hunt, where the girls ran around finding all sorts of meaningful items to put in their grief survival kits. Everyone found some joy to include which was great! We finished with the girls passing around calico bears and writing one word about each other on the bears. Words of affirmation and encouragement that they can look at whenever they need to when they are back at home. They all loved this weekend and got onto the bus cuddling their bears and with hearts full and bodies exhausted.

Much gratitude and appreciation to First Foundation who funded this program. It is so incredibly beneficial for the children to come together with other bereaved children, so they know they are not alone and can share time with others who are also learning to accommodate grief into their life. Thank you to Quest for Life for accommodating our group and serving up delicious meals all weekend. Many thanks also to all of the counsellors and young adult volunteers who weaved their magic across the three days, each skilfully contributing to ensure the weekend was a success....and to our administration team, for their amazing and essential 'behind the scenes' efforts. Overall, a truly fabulous weekend and a really wonderful opportunity for these 17 young women.

## Farewell to one of our Kids Counsellors



In June, we farewellled one of our valued and loved counsellors, Joke (Johanna) Klein van Exel. Joke first did one of our bereavement counselling courses in 2013 and then trained to become a specialist children's bereavement counsellor. Joke has been a committed and passionate member of our team since then. She is known for her wonderful creativity, and many children have enjoyed working creatively with her

as they expressed their grief through art, craft and other creative avenues. Joke has always cared deeply for the children and families in her care and has provided wonderful support for so many hurting kids. Joke is proud of her Dutch heritage and as a team, we have enjoyed many delicious home cooked Dutch treats over the years. Joke has plans to travel more and also spend time with her new grandson. We wish her all the very best for the future and thank her sincerely for her years of commitment to the NCCG.

# Specialist Courses 2022



All courses PACFA endorsed



## Core Course in Bereavement Counselling

### Course Duration

2 half days online plus 1 day in Centre (12 CPD hours)

### Course Cost

\$875 (25% discount applies to July course – Course cost \$640)

### Course Dates

Term 3: 26 & 27 July, 28 July

Term 4: 18 & 19 October, 25 October

## Working with Bereaved Children

### Course Duration

3 days (18 CPD hours)

### Course Cost

\$875

### Course Dates

Term 4: 10 – 12 October

## Kids Grief in the School Setting

### Course Duration

1 Half Day online (3.5 CPD hours)

### Course Cost

\$160

### Course Dates

Term 3: 16 August

Term 4: 8 November

For enrolment details go to our website



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