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'Shafts of Sunlight'

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide First National Forum

"Inspiring, heart warming, heart wrenching" (Forum delegate).

The above quote encapsulates what many of us felt about the day and Forum feedback indicates that many delegates saw the event as a source of support, encouragement and celebration. The Forum was held on Saturday 8th November 2008 at the Midland Hotel, Derby. Its aim was to further develop our knowledge of suicide and its aftermath, support survivors and also to bring together people with a common interest and shared experiences.

The Forum was attended by 72 delegates with representatives from the Mental Health Trust, police, voluntary agencies, counselling services and of course, survivors. With the help of our facilitator, David O'Grady, the Forum ran smoothly. We welcomed guest speakers, Martin Anderson, Keith Ineson and Gordon Riches.



Martin's talk was engaging and informative as he outlined the current position of England's National Suicide Prevention Strategy. We learnt that suicide rates are going down and how this has been achieved.

At the same time, it highlighted vulnerable groups to us, such as the elderly.



Keith's heart-moving talk focused on the farming community and the isolation experienced by many when suffering from depression. Yet when there is a suicide, this is a

supportive and close-knit community. We were also asked to close our eyes and conjure up an image of a farmer and Keith challenged those images, as for example, the reality is that they work very long hours, rarely have holidays and often suffer debt too. challenged those images, as for example, the reality is that they work very long hours, rarely have holidays and often suffer debt too.

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After lunch, we heard **Gordon's** talk

'Getting a Life: Mapping the Landscape of Loss'.

This resonated with many delegates and as one noted, "Shafts of sunlight" came from

Gordon's talk. His ideas of 'going under' and then moving towards 'going in' and finally 'going out' was truly inspiring and also a source of support. Over all, Forum evaluations indicate that the presentations were well received with over 80% of delegates rating them as excellent.

A big thank you to Forum delegates but also, to the organisers, speakers, David and the Midland Hotel who all contributed to the day's success. At the same time, thank you to all those who support Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide, whether that is picking up the telephone to a distressed parent, rising money at a car boot sale, emailing a bereaved sibling, organising a retreat, attending a group or making a donation.



The Forum reaffirmed how Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide is both needed and valued by survivors and those who work with bereaved people.

Facilitator David O'Grady

Events such as this and support days raise awareness of our work and as one delegate observed

, "Until 2 weeks ago, before the poster arrived, I had not heard of Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide. I know where to come to when I'm ready". Once they do, they will be able to, "move forward in the supportive arms of like-minded survivors" (delegate).

Caroline Simone (Trustee) Gordon Riches
November 2008

HUGE THANK YOU FROM THE BOLTON GROUP



To Linda and John of the Church Inn, Wigan Road, Bolton, for all their wonderful efforts in raising funds for our group. They will continue to support our group for as long as the Bolton Group exists.

Over the last two years they and their customers have raised hundreds of pounds through raffles, darts/football matches, sponsored walks, karaoke competition, car boot sales etc and we feel they deserve a special mention in the next Newsletter.

The fundraising was made possible by one of their customers Jean, who lost her daughter Leanne through suicide and recently has lost a second daughter. The fundraising is in memory of them, lest we forget.

Janet and Noel

A SECRET DISCOVERED AFTER DEATH

Our son took his life this August at the age of 31.

We made a discovery after his death that we would like to share with other SOBS members, in case it rings a bell with other bereaved parents.

Although Andrew had a girlfriend for four years, we found from old letters that he had been impotent. This together with his depression was what led to his break-up (according to what his girlfriend). This was a terribly sad discovery for us, and it explained so many things, particularly his lack of confidence when he was so attractive, so kind had so many friends and was so capable in his job. It also explained why he had never 'moved on' in the six years after his girlfriend left him - because of course, he must have thought his problem would make it impossible to sustain any new relationship. It made it clear to us why this year had been so hard for him, filled as it was with weddings and babies among his family and friends.

But this was not all we discovered. We also found research that showed his impotence was very likely to have been caused by a bad head injury that he had suffered when he was seven. Damage to the pituitary gland in childhood can show itself years later in adolescence. But nobody ever warned us of this, because the research has mainly been written in the past few years. Brain-injury-induced hypopituitarism is often not diagnosed, or diagnosed years too late, because medics in this country are just not aware how common it is. At least five people treated Andrew for depression but nobody thought of his past brain injury and checked his hormone levels. In fact, between 28% and

69% of head injury survivors have pituitary damage - one article describes it as a 'silent epidemic.' We're now doing all we can to make sure people everywhere know, because we do not believe that Andrew was the only victim of this lack of awareness.

It was by mere chance that we discovered about Andrew's impotence. If it hadn't been for the letters ... and it was only thanks to my sister's persistent searching of the Internet that we found the research. So now we wonder how many other past suicides may hide this same story, without the parents having the faintest idea.

If anyone has a child who had a past brain injury and took his/her own life (hypopituitarism affects girls as well as boys) I would be so pleased if they would get in touch. I would be happy to email copies of the research I have mentioned.

My telephone number is 020 8665774, email joannalane@blueyonder.co.uk.

BOOK REVIEW - OVERCOMING LOSS

This book will prove to be an excellent resource for anyone who is helping children deal with grief through loss. It has many activities that support children in expressing their feelings, and supplies ways of working with them to help them when they have not actually got the vocabulary to express what it is that they are feeling. It gives positive examples of how good memories can be expressed and stored, so that children can reach closure, and transcend the loss of the physical contact. Guidance on building new perspectives is offered, and the book can be photocopied as hand out materials for working with individuals or groups.

There is a useful Appendix that cites common reactions to traumatic stress, divided into age groups, with guidance for parents on how to handle this. For those people who are working with groups over time, there is a four-week curriculum which gives indicators for working from a basic foundation, through development, to closure, with many activity examples. Finally, there is an excellent Resource List giving contacts across many support groups and organisations in the UK and EU. I feel that this book is excellent, both as a working tool, and a reference book for guidance and ideas. *Helen Walker*

Author Julia Sorenson

Paperback, ISBN: 978-1-84310-646-3, £19.99

FIRST RETREAT

It was just seven months ago, in April 2008, that my family and I were left floundering in the morass of confusion, disbelief, pain and despair when my beloved eldest daughter ended her life; we felt we were in real danger of sinking. Then, we became aware of Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide. It was as though we had been thrown a lifebelt and only six weeks after Nicola's

death we attended our first group meeting. Not long after that the possibility of attending the Retreat came along and I decided to take the plunge and attend.

As the date of the retreat drew nearer I must admit that I had feelings of apprehension, I was uncertain about what to expect. Would there be any pressure? Would I be expected to be strong? Would I be able to hold it together? Would I be welcome and would I find the support and security I was so in need of?

I have to say from the very beginning of the weekend I knew with certainty that my fears were groundless. It didn't matter if or when I cried, it didn't matter who I spoke to of my feelings and circumstances, I was with people who were, although at many different stages and with many different stories, going through the same as myself and I was not alone.

The whole weekend was relaxed, without pressure, cathartic, comforting and most importantly for me, secure. The hotel was lovely, the food and service wonderful and the organisation of our time there truly excellent. Attending the retreat and belonging to the group is an experience of being with people WHO REALLY DO KNOW how I feel and what's more, truly do care.

Jackie Martinez

For more information about the Gloucester Retreat, please contact **Trish on 01452 371945**

LAUNCH OF HEALTHTALKONLINE.ORG

Thursday 6th November found Paula and Ann from the Nottingham Sharers of Bereavement by suicide arriving in London in the early evening to take part in the launch of this new website, part of which has a section on Suicide Bereavement. Suzzi Holden a Trustee of Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide also attended, along with John Peters from the Solihull Group. I think it is appropriate to thank the Research Group of Oxford University for having the insight to identify Suicide Bereavement as a Health Issue and to thank Alison Chappell for the innumerable hours spent gathering the recordings and video shots for the website. Do visit the website and recommend it to those newly bereaved.

Libby Purves one of the speakers shared these beautiful words written by her son Nicholas Heiney at some time before his death: *'What is important is not the way in which we record our existence, but that we do record it. Remember how the streets ring out for every soul that thought and felt and passed through them in weakness and in strength.'*

KATHERINE'S WOOD - BALSALL COMMON



On Sunday 14th September 2008, I had the privilege of sharing with fellow survivors from the West Midlands Area an afternoon with Ian and Sheila Courts, who have successfully brought to fruition a tree planting project in memory of their beloved daughter Katherine. Katherine had commented to her parents how she thought more tree planting in the local park would enhance the area and encourage wildlife. With this in mind, after the death of their daughter Ian and Sheila began asking for contributions towards their project. They have been assisted in their goal by the support of the Rotary Club of Meriden and Solihull M.B. Council.

In June 2007 Ian and Sheila were delighted to be awarded, a Big Lottery "Breathing Spaces" grant of £8750 for an area of planting. All in all nearly four acres of planting in the Park have been carried out and this has prompted the Park itself to be declared, by Solihull M. B. Council, as a Local Nature Reserve. The project has been reported on the front page of the local paper, and a lovely sign bearing Katherine's name erected at the beginning of the walk that forms Katherine's Wood. School groups have been planting wildflower plugs around the Project area and also planted additional native shrubs. Groups have also taken part in "bug hunts" and pond dipping. Volunteers have laid some additional hedging and started installing some steps to help create a nature trail / circular walk through the wood. Some wooden trail / marker posts have still to be installed around the area and the Rotary District 1060 has given a £500 matched funding grant to assist with this. The posts will be inscribed with the name "Katherine's Wood" and bear the Rotary insignia. Out of a great loss and deep grief Ian and Sheila have created a special area where they can remember the goodness and life of their daughter, and where young and old alike can enjoy the beauty of nature as the trees, shrubs and wild flowers flourish in the years ahead. *Ann Davies*

GRANT AWARDED

The organisation would like to thank Lyn Rabbitt for all her hard work, time and effort over the past 12 months, which has now been rewarded with the grant of £53,000 from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

Eric Thwaites



On behalf of everyone involved with our charity, I would like to thank the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for their generous award, helping us to continue our support over the next 2 years.

Lyn Rabbitt

BEN NEVIS CONQUERED BY INTREPID EIGHT



Conquering Ben Nevis, the challenging walk in the Scottish Highlands, seemed an ideal way to honour the memory of Mark, son of John and Jane Thorne, as also Rob and Trese Hulbert's son Chris. "Mark was a keen walker as was our son Chris, explained Trese, so we rationalised that it would be a fitting tribute to our boys to honour their memory by attempting the climb, and also to try and raise some money for SOBS in the process."

In August 2008 eight SOBS members from across the country met in the rain-soaked visitors' centre car park at the base of the mule track up Ben Nevis. Emotions were raw but in check, there was some degree of apprehension, but all of us were still enthusiastic for the climb, each in a singular, personal way determined to show grit and fortitude as a mark of memory for a lost dearly beloved. The camaraderie grew as the group climbed, and humour developed. Reaching the summit was very emotional for everyone.

It took us exactly 4 hours and 9 minutes to stand at the highest point in the United Kingdom, 1344 meters above sea level, (1329 meters above the soggy base-camp car park, according to Roger's trusty altimeter). Roger, trusty leader and Chief Shepherd, hugged and congratulated each one as we arrived through the mist.

"Reaching the summit felt good," said Rob and Trese, it was gratifying to be not only amongst friends but fellow survivors, which added to the poignancy of the occasion." Barbara's thoughts probably sum up the expedition for all who took part. "We shared laughter, mutual support, achievement, painful legs and also some tears for our lost men and boys. There were so many kind gestures from everyone.... Thanks to all, I wouldn't have done it on my own!"

Thanks are expressed from the Trustees to all the participants who by this walk have raised valuable funds for the work of the Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide.

CONGRATULATIONS TO TRISH THOMAS



Trish has been recommended for election to the RSA for her commitment and dedication to helping those in need of support after losing a loved one to suicide.

"Trish has pursued the recognition of support for carers and families of bereavement by suicide. It is only around 10 years that support groups have been recognised for their role in supporting those who have lost loved ones through suicide. Trish is articulate, vocal and very determined to move mountains of ignorance. Many people's lives are affected by suicide and Trish represents one of a group of people in the voluntary sector that are making a difference. The recent conference organised by Trish was instrumental in making the health community aware of the issues and available support agencies that are out there".

Daphne

SOME IMPORTANT DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES

March 28th 2009 Volunteers Conference
For more information contact the National office
01159 441117

April 16th 2009 National Awareness Day
For more information contact the National office
01159 441117

May 9th The 14th Annual Birmingham Support Day
For more information contact
John Peters 01827 830679
email john@johnpeters.freeserve.co.uk

June 6th 2009 A Celebration at the Multi Faith Centre
Derby University
For more information contact the National office
01159 441117

October 23rd to 25th 2009 Gloucester Retreat
For more information contact Trish Thomas
01452 371945

November 28th 2009 Forum
For more information contact the National office
01159 441117

Submission of articles, news, events, reflections, etc. for consideration for the June newsletter must reach the national office no later than 1st May 2009. We reserve the right to publish those submissions that seem most relevant and suitable for the newsletter. Submission does not guarantee inclusion. Submissions can be sent via Email to Eric Thwaites at sobs.admin@care4free.net or by post to The Flamsteed Centre, Albert Street, Ilkeston, Derbyshire, DE7 5GU