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Calendar of events

Wednesday 15 May - BTS Support Meeting

7-9pm, Uniting Communities, Lvl 3, 10 Pitt St, Adelaide. Parking, Care Park, 15 Pitt St (directly opposite).

Special Presentation - by Dr Sheila Clark. Details page 3.

Please call or text the BTS support line on 0468 440 287 to advise if you will be attending for catering purposes or if you require further information.

Thursday 13-15 June - 6th Postvention Conference. Theme – Building Hope Together.

Sydney Masonic Centre. Details page 2.

Sunday 7 July - BTS Coffee Morning

10am -12.30pm Botanic Garden Cafe - located by the lake (next to the restaurant). This is an opportunity to catch up with others who have lost someone to suicide, in a less formal setting than our regular monthly meetings. Join us for breakfast or coffee and cake while chatting and listening to others and then take a stroll through the beautiful surroundings of the Botanic Gardens. BTS volunteers will be on hand.

Wednesday 21 August - BTS Annual General Meeting

6-6.45pm, Uniting Communities, Lvl 3, 10 Pitt St, Adelaide. Parking, Care Park, 15 Pitt St (directly opposite).

BTS invites all its members to attend the AGM which will be followed by light refreshments. The monthly support meeting will follow. BTS needs your support. We have a couple of retirements and need new faces to fill committee vacancies.

Wednesday 21 August - BTS Support Meeting

7-9pm, Uniting Communities, Lvl 3, 10 Pitt St, Adelaide. Parking, Care Park, 15 Pitt St (directly opposite).

A Welcome from the Chair

Welcome to the 2019 2nd quarter newsletter.

This edition contains one of the most moving articles to ever have graced the pages of this newsletter. A parent has written openly about the beloved son who they lost some 3 years ago. On reading I believe that all of us will in some way be able to relate to parts, or all, of the story. We also have a poem from a family member. The ability to write, to put one's feelings and thoughts on paper can be so difficult to do but many believe that writing, especially journaling, can help us cope, to provide hope.

This letter is followed by an article on the loss of a child and the effect that loss has on our lives every day forward. We learn to cope but never forget, never to stop loving.

Suicide bereavement carries with it enormous pain, grief, trauma and many unanswered questions.

At the upcoming May support meeting Dr Sheila Clark is leading a presentation that talks to courage and strength to go on, to find a way forward through the use of images and what an image may represent to us at any moment in time.

Postvention Australia holds its annual conference in June in Sydney, more details are found below.

Finally it is only 3 months till the BTS AGM. We would welcome new members to our committee. Please consider becoming a committee member. Supporting others bereaved through suicide, whilst at times difficult, can lead to good friendships and thanks from those you support.

As always travel safely and be kind to yourself and those around you.

Tim Porter

Chair (on behalf of BTS volunteers and committee)

BUILDING HOPE TOGETHER

The Journey After Suicide

Sydney Masonic Centre, 66 Goulburn Street, Sydney
Thursday 13th, Friday 14th and Saturday 15th June 2019



The 2019 Conference focuses on building hope together through the three main conference themes – encouraging resilience, incorporating lived experience and facilitating collaboration between stakeholders. The conference encourages the sharing and discussion of ideas, stories and research to bring positive outcomes for the postvention sector. This conference brings together those bereaved by suicide, trauma victims and survivors, Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders, defence force services, emergency services and individuals/organisations working the field of suicide bereavement, trauma and loss.

The three-day conference commences with half-day and full-day pre-conference workshops on Thursday 13 June. These workshops are followed by two days of plenaries, workshops and presentations from International and Australian presenters. We are privileged to have international guests and invited Australian speakers who are well known in Australia and internationally for their research and expertise in trauma and bereavement.

The conference concludes on Saturday 15th June with a special Healing and Remembrance Service. The Healing and Remembrance service provides an opportunity for individuals, families and friends to come together to share and be supported in their grief as we honour and remember their loved one. Further details at: buildinghopetogether.com.au

Wednesday 21st August 6-6.45pm Bereaved Through Suicide Support Group Annual General Meeting

Please consider attending the AGM, and even becoming a committee member. We would love to have a few extra people on the committee. BTS plays an important role in supporting those suffering the loss of someone to suicide and needs input from those who have lost someone to suicide and may now be in a position to give some support to those others who are on the same journey. Please call/text 0468440287 or email support@bts.org.au

Light refreshments provided at the end of the AGM. The monthly support meeting will follow at 7pm.

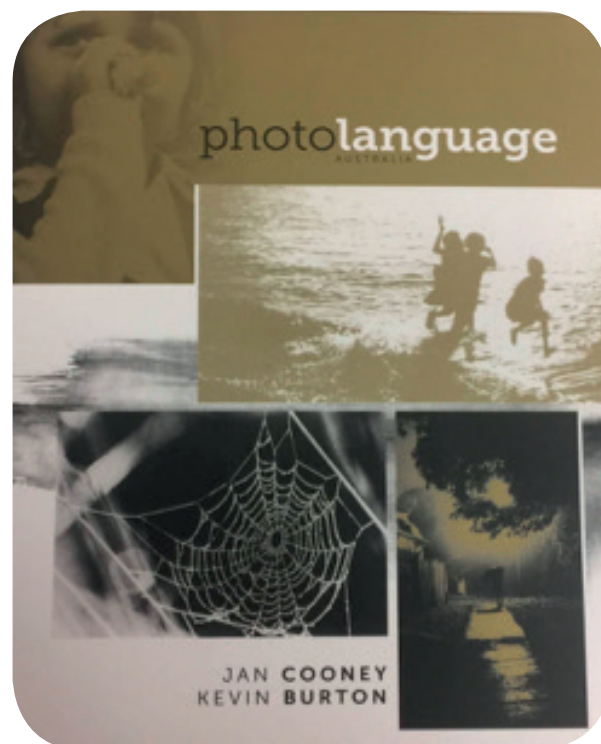
SPECIAL PRESENTATION - DR. SHEILA CLARK

Topic: How Images Can Speak To Us Wednesday 15 May 7pm

Through the use of images Dr Clark will facilitate a meeting where the images will be used in various ways to help define our individual journey, how we have found strength to survive, to find hope, to keep moving on. There is no need to verbally express how one feels, an image can convey the message.

Dr Sheila Clark is the author of the best selling book "After Suicide –Help For The Bereaved", is on the BTS Professional Advisory Council and work extensively as a grief counsellor.

Please call or text the BTS phone number
0468 440 287 should you wish to attend.



We thought that you were happy.....

We thought that you were happy,
We must have all been blind,
We didn't know your suffering
We didn't know your mind,
You have left all our hearts aching
and we are not sure how we'll cope
If only you had talked it over
We may have found you hope

We thought that you were happy.
But yours was a troubled mind.
Hardly a hint, hardly a clue.
How could we be so blind?
You chose to go from this place.
And onto somewhere new.
May you find peace at last.
Our love goes with you too.....

Author unknown..

Boy were those early days hard.
From the moment I opened
my eyes I was counting down the
minutes until I could go back to
sleep. I craved sleep, not only
because the grief was utterly
exhausting, but also because
sleep meant I had time out from
thinking, from crying, from being
overwhelmed by pain.

Zoe Clark-Coates

sayinggoodbye.org

Benjamin Mark Townsend 31/11/76 – 21/12/2015

Forever missed, with deep and eternal love,
Mum and Dad

**“Those we love don’t go away
They walk beside us every day
Unseen, unheard but always near
Death leaves a heartache no one can heal
Love leaves a memory no one can steal”
(Author unknown)**



There are many strong words to describe my initial thoughts and feelings when we were unable to contact our son, Benjamin. Reality soon hit me. Ben was missing. Shock and fear overwhelmed me. The painful discovery 10 days later, that Ben had chosen to end his life left me, my husband and our family utterly devastated. We believe that Ben’s emotional and psychological pain was so severe, that he saw his only way to alleviate such unimaginable pain, was to end his life. But not one person knew of his suffering, not our family, not his many friends, nor colleagues. Ben was a very private person and kept his pain and turmoil hidden, locked deeply and securely within himself, possibly for quite some time.

On Sunday December 20th, 2015, our small but close family of 9 gathered at our daughter & son-in-law’s home for an early family Christmas lunch. On Christmas Day itself my husband and I looked forward to a relaxing lunch at our home with our two sons, one of whom was Ben, and my brother-in-law. Our family always shared our birthdays, Christmases, Mothers’ Days, Fathers’ Days together, most times with a special meal at our home. It was always special to be all together on these occasions.

On December 25th, 2015, Ben did not arrive for Christmas day lunch as expected. This was most unusual. I texted and tried phoning Ben all afternoon, firstly thinking he was possibly running late or held up in Christmas day traffic. As the day wore on, we were all baffled, with a deep sense of unease creeping into each of us. Over the ensuing days, with hundreds of phone calls,

police input and intensive liaising with and searching by family and friends, we became desperate. On December 31st we hired a plane to search the York Peninsula coastline. (Ben loved to fish on the beautiful rugged, often isolated beaches on Yorkes. At our early Christmas Day lunch on the 20th Ben had mentioned to me that he might “head to Yorkes” for a day or two before Christmas.) We also knew that Ben was due to spend a few days around New Year at Marion Bay where he and one of his good friends, would play music at the popular Marion Bay Tavern. Ben loved playing his acoustic guitar and he and his good friend occasionally performed at gigs around Adelaide. On December 31st our hearts were totally shattered when Ben was finally located by the pilot of the search plane. For a few seconds only, when the sun glinted on the hood of the car, just minutes before the plane search was to end, the pilot spotted Ben’s car nestled amongst the native scrub, in a secluded enclave near his beloved Butler’s Beach.

On the morning of Monday December 21st (the day after our family lunch) Ben left his home at around 5am with a clear and planned intention to end his life. It was at this peaceful location near his much loved Butler’s Beach, that Ben closed his beautiful blue eyes for the last time and found the peace he needed. In the wonder of hindsight, I believe that Ben chose this special location quite some time before his death, but it is one of the many unanswered questions that we live with.

Disbelief and Devastation! Our hearts were broken, completely shattered as we experienced the worst kind of pain ever. Unimaginable pain, and the guilt set in early.

Why didn't I see that something was wrong? I should have picked up on something the day before or in the weeks or months before, I should have known something, asked more questions perhaps. Were there warning signs that I and everyone else missed? The perennial "what ifs" and "whys"? In the cold light of hindsight, so many thoughts and questions fill my mind. For a mother, now a "suicide survivor" this is painful and damaging. With no obvious signs of un-wellness or dysfunction, does anyone ever remotely consider that their son (or loved one) might take his or her own life? Such a notion had never entered my head. Never, ever, even when Ben was missing. Along with our family, I rapidly dismissed this suggestion as simply not being possible, "no, not Ben" we answered when the question was asked by police during the search. Instead I imagined probabilities of some kind of terrible accident, for Ben always let me know if he was going to be away from home fishing or holidaying. I am not yet prepared to let the guilt go, even though I have read numerous articles and understand the messages about "letting go of the guilt". Now knowing that Ben endured so much pain in his life, which he kept so well hidden from family and friends, is painful to bear, so hard and so very sad.

Three and a half years later, as I write this, the deep pain within me remains, I am sure that I will always feel it, my heart is forever shattered, but slowly, very slowly, ever so slowly, I am learning to cope and move through the fog of intense grief and devastation. Learning to grieve privately, to be strong enough to face the world again and function in spite of the grief and pain, and to appear "normal". Feeling strong enough to once again venture outside of the safe haven that is my home, learning to socialise again, learning to be interested in other people and the world around me, to some extent at least. Re-entering socialisation is a challenging situation. Developing strategies to cope with well-meaning people or friends who might "helpfully" proffer advice to me, such as "time will heal everything". Sometimes it is just very hard listening to other people's happy stories. I realise that it is very difficult for many people to know what to say, or to say the "right thing". I believe that people are well meaning but they simply can-not understand the impact of a death by suicide, they look for the person I was before the tragedy, but I can never be the person I was before, or experience the freedom of enjoyment and pleasure that belongs to those people untouched by great tragedy. On the other hand, I am fortunate to have the support and love of close, compassionate friends and family who quietly, with their continual hugs, words and actions help me walk this journey. Along the way I have also met many kind, empathic people. I need to feel free and supported to grieve infinitely, without judgement.

Ben is our second son, an amazing, charismatic, intelligent and sensitive man with a very independent spirit. During the first long, agonising 12 months following his death, I did not believe I would ever move forward or cope with the pain and grief of such a great loss, or find anything to look forward to ever again. But I also knew that it was necessary for me to somehow keep going, to cope, because importantly, I still had a very close and supportive family, not least our two precious young grand-daughters.

As a family we have shared this great loss together, but often in silence when it is just "too hard to go there" (to talk about Ben). This avoidance bothers me but "it is just too hard to go there". It is still too painful.

Though I think of Ben often during my waking hours and during my dreams at night, I have adopted several rituals which are my special times, my private times, for quietly reflecting and spending time with him.

Every afternoon around 5 o'clock, I light a candle, pour a glass of wine and think of Ben. We have a rock "borrowed" from Ben's beloved Butler's Beach where he died, and where his ashes are liberated, with a simple plaque with the words, "Ben – In Loving memory". This rock rests near the fountain in our garden and allows me and my husband to be with Ben in the privacy, peace and comfort of our garden at any time of the day. I am grateful for having possession of several short videos of Ben. In one of them he is fishing on an isolated pristine stretch of the Yorke Peninsula coastline, and in another he is contentedly playing his guitar. I treasure these greatly and some days when I feel strong enough, I turn to them to see Ben's face and hear his voice. I believe that Ben regularly sought solace on these peaceful, pristine beaches. In our home we have many photographs of Ben as well as beautiful Butler's Beach with the rock where his ashes are liberated to the sea. I spend time near these photos, every day. As often as possible my husband and I like to spend a few days at Marion Bay and beautiful Butler's Beach. For these were and will always be Ben's special places, where I know that he has found peace.

I have developed an interest (my husband might call it "more like an obsession") with establishing an extensive succulent and cacti garden in a small courtyard of our garden. I find this hobby peaceful, interesting and demanding of my time and thoughts. I have always loved flowers and gardening but this newer development has provided me with a new focus and interest, and I spend time there daily, quietly, with my thoughts, propagating and tending my plants.

I have recently decided that I must try to increase my opportunities for socialisation. I value the friendship of my long term friends but the reality is that whilst some close friends have walked beside me on this painful journey, offering much love and support and understanding, some relationships have suffered. Last year, I managed a shaky return to my previous involvement with my movie group (of friends). I have felt more confident about this involvement this year and am slowly learning to enjoy the outing once again.

The friends and acquaintances that I have met through BTS have been invaluable along the way, and I felt that by becoming a BTS committee member, joining in late 2018, that I could maintain this friendship and involvement with the support group. I have also recently joined a Probus Club, appreciating the friendship and the interesting guest speakers. With people I meet I struggle with being asked the question "how many children do you have"?

REMEMBRANCE - BENJAMIN MARK TOWNSEND

I tend to avoid asking new acquaintances the same question too, not wanting to “go there”. I am very aware of this and realise that this is another hurdle for me to overcome.

During 2018 I collated a book entitled “Remembering Ben – with a few good yarns”. This included many treasured photos of Ben during his short 39 years, stories written by Ben from his early childhood years through to his last fishing story which was written by Ben and published in the Fishing magazine, South Australian Angler, in October, 2015, just 2 months before he died. Ben was an avid and rather quirky story-teller and writer – he was always very entertaining! “Remembering Ben” also contains tributes written by his closest mates, and moving tributes from many school students (Ben was a highly regarded teacher for year 6/7 students at Settlers Farm Campus). Importantly, this book shows the wonderful, charismatic, fun loving person who was and is forever very much loved, a great fisherman, a great musician, a great golfer and a great person that others simply wanted to be with. I want Ben to be remembered as this special person with a full life, not for being a suicide statistic.

Not least is the support and love of my family, especially my husband who was such a rock from day one when Ben was missing, our son, daughter and son-in-law, but especially our grand-daughters who have unknowingly provided an abundance of hugs and love and have enabled us to smile again, through the darkest days. Together we are walking this sad pathway and together we face each day and go on, including the saddest and very difficult memorial days such as Ben’s birthdays, Christmases, Mothers’ and Fathers’ Days, the date of Ben’s death, the period of searching for him between December 21st and finding him on December 31st, 2015 and so on. No day is easy. No day is complete. A shattered heart and the many unanswered questions have become part of my life forever. But more often now I find that I can smile again (especially with my grand-daughters), look forward to doing or seeing someone or something, and to again see something wonderful in the world around me... I will keep looking each day...

Written March 2019

**Our gardens keep giving despite some harsh heat,
and the blooms will move on when their mission complete.**

**For us, life delivers joy, sadness and sorrow
but like flowers of today we leave seeds for tomorrow.**

**So two naked ladies heads held up so high
even in this harsh air they cope, they still try.**

**With this vivid display of colour so white
are sure to keep giving a future that's bright.**

David H. Giersch, March, 2019



FOR PARENTS WHO HAVE LOST A CHILD **Why We Will Never Get Over It**

Unfortunately bereaved parents get judged often. By those who know us and by those who don't.

We are often criticized and pathologised for grieving (for remembering our child.) People erroneously think we are stuck, depressed, and/or clinically-something, if we still cry, ache, and miss our child; if we still remember them; if we continue speaking their name and grieving for them– especially if the grieving has been going on “too long.” Too long could mean 3 months, 6 months, a year– a decade, or longer. It couldn't possibly be healthy to grieve THAT long, right?

Wrong. We will grieve forever because we love forever. There is no end to our love for our child, therefore there is no end to our grief– not in our lifetime, anyway. We will grieve forever. We will never get over it.

The presumption is that since our child's death happened years ago– a presumably finite event– how are we not over it by now? As if child loss is something you can get over– likening it to something far less horrific that can be conquered if you only try hard enough, think positively, or pull yourself up by the bootstraps. As if it's a hurdle you can easily jump over, or a roadblock you can simply go around and then move on. As if sunshine, rainbows and unicorns will magically greet you once enough time has passed and you cross into “I'm-over-it” land. This may work for other things, but not child loss.

It's time to bust a long-standing myth about child loss and grief. There is no getting over it. Child loss is not something you get over. Ever. You don't get over watching the living, breathing piece of your heart and soul, your flesh and blood, your child– die. It's simply not possible to get over the death of your child.

You will grieve the death of your child until your last breath.

FOR PARENTS WHO HAVE LOST A CHILD

It is said that the decision to have a child is “to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body.” When your child dies your heart is obliterated, broken beyond repair. When your child dies, a huge part of you dies, too. And there is no getting that part back again. Over time you can try to put the pieces of yourself back together again, but they don’t fit the same. There are huge pieces missing, no matter what you do. No matter how long it’s been.

The pain— visible or not— is with us every breath and every step we take, every second of every day. The scars never heal. We are not defined by child loss, but we are certainly marked by it. Forever.

Normal died the day our child did. There is no guidebook for how to survive, or how to grieve. No formula. No roadmap. No start here, end there. The truth is bereaved parents will grieve the loss of their child until their last breath. It may seem confusing why bereaved parents do the things we do; how we’ve chosen to survive and navigate life post-tragedy. From outside of grief, it likely won’t make sense to an onlooker. The good news is, if you don’t understand, breathe a deep sigh of relief and remember one thing: you’re so fortunate (#blessed/lucky/_____) you don’t.

Ultimately to understand means to be bereaved. Which we wouldn’t wish on our worst enemy. We hope no one else truly understands. Ever.

We would have given our life one million times over + infinity to save our child— but, unfortunately we weren’t given that choice. And so, for the rest of our lives, we have to learn how to live with the pain. A pain that is so excruciating, so much like torture, so unimaginable, there’s not even an apt word for it in the English language.

We trip over grief just when we thought we had it contained, figured out, put away, managed. We fall into grief potholes when we least expect it.

We become adept at carrying it, stuffing it, hiding it places. It leaks from our eyes when we least expect it. We sob in the shower, the car, on the bathroom floor. We dry our tears, put our masks back on, so we can move and be and live in the world, to the best of our ability.

Grief steals the person we used to be, and we grieve that, too. The person staring back at us in the mirror becomes almost unrecognizable. We wish we could be who we used to be, too.

We are broken, but there is no fix for our heartache.

We carry it with us, always. Grief exhausts us to the bone. There is no reprieve. No minute, hour, or day off from being a bereaved parent. Once a bereaved parent, always a bereaved parent. There is no going back.

Even during happy or joyful moments, the pain and sadness is always there. A permanent undercurrent, a pulse of pain.

We learn how to carry it all: the joy, the pain, the love, the sadness. Eventually we become an expert at carrying it all.

The moment our child died is now, yesterday, tomorrow, forever. It is the past, the present, and the future. It was not just one finite horrific moment in time that happened last whenever. It is not just the moment, the hour, the second, the millisecond our life became permanently divided into before and after.

You might say, “But she died last year!” Or 10 years ago, or five. No. No, she didn’t.

Our child dies all over again every morning we wake up.

And again every moment they are (yet again) missing.

And again every moment in between.

And again every breath we take.

Our child dies again every moment they are not here with us— for the rest of our lives.

The truth of this fact is almost impossible to express. How many deaths can one parent endure?

For the rest of our lives we will struggle to accept and understand this very fact: our child is dead. And in the incessant replay of our minds our child will keep dying all over again for the rest of our lives.

This is child loss. It is never over. It is always happening. Again and again and again.

We live and relive it. It is now, yesterday, tomorrow— forever.

Just like our love for our child is now, yesterday, tomorrow, forever. It spans both directions. There is no end.

Please remember this next time you hear someone tell a bereaved parent they are dwelling, stuck, depressed, not moving on; that they should just hurry up and get over it— or any other common judgement or misconception. Our pain, our love, and our child cannot be watered down to such phrases, such shallow summations. It does not even begin to capture or express the reality of our day-to-day lives, nor the eternal ache and love in our hearts.

To understand child loss, you have to think about every second, minute, hour, day, month and year a bereaved parent has to live without their precious child— a lifetime— not just the finite moment in time their child died. Every missed milestone, every heart beat, every breath without them, hurts. It hurts now, now and now. It will still be painful 10 and 20 years from now. It will remain an ever-present ache in our heart, soul, mind and body always— until our very last breath.

Child loss is never over. It is a loss that spans a bereaved parent’s entire life.

This is why we will never, ever, get over it. Because “it” is our precious, irreplaceable child. There is no getting over it. There is only love (and pain) to be bravely and courageously carried— for a lifetime.

By Angela Miller

The Bereaved through Suicide Support Group

Run by people who themselves have been bereaved through suicide, BTS supports those in the community who have been close to someone who has taken their own life – partner, child, relative, friend or close acquaintance.

**Telephone support service: (08) 8332 8240
or 0468 440 287 from 8am - 8pm**

**Email support service: support@bts.org.au
Suicide bereavement resources: www.bts.org.au**

Each month BTS holds a support meeting. Facilitated by trained Support Workers, themselves having lost someone to suicide, it is a place for people to find compassion, support and understanding. Thoughts of attending a meeting can be incredibly daunting. Many of us want to be alone. But knowing and talking to others that know, and have an understanding of, how you feel can provide some help and solace in this incredibly difficult journey.

Donations

Without donations, BTS would not be able to continue supporting the Bereaved Through Suicide community.

100% of all donations received are used to continue supporting people bereaved through suicide. BTS receives no government funding and all work is undertaken by volunteers, however we incur costs by providing the support services above.

Should you wish to make a tax deductible donation to BTS you can directly EFT to: **BTS Support Group BSB: 633-000 A/C: 148312366** Tax deductible receipts will be issued.

Thank you in advance for supporting our very worthy organisation.



Additional Support Services

NATIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES

Kids Helpline	1800 55 1800
Lifeline Phone	13 11 14
Beyondblue Phone	1300 22 4636
Mensline Phone	1300 789 978
Suicide Call Back Service Phone	1300 659 467

OTHER SOUTH AUSTRALIAN SUPPORT SERVICES

Living Beyond Suicide (LBS) Phone	between 10am–10pm any day.	1300 76 11 93
Minimisation Of Suicide Harm (MOSH) Phone		8443 8369
Country SA – Standby Response	North	0438 728 644
Country SA – Standby Response	South	0437 752 458
Silent Ripples	Murray Bridge	0417 741 888

Thank you

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