

changes



End of Life Rituals

A NALAG NSW PUBLICATION

AUGUST 2021

Community Visitors Scheme



Orana Companionship Project

Community Visitors Scheme (CVS) is a free government funded program providing companionship for nursing home residents and home care package recipients in their own homes. Based in Dubbo, the companionship program covers the Orana and Central West.

The CVS arranges volunteer visits to older people to provide friendship and companionship. CVS volunteers visit once a fortnight for in-home or one-on-one sessions in residential care facilities and private homes. Group visits are also offered in nursing homes.

Long-term CVS volunteer and mentor Gwen Yelverton says CVS is about bringing the sunshine into the room by offering kindness, compassion and a listening ear. CVS makes a difference by providing person-to-person companionship.

Volunteers are always needed; you don't need experience or endless hours of time. We can all make a difference just by taking the step and contacting the service on ocpcvs@gmail.com. Volunteers will need to complete an application form including forms for a national criminal history check. Training and support is provided.

A community volunteer is matched with an elderly person by the coordinator, who looks at the volunteer's and intended recipient's background and interests to match a friendship that will be natural and lasting. Support is offered throughout your journey with volunteer functions organised for shared experiences.

This is a rewarding opportunity to enrich your quality of life by helping the older generation to feel more connected.

I encourage everyone to volunteer today.

Vanessa Creed
Service Coordinator



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**LONELINESS IS
A BIG ISSUE FOR
PEOPLE WHO ARE
UNABLE TO GET
OUT OF THEIR
HOMES OR ROOM.**

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Listen up: How you can help by lending an ear

Volunteering with NALAG can be a rewarding and satisfying way to not only support your community, but a way to use your own shared experience to make the road just that tiny bit smoother for others who may need a helping hand.

Without the valued contribution of volunteers, NALAG simply could not operate as effectively. We are always looking for generous people to assist with the running of our organisation and events.

As a NALAG volunteer, you can engage in a broad range of activities and there is a range of roles available – from grief support work to administrative assistance, to gardening at the centres, to using your technological skills ... there are so many ways in which you can help. You can give as much or as little as you feel able, and no matter what you would like to contribute, be assured that NALAG, and the people it serves, will be grateful.

Support and care of our staff and our volunteers is paramount at NALAG, and you'll never feel as though you're flying solo – we'll always be there to train, guide and support you.

Apart from access to training and one-on-one support, we frequently hold social outings and awareness sessions for our volunteers to meet one another and to involve them in the planning of special events like Grief Awareness Month.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Get in touch with us – either call the NALAG head office team on 02 6882 9222 or email us: info@nalag.org.au – we can answer all your questions and help you understand more about how you can volunteer with NALAG. More information is also available on the NALAG website: www.nalag.org.au



Julie Dunsmore

AM MAPS
NALAG NSW President

From the President

by Julie Dunsmore AM MAPS

Grief and Mourning in the time of COVID-19

As the deaths from COVID 19 around the world surpass four million people, we are seeing what has been described as a tsunami of grief that affects individuals, communities, and generations to come. Compounding the distress is the inability to grieve as before – safety restrictions causing major disruptions to end of life cultural and religious rituals and traditions. The unpredictability of restrictions on travel and lockdowns have added to the collective anxiety around how we support the dying and the bereaved, both within Australia and overseas.

Disruptions to rituals and traditions can have a significant impact on how people process their grief. Engaging in some form of mourning practices and traditions have been shown to be crucial for many individuals' mental and spiritual health.

During COVID-19 there have been many instances where cultural and religious traditions have been completely transformed. Simple, private, personal opportunities to connect and say goodbye have also needed to be adjusted to the new normal.

Individuals and communities have taken on the challenge of adapting funerals and end of life traditions to the new realities with grace, heart and innovation.

The restrictions and lockdowns have however, caused immeasurable heartache, generated when

people have been unable to be physically present when their loved one was dying or attend funerals. Support organisations including our NALAG Grief Support services have reported the despair felt when family or friends have been unable to be there to hold their loved one's hand, be in the same room, give them a kiss, a hug, soothe their fear, talk with them, laugh and cry together.

We have had to learn different ways of dealing with death, supporting the dying, honouring those who have died, adapting our end-of-life rituals, and how we support each other during mourning.

Our grief support services have assisted those affected to explore ways that they can still create meaningful end of life rituals, albeit not what they would wish for.

The pandemic has highlighted how important it is to understand the diversity that exists around traditions and end-of-life rituals for individuals and the people who are part of their lives.

Being part of a farewell or remembrance ceremony, a gathered community, has been found to assist in the grief process. These activities can provide a framework and an opportunity to "do" something, to play a part in marking the significance of the loss and acknowledging an individual's own grief.

We know that meaningful rituals can help with:

- acknowledging the reality of the loss,
- providing something tangible to anchor us in our grief,
- enabling people to say goodbye,
- processing some of the meaning of the loss,
- providing opportunities to celebrate the life of the person who died, and
- providing opportunities to share our grief with others and feel supported in our grieving.

Cultural and religious services and traditions, which bring together communities with similar faith-based beliefs, or community connections and history, have been shown to bring comfort and a sense of belonging to the bereaved. These end-of-life rituals allow for shared ways to pray and grieve according to beliefs and traditions, receive guidance and care from trusted priests or clerics, elders and community leaders and importantly show support for the bereaved and each other. In today's world the above has had to be reimagined and undergo some form of transformation to meet the current COVID-19 restrictions around gatherings and funerals.

In Australia there has been an increase in more secular farewells, and end of life rituals. These still bring together gathered communities, often with music, song, art, videos, testimonials, storytelling

and the use of social media. Funerals have become more individualised with the deceased more commonly having played a part in the planning of their own funeral.

We have all witnessed the huge outpouring of grief by the general public after the sudden unexpected death of strangers in tragic circumstances or the death of celebrities or well-known community members, political figures.

The setting up of memorials, the holding of vigils and spontaneous gatherings in honour of those who died, and in support of the bereaved, has of recent times become more common. Again the gatherings are now subject to restrictions and much of the community response has gone online.

The sea of flowers in Martin Place after the Lindt Café Siege is an example of the community standing together to support the bereaved families, survivors, police and first responders. The fundraising concerts after the 2020 Bush Fires, another example of people wanting to show their love and support for those impacted by those who lost their lives, the first responders, and devastated communities.

The message was clear: You are not alone. This message is also being reimagined through social media and online events.

NALAG has over the years been active in providing opportunities for different remembering ceremonies and events that address the significance of different types of bereavement. Our Remembering the Babies ceremony and beautiful memorial stone garden in Dubbo and our Walk Towards Hope in honour of those lost to suicide whilst raising awareness of suicide prevention, are examples of much treasured community memorial events. These events are both grief awareness opportunities that promote resilient action and also allow people, when they are ready, to come together and mark the significance of their loss in a compassionate ceremony.

NALAG also has joined with others in honouring the memory of those that were impacted by terrorism, disaster and events which involved significant loss for communities. These events provide opportunities to honour, remember and celebrate the lives that were lost. It provides a place to acknowledge the grief that continues but also affirm the love and connection to each other.

In these extraordinary times, through necessity, resilient ways to process grief are evolving. Some of these innovations, particularly the use of video and online technology, zoom meetings, will, I am sure, find their way into other mourning rituals and compassionate approaches to supporting the bereaved in a post COVID-19 world.



Culture and ritual: How learning from others can help

BY JEN COWLEY

There is a great deal we can do to borrow from other cultures in commemorating and celebrating our dead, and in expressing our grief and conducting end-of-life rituals. JEN COWLEY explores two of these different cultural practices that bring a refreshing and valuable perspective to the changing nature of death literacy: The Day of the Dead celebrations adapted by NALAG's Miindala (North Coast) branch, and the ancient First Nations traditional rituals of the Anangu of the Central Desert.



Physiotherapy
Respiratory Rehab
Social Worker
Chapel
Services/Security
Technology

Big little lives

INTERVIEW BY JEN COWLEY

Every year in Australia, thousands of families face the devastating loss of a precious infant – each day, six babies are stillborn, while another two die within 28 days after birth, and countless other little lives are lost before they reach full term, but it's only in recent years that society has come to recognise that the loss, the pain, the grief is real.*

Now, NALAG is part of a unique partnership with Dubbo hospital that helps parents and families with their loss and grief. Members of the Hospital's social work team – Raelene Selfe, Emma Parkes and Maddie Bridge as pictured above – spoke with Jen Cowley to explain their role and how things have changed so much for the better.

A close-up portrait of Doris Zagdanski, a woman with short, light brown hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a dark green turtleneck sweater under a grey blazer. Her hands are clasped in front of her, and she is wearing a gold watch with a metal link band on her left wrist and gold hoop earrings. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Do funerals really matter?

BY DORIS ZAGDANSKI

Doris Zagdanski has worked in and around the funeral industry in Australia and New Zealand for almost 35 years. She is the author of seven books on grief and empathy and is well known for her innovative training programs in this field.

Doris shares her expert opinion on how funerals, the funeral industry and end-of-life rituals have changed over recent years. Doris speaks to the notion that “funerals are for the living and the living need to grieve.”



Changes in church

Navigating to a new normal

BY BRONWYN VICKERS

Bronwyn Vickers shares some reflections on her role as Lay President of Wauchope Uniting Church during the worst of the pandemic, and tells of the impact of Covid-19 on some of the church's practices.



Rituals: Heart and Intention

BY JEN PERINO

Whether we realise it or not, rituals are part of our life, extending from a very personal level through family and community. Each culture has its own specific rituals, developed and sustained over many generations and eons of time. These may be modified over time but the ultimate intention remains. Jen Perino comments on the significance of rituals in the grieving process for the bereaved.



Weathering the storm

Navigating the grief of suicide

BY PHILLIPA ENGLISH

The ripple effects of a person's decision to take their own life are almost always deeply devastating for those left behind. Philippa English has recently navigated the uncharted waters of her grief in the wake of a much-loved cousin's death by suicide.

A portrait of Nic Healey, a man with long, wavy, greyish-brown hair and a full beard. He is wearing clear-framed glasses, a white t-shirt, and a black leather motorcycle jacket. He is leaning forward with his hands clasped in front of him, resting on a light-colored ledge. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a light-colored wall and dark vertical elements.

Grief Support Volunteer: Nic Healey

A unique perspective

Nic Healey was in primary school when his mother died. Only a few years later the still-grieving youngster lost his sister in shocking and tragic circumstances. Now an accomplished radio presenter who holds a degree in psychology, Nic talks to JEN COWLEY about the unique perspective on loss and grief that he brings to his role as a volunteer with NALAG's Dubbo Centre.

Tulich

Kintyre

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As we get older, it's common to face situations like the loss of a loved one or changes to your lifestyle and daily routine.

Although while it can feel impossible, moving forward and looking after your emotional and physical wellbeing is essential.

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- The Royce Manor includes residential care, respite, palliative and memory support and provides peace of mind.
- Enjoy a range of daily activities, the world of Panthers entertainment and shopping nearby. Plus, exceptional community facilities on-site including Café Royce (with homemade delights) and HWA Beauty and Hairdressing studio.

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GET IN TOUCH WITH OUR FRIENDLY TEAM TODAY!

NALAG

**National Association for
Loss and Grief (NSW) Inc**

Providing free counselling and support to individuals,
families and communities experiencing loss and grief, and
delivering quality educational programs, workshops,
training and mental health awareness events

www.nalag.org.au

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