



### Keeping Connections Childhood Bereavement Program Integrated Health Care

#### Introduction

Childhood grief can lead to grown-up problems. Specialist childhood bereavement programs are virtually non-existent in NSW, despite evidence for contributing to long-term health benefits for families and communities.



Memory table. "I've met others who know what it's like"

#### Aim

To promote healthy and positive futures for children and their families following the sudden death of a parent.



"It helps keeping memories so I won't forget him"



A letter for Father's Day. "He'll always be my dad"



"Supporting each other about our dads"

#### Method

The Forensic Counselling Unit of the Department of Forensic Medicine, Newcastle developed and piloted a robust, evidence-based, non-pathologising, integrated model of support for parentally bereaved children. The facilitated eight-session group-work program supported eight children (aged 7-12) in the Newcastle region whose fathers had died unexpectedly, with a concurrent group for the surviving parent.



Rebuilding positive futures

#### Results

The following outcomes are self-attributed to participation in the group:

*Feeling a bit stronger inside  
I've started going to school again  
I feel calmer and happier now I've been to the group  
I can better understand my feelings and remember my Dad the way I want to  
I know I'm not alone*

Quantitative research pending. All respondents strongly recommend group.

#### Conclusion

Keeping Connections is the first of its kind for NSW Health, and a model of best practice in childhood bereavement. Given the existing need and well-documented benefits of a far-reaching specialist childhood bereavement program in NSW, the future scope of Keeping Connections is limited only by resources.

#### Acknowledgements

The Keeping Connections program is an evidence-based, facilitated group work program of the Forensic Counselling Unit (FCU) of the Department of Forensic Medicine Newcastle. It was developed and designed in partnership with the ASPIRE (A Student Programming Initiative & Research Exchange) program - an initiative of the Bachelor of Social Work Program at the University of Newcastle. The realisation of Keeping Connections was made possible following funding support from nib foundation.

Appreciation for colleagues from the International Work Group on Death, Dying and Bereavement, and acknowledgement of established community-based childhood bereavement programs, particularly:

- [www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)
- [www.bereavementcare.com.au](http://www.bereavementcare.com.au) (Mal and Di McKissock)
- [www.dougy.org](http://www.dougy.org)
- [www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk](http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk)

We also acknowledge the 'real experts' – bereaved children and their families who continue to teach and inspire. Thanks particularly to those who participated in the group, and for their permission for photos and content of the group to be shared.



"I am not alone in my grief"