

THIRD LINK PARTNER PROFILE

NCCG: National Centre for Childhood Grief

‘Providing all children in Australia with the opportunity to express grief in an understanding and supportive environment.’

The National Centre for Childhood Grief (NCCG) provides loving professional support and guidance in a safe place where children grieving a death can share their experience as they learn to live with the impact on their lives.

The NCCG also provides support for care givers of bereaved children, and provides education and training for individuals, schools and other organisations handling the grief of children and young people.

HISTORY

NCCG (also known as A Friend's Place) was established in January 1994 as a not-for profit charity, providing a free specialist bereavement counseling service to children aged 3-18 years. This is in line with the centre's ethos that no child should go without grief counselling due to financial circumstances. NCCG was founded by clinical directors Dianne and Mal McKissock who were both awarded OAMs for their work in this area.

From its inception NCCG has provided individual and group counselling to children experiencing grief from the death of a significant person in their life, often a parent or sibling. NCCG has also provided a substantial email support service to parents and carers of bereaved children.



KEY PROGRAMS

The NCCG's core programs consist of group and individual counselling sessions provided to bereaved children between the ages of 3-18 years, plus the email support counselling provided to families who cannot access face-to-face counselling due to geographical constraints.

Additional programs include Girls' and Boys' Adventure weekends where children and young people learn resilience and have experiences they might otherwise have shared with the parent they are grieving for.

Outreach work includes the provision of services to a school in Wilcannia where the predominantly Aboriginal population has high numbers of children suffering the death of a parent, sibling or significant loved one.

CLIENT BASE

Based in Denistone East, NCCG provides counselling mainly to children and their families from NSW. Since 1994, a total of 8,800 families have directly benefitted from this free service, with counselling now provided to about 400 children and their families each year. It has a wider national reach through training and mentoring school and community counsellors, psychologists and GPs, including in rural and remote Australia, who in turn counsel bereaved children in their communities. The aim is to disseminate expertise into the community so more grieving children can benefit from expert bereavement counselling.

POINT OF DIFFERENCE

NCCG is the only organisation in Australia specialising in supporting bereaved children. Founders Dianne and Mal McKissock are leading authorities on childhood bereavement. They lecture to other bereavement professionals all around the world as experts in their field.

In group counselling for bereaved children, group members are carefully chosen to ensure that all of the children will experience the maximum benefit from the group. This way of gathering the children in a group 'normalises' their experience. They want to be like everyone else and not 'the kid with the dead Mum'.

EVIDENCE BASE

According to the 2011 Census, 8% of people in NSW suffered the death of one or both parents before the age of 18. The NCCG's work is informed by a raft of international research carried out by, and experience shared between, members of the International Work Group on Death, Dying and Bereavement.

Research demonstrates that bereaved children do better when:

- they feel understood
- they are treated with respect
- they have permission to grieve (or not)
- they're given informed choice, within boundaries
- they understand what happened and have a sense of control
- they are 'joined' in their world
- their unique ways of coping are validated
- adults recognise how intelligent, perceptive and wise they are
- they have permission to express (or not express) what they're feeling
- they're treated as individuals with unique needs
- they're given access to truth
- they're supported to have an ongoing relationship with the deceased
- they're helped to retrieve and 'fatten' memories
- they are taught practical strategies for managing their grief
- they have participation in rituals of family and community

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www.childhoodgrief.org.au

They learn through personal experience that they can achieve more than they initially believed, and that this experience is transferable to life.

HELPING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO THRIVE, NOT JUST SURVIVE

The service helps children learn coping and resilience skills to live with their grief and the many ups and downs of a bereaved family's life. It encourages and guides them to build enough life around their grief so that living with its pain is mostly manageable.

NCCG works with and educates caregivers on strategies to help children, facilitating a teamwork approach to providing the right support for them.

Evidence indicates bereaved children's short and long term outcomes tend to be polarised: more likely to under- or over-achieve. Adolescents, in particular, are at an increased risk of falling behind at school and have increased potential to adopt negative coping strategies. NCCG gives bereaved children a higher than average chance of ending up in the over-achiever group in the longer term.

ORGANISATIONAL GROWTH

NCCG is at a critical phase in its history as in January 2015, NCCG saw through an elaborate succession plan to replace Dianne and Mal McKissock as clinical directors and CEOs of the centre. Dr Elizabeth Mann is now the Clinical Director of NCCG, with Mal and Di McKissock still providing support to the Centre by way of clinical supervision and training.

NCCG does not receive any government funding and is funded entirely by donations and grants. It has just employed a part-time fundraiser to ensure sustainability past the founders' involvement.

When a child grieves, they have a broken heart. The sustainability of NCCG and its bereavement expertise needs to be ensured so we can assist children to mend their broken hearts to become future well-functioning adults in our community.

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