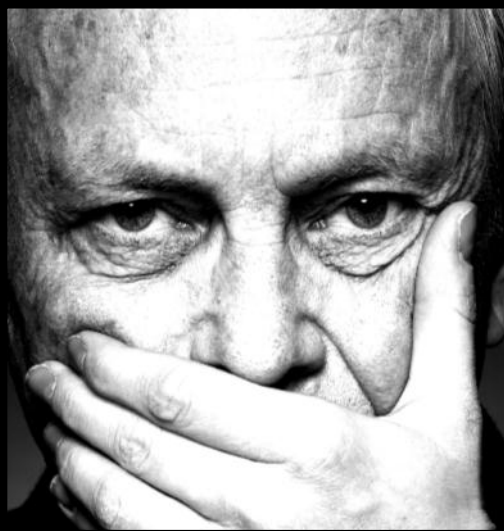


The Bereavement Buddy

Issue 2, June 2011



Unspeakable

THE HIDDEN GRIEF OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

More than 40 per cent of all homicides committed in NSW are the result of domestic violence, and yet it's an issue that still remains largely hidden by shame and silence. JEN COWLEY asks why, in a 'civilized' and 'educated' society, the spectre of domestic violence still lurks largely in the peripheral shadows of public consciousness.

For ten years, Elizabeth* spent every day believing it could be her last. For ten years she tip-toed gingerly across eggshells laid by her physically violent and emotionally abusive partner, waiting for the next blow and wondering if this time, it would be the one that finally ended her hell on earth.

For ten years, she watched the shreds of her self-esteem dwindle to nothing, praying for just the tiniest vestige of courage to leave. And for much of that ten year hell, Elizabeth numbed the pain with drugs - imprisoned as much by her addiction as the

circumstances from which it grew.

From the comfort of merciful ignorance and the absence of personal experience with domestic violence, it's easy to judge Elizabeth - and the thousands of women (and to a lesser extent men) like her who, each year in Australia, suffer largely in silence.

Why do they stay in these relationships? Why do they not stand up for themselves? Why not just pack up and leave? Doesn't turning to drugs or alcohol just make the situation worse?

"Unless you've been through it," says Elizabeth, her eyes flashing, "You can't understand it. You just have no idea."

Like many survivors (the experts don't like using the word 'victim' because of its disempower overtones), Elizabeth still struggles to explain to the uninitiated exactly how she fell into and stayed in such a cycle of despair.

"I loved the bloke. I kept thinking it was just a one-off thing. And you have to understand, most women think,

well, I can change him, I can save him because I love him and deep down he loves me.” she laughs without humour.

“You make excuses for him. You blame yourself - it must be something you did. With me, I just kept thinking it would get better, but deep down in your guts you not it’s not going to stop, and by then your just so ashamed of letting yourself get pushed around, controlled. You feel weak and full of self loathing and doubt.

“It becomes a state of mind - and you hear often enough that you’re a useless, you’re and ugly fat slut who’ll never amount to anything and you’re stupid and worthless - well, you begin to believe it. And you think you’re going to die and you think there’s no-one to help. I was trapped. Well, at least that’s what I thought.”

In 2009, the estimated cost to the Australian economy of domestic violence was in the vicinity of \$13.6 billion - three billion more than the government spent on the ‘stimulus’ package in that same year - and while the costs can’t and shouldn’t be measured in financial terms alone, the staggering figure is an indication of the depth and breath of domestic violence’s prevalence.

Long before her elevation to the position of NSW Minister for Women and Family and Community Services, Pru Goward was vocal in her calls for the issue of domestic violence to be placed squarely if not at then certainly near the top of the political agenda.

“We’ve come a long way since the 60s and 70s when courts considered domestic violence ‘private business’ and when men were set free even after the most appalling and brutal crimes of violence against their women. Now, judges are much likely to commit, and women don’t even have to give evidence if there is photographic proof of their abuse.

Goward credits the more stringent judicial approach to domestic violence to a least part of the seeming increase in its incidence. “We’ve seen rates go up in recent years, but this is largely due to the fact that people are now more willing to report domestic violence, and that’s a good thing because it means people are acknowledging that it’s not acceptable. But we still have a long way to go.”

“By international standards, our response to domestic violence is still pretty poor and there’s still so much more we can do. For instance, we have to keep our police from getting ‘overtired’ with repeat offenders - it’s hard for them to turn up time after time at the same house, with the same victim and the same perpetrator. And we have to give women greater access to shelter and support, for instance through programs such as Staying Home - Leaving Violence, which is aimed at removing the perpetrator from the family home, not the victim and kids.”

Public attitudes, although significantly shifted in recent years thanks to public awareness and anti violence campaigns, also need some further adjustment, according to Goward, who notably once

held the high-profile position of Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner.

“I’ve had many women say to me, ‘well, he’s only need to do that once and I’d be gone’, but you can’t know until you have been in that situation. It’s one of the reasons so many women suffer in silence. Women know that other women don’t understand.”

Elizabeth knows exactly what Pru Goward is saying. “I was too ashamed to come forward, I hid every thing from my friends and family. You hide your bruises because you feel like people will think it’s your fault - that you did something wrong. And this is how you get trapped. You’ve got this constant abuse, the whole “your worthless and your noting without me” thing beign thrown at you the whole time, so you begin to believe it. And you think, well, if I say anything that will just prove I’m worthless and gutless.”

It’s an all too familiar refrain for local domestic violence counsellor Susan Ross. “The lack of self-esteem puts you in an emotional headlock”.

She should know. Ross spent a number of years in a violent relationship and understand just how difficult it can be to “get out”. “But when I did make the decision to leave, it was life changing on a number of different levels. I thought about my situation and realized that if a women with the kind of resources I had available to me could get into this situation.” she says (Ross was a high profile professional in another town), “then I realized there must be a whole lot of other women out there who really, really need help and I wanted to help.”

That Ross herself as walked the walk makes her more understanding, and arguably more credible in talking the talk. “Having had the experience gives me a greater insight into why women stay in these relationships. There is an enormous amount of shame because you’re hiding probably the most significant thing in your life. Denial is the main way women hide the abuse - they make excuses because of the humiliation. And that just pushes the cycle around.”

According to both Susan Ross and Elizabeth, making that first step towards seeking help is the hardest thing for a victim of domestic violence to take.

Ross says she planned her ‘escape’ - “I looked for an opportunity and took it,” she says.

For Elizabeth, the cycle of drug abuse meant a number of ‘false starts’ before she was finally able to make the break. “Every time I’d leave, he’d drag me back with the drugs - he used them to control me. He’d hit me with his fists then he’d hit me with, well a hit - and that helped numb the pain. I’d shoot up and it was all okay again, until I came down and he’d flog me again”.

Elizabeth laughs suddenly and quite startlingly, given the seriousness of the subject at hand. “You know, I just can’t believe it when I hear myself say that now...I’d shoot up...I cant believe that was me and

that's how low I'd sunk. I've been clean ten years now," she says proudly.

But its been a hard-fought battle - and it came at one hell of a price.

"I lost my children," she says bluntly. "The police has been called so many times (about the domestic violence) that one day, DoCS (Department of Community Services) just came and took the kids.

"I can tell you all the psyhsical pain, all the bashings, the perforated ear drum, the busted bones, the scars - they were nothing. Nothing compared to the pain of losing my children. That's the cut that never healed".

With the benefit of hindsight, does she understand the authorities decision to remove her children from that situation?

"Oh yes, absolutely. NOW I understand and Im's in a way glad they did - for this kids sakes as well as mine. I was glad because I didn't have to worru about him hurting the children. And I'm glad because I wouldn't have left otherwise - and if I hadn't left, I'd be dead. No doubt about it.

"But at the time, I just wanted someone to help," says Elizabeth, who still feels she was let down by "the system". "They took the kids way and left me there - they hung me out to dry. There was no help for me.

"Having the kids takne away just ripped my soul right out - but it have me the motivation I needed to get clean and get them back."

Don't ask Pru Goward to apologize for taking children away from homes where domestic violence abounds.

As newly anointed Minister for Women, Family and Community Services, it's her unpalatable brief to preside over the removal of children from such situations, but its her long-held belief that children's needs must come first and she wont resile from such actions.

"We need to start thinking in terms of children being just as much the victims of domestic violence as those who are suffering the direct abuse. Children's brains can be seriously damaged by remaining in environments where violence abounds", she says, citing a raft of new research showing that the plasticity of the infant brain leaves those exposed to domestic violence at an early age susceptible to serious mental disturbances in later life.

"Women will often believe they should stay (in an abusive relationship) for the sake of the children when in fact the absolute reverse in true. They think, 'oh well, they love their father and they need him in their lives, so I'll just put up with it'. It's the worst thing they can do."

Trudy Hanson, from the National Association for Loss and Grief (NALAG) echoes Goward's warning, and has seen first hand the tragic aftermath of domestic violence's impact on impressionable and developing young minds.

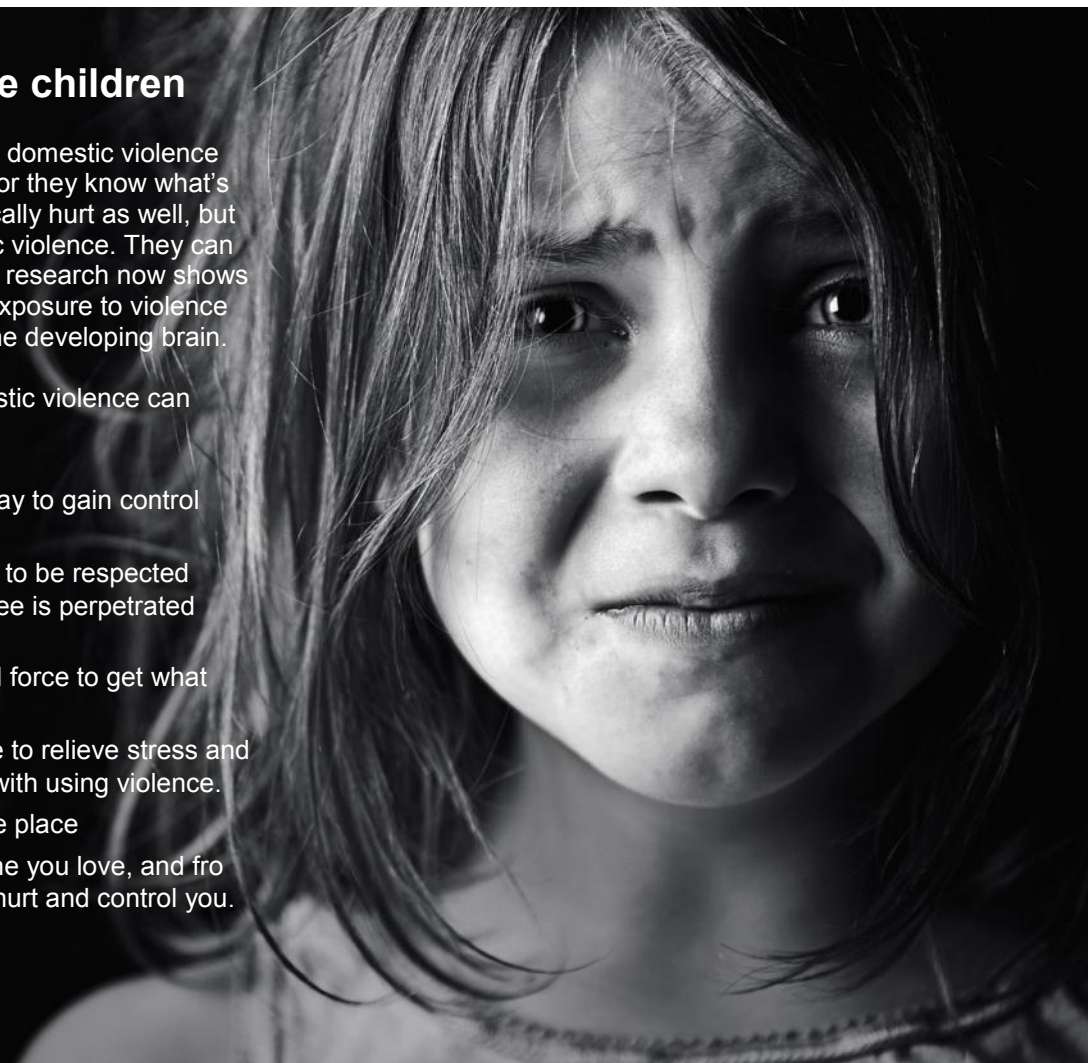
"There are some very damaged little people out

For the sake of the children

MOST children who live with domestic violence see and hear it happening - or they know what's happening. Some are physically hurt as well, but all are damaged by domestic violence. They can be severely traumatised and research now shows that the impact of constant exposure to violence literally caused damage to the developing brain.

Children who live with domestic violence can learn that:

- ◆ Violence is the best way to gain control over someone
- ◆ Women don't deserve to be respected (when violence they see is perpetrated against women)
- ◆ It's OK to use physical force to get what you want
- ◆ It's OK to use violence to relieve stress and that you can get way with using violence.
- ◆ The world is an unsafe place
- ◆ It's OK to hurt someone you love, and fro someone you love to hurt and control you.



there", Hanson says. "We work with children who've come from these situation and it's awful to see the effect that living with constant violence - the unrelentless fear and terror - can do to a young brain.

The scientific research is now showing us that they don't have to be the direct victims of physical abuse to suffer brain damage".

Elizabeth makes no bones about her background - "I'm from the wrong side of the tracks" - and no excuses about her drug use, except to explain the circumstances.

While statistics show that domestic violence is more prolific in lower socio-economic groups, and particularly prevalent in indigenous communities, both Trudy Hanson and Susan Ross warn that it's dangerous to generalise.

"You can't pick an abuser", says Ross. "They don't come with a sign. And women are very , very good at hiding the abuse."

Anecdotally, according to Hanson, it's often the women from higher socio-economic groups who find it hardest to come forward about their experiences with domestic violence, such is the humiliation and shame that goes with a perceived loss of faith. Those from more privileged backgrounds often believe they will be harshly judged because of the expectation that comes with better levels of education and greater access to financial resources.

Equally dangerous is the misconception that domestic violence is only ever perpetrated against women - men to suffer at the hands of abusive partners or relationships.

"Most of the victims of domestic violence related homicides are women," says Pru Goward, "But there is no doubt that men also suffer - often from different forms of abuse than physical. There's also verbal, psychological and financial abuse. And you only have to look at the increasing incidence of young women abusing alcohol to see that yea, women are capable of violence too".

While the Dubbo Domestic Violence and Counseling service which Sue Ross is a counsellor, does not cater for men, she also agrees that it's not just women who suffer. "Men are often to victims of emotional abuse. And although historically and statistically, women are mostly the ones on the receiving end of violence, to be frank, these days I'm just not so sure".

One of the difficulties in collecting accurate figures on the number of men who suffer from domestic violence is the reluctance of men to come forward. "If it's difficult for women," says Ross, "It's worse with men - they're not likely to admit they're being abused, so we just don't hear about it."

The impact of domestic violence is far-reaching and

GETTING HELP

Help for Women:

- Check your local telephone book for Domestic Violence Counselling Services
- Contact Interrelate in your area or phone 1300 736 966 to find services near you
- Speak to your GP

Help for Men:

- Contact Interrelate in your area or phone 1300 736 966 to find services near you
- Contact Centacare office near you
- Speak to your GP

can last well beyond the end of the abusive relationship, according to Trudy Hanson.

"The grief associated with domestic violence can last a lifetime. It's what we call 'disenfranchised grief', which is the grief experienced when loss cannot be openly acknowledged or publicly mourned or socially supported. Domestic violence ticks all those boxes.

"What they're grieving is the loss of a dream, of hope, of a marriage or partnership or love," says Hanson, adding that "survivors' often tell her their grief is a lonely , isolating and frightening experience. "Domestic Violence is often referred to as an 'affliction of the powerless'.

"What we can do is give women and children - we see lots of children - a chance to share their story and that helps their healing. It's particularly important to help children through this process, because we know what a profound effect exposure to violence and fear and constant terror can cause to the developing brain."

According to Hanson, whose experience with grief counseling is extensive, survivors of domestic violence, like many others who grieve, often "get to a point in their 'story' where they're left with one question and that's 'why?'"

It's a question Elizabeth struggles to answer - at least from a personal perspective.

But she has very firm views on the reasons behind the proliferation of domestic violence, particularly disadvantages communities.

"It comes down to welfare. Put people on welfare and you take away their sense of pride and purpose, their sense of power over their own destiny. And this welfare system is not letting men be men. It's taking away men's traditional roles away. When their women are on the pension, the men are no longer having to provide for them and that makes them feel inadequate. And that makes them frustrated and angry. Then pour a bit of grog

into the mix, or drugs, and guess who they're going to take that anger out on?' she says, shaking her head.

Pru Goward cautiously echoes the sentiment. "It's a fact that the incidence of domestic violence is higher in regional areas and, tragically, much higher in indigenous communities. And this is largely because they just don't have the services and there aren't the options available, but yes it's also because unemployment is often high in small regional centres.

"look," she says bluntly. "It would be great if we could get everyone into work - we'd see a decrease in all these social problems. Employment gives a sense of dignity and purpose, and yes, an outlet for frustrations.

"Welfare doesn't have a lot to recommend it, except that it's better than having no money at all."

But Elizabeth - who just happens to be indigenous—is insistent.

"Turn off the welfare tap. We need to have a voucher system that provides only for the basics - food, clothing, utilities - so that children are looked after first. If they want to have drug and alcohol habits, let them work for it. They can't be alcoholics

From the



NALAG
Centre

Trudy Hanson OAM Manager NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief Grief Counsellor & Educator

This issue of the Bereavement Buddy focuses on the hidden grief of domestic violence. The many losses, pain and distress associated with domestic violence is often unacknowledged and unvalidated. The grief is sometimes described as a "silent sorrow".

Domestic violence can have a devastating impact on the emotional/ social health of individuals, their children, extended family, friends & community. The experience of grief can come at a time of great vulnerability or emerge years later out of the blue.

The grief associated with domestic violence can be about the loss of the dream, identity, innocence,

safety, home, love, family, history, financial security.

At the NALAG Centre, our clients often present for grief counseling and issues arise during sessions which evolve around domestic violence. This unique grief, promoted me to develop a workshop to teach volunteers and others working with people who have survived domestic violence. The workshop which was piloted in Dubbo this month explores the issue of domestic violence and the associated grief and trauma reactions. The workshop explores different strength based and creative approaches to working with the roller coaster of grief and trauma that individuals experience as part of dealing with their new realities.

The NALAG Centre will present this workshop in Coffs Harbour in August 2011. Keep an eye on the website for more details and registration forms.

What's on the Centre?

Friends of NALAG Morning Tea

First Monday of each Month at 10.00am. This is an opportunity for NALAG staff and volunteers to meet socially with friends of the NALAG Centre for a cuppa and a chat. We currently have around 8 regulars that attend but we have room for more if you want to join us.

Supervision

All volunteers are reminded that Supervision is mandatory for volunteers providing support to clients. We recently had Cathy Banks provide Supervision at the NALAG Centre in Dubbo. We would like encourage volunteers to make use of such a valuable service when offered in the future

Next supervision is on 13th July 2011 with Trudy from 12.00noon—2.00pm.

Babies Remembering Ceremony

The annual Remembering the Babies ceremony was held on Thursday 31st March at the NALAG Centre in Welchman Street, Dubbo. This event was well received and 50+ people attended the ceremony.

Reflective Practice Workshop

Wednesday 29th June 2011. Places are still available for this workshop and details are available on our website. This new one day interactive workshop provides theory and skills training in reflective practice and critical reflective practice for use in both the supervision of provisional psychologists and in peer consultation for CPD.

Topics for this workshop include:

- Current theory on reflective practice

- Creating a reflective space
- Templates and methods for reflective practice

A **Reflective Practice Tool Kit** will be provided to participants. It comprises 3 templates and 7 reflective tools that are useful for technical reflection, evaluative reflection and critical reflection.

Seasons for Growth

Seasons for Growth will commence in Dubbo for children ages 6-15 on 21st July 2011. This program runs for 8 weeks every Thursday evening from 4.00-5.00pm and is a peer group program for children which teaches them valuable skills about loss, grief and change. The Seasons for Growth Program is offered free to suitable participants and more information can be obtained by calling the NALAG Centre on 02 6882 9222.

Working with Drawings in Grief Counselling

1 Day Workshop presented by Julie Dunsmore on 22nd July 2011 at the NALAG Centre in Dubbo. Julie will present the theory of interpretation of drawings, along with selected case studies to demonstrate the power of drawings in the counselling process. Participants will be introduced to various questioning techniques by utilizing their own impromptu drawings on the day and through guided small group work. For more details please see our website.

Blue Healers

We have successfully completed 2 Blue Healers groups so far this year, 1 in Parkes with 13 participants completing the 6 week course and 1 group of 13 in Dubbo which finished in late June.

Paula and Kerry-Lyn will commence Blue Healers in Mudgee this week for 10 participants. We hope to receive additional funding later this year to continue the development and presentation of this program in the central west.

Partners in Depression

In July Paula and Jo Krause will present the Partners in Depression Program which looks at supporting the carers of those experiencing depression stress and anxiety. So if you know of a person who cares for some one with depression,

please ask them to contact us so that we can tell them about the program. Partners In Depression will commence at the NALAG Centre on Monday 18th July 2011 and will run for 6 weeks.

VRA Volunteer Medal Presentation Dinner

The NALAG Centre will hold a Medal Presentation Dinner on 20th August 2011 at the RSL Club in Dubbo. This presentation dinner will see VRA medals awarded to NALAG Volunteers that have been in service for 10 years or more.

We will soon send out invitations for the dinner—see keep tuned.

Are you eligible for a medal? Have you been a NALAG (NSW) Inc member for more than 10 years? Talk to



Geoff Glascock (former NALAG Deputy President) and NALAG (NSW) Inc President Julie Dunmore present Elizabeth Pattinson with her VRA Volunteer Medal at the Presentation Dinner held in

Trudy and she will let you know.

International Travel—Volunteering abroad!

Well this year I am returning to Africa. In February 2002, Gemma Sisia (nee Rice) from Northern NSW in Australia, founded The School of St Jude in Arusha, Tanzania, East Africa. In 2005 my family and I volunteered at the school and we have decided to return together as a family to see the progress of the School and lend a hand at the school building shade areas for the children. In 2005 the school had 750 students and they were building the secondary school. They have now completed the secondary school, and boarding houses and are starting to plan the building of a tertiary teaching college. They now have in excess of 1500 students.

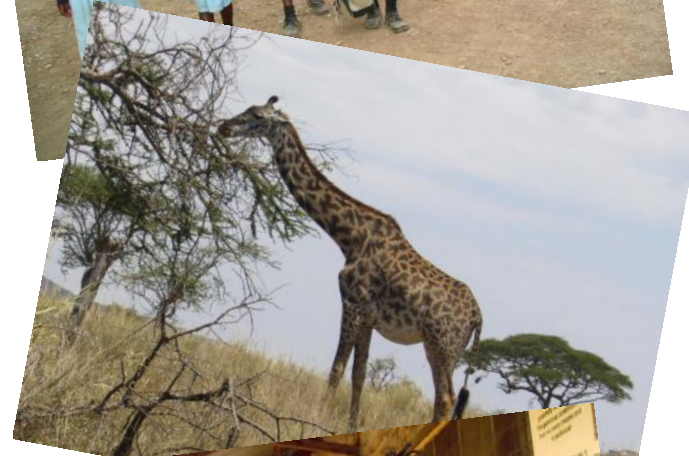
The School of St Jude is Africa's largest private school offering quality education to the poorest of the poor and

the only school in Africa achieving such outcomes on such a scale.

The school blends the best of Tanzanian and International instructional methods to promote critical thinking and high moral values. The children qualify by being incredibly bright and possess the potential of being responsible and dedicated leaders needed for the development of their country. Without St Jude's assistance these children would possibly be facing destitute circumstances with poor employment prospects and no way of breaking the poverty cycle to help themselves and others.

With the help of generous supporters and international volunteers St Jude's can open its doors everyday and continue to fight poverty through education. Big thinking, plenty of passion, direct impact and loads of energy is what has made The School of St Jude a sustainable stand-out.

If you feel like a holiday with a little hard work for a great cause, we will be travelling to St Judes on a Rotary Working Party leaving on 20th September for 1 month returning 20th October. Places are still available on the trip and if you would like more information contact Paula by email paulah@hwy.com.au or phone 02 68829222. Cost of Airfares and the stay at the school of Tax Deductible. Estimated cost of trip is \$5,000.00 included airfares, volunteer stay at school, safari and optional Killimanjaro climb for any adventure enthusiasts. For more information on the School of



For Your Diary...coming events

June 2011

Reflective Practice

In Supervision and Peer Consultation

Presented by Daphne Hewson PhD

When: Wednesday 29th June 2011
Where: NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief
Welchman Street, Dubbo
Time: 9.00am - 5.00pm
Cost: \$360.00 (Inc GST) Non NALAG Members
\$300.00 (Inc GST) NALAG Members
(Includes morning tea, lunch, comprehensive manual and certificate of attendance).

[More Information & Register](#)

Volunteering

NALAG (NSW) Inc Telephone Grief Support Volunteer Training Program

Starts: Friday, 24th June, 2011
Finishes: Friday, 29th July, 2011
Time: 9.30am - 3.30pm
Where: Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre
14-16 Fitzroy Street
Kirribilli, NSW
Cost: \$300.00 (Inc GST)
(Cost of this 6 Week Course includes Workbook and comprehensive additional information.

This course will assist participants to provide telephone grief support to grieving adults.

[More Information & Register](#)

July 2011

Working with Drawings in Grief Counselling

Presented by Julie Dunsmore AM
Psychologist, MAPS President NALAG (NSW) Inc

When: Friday, 22nd July 2011
Where: NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief
Welchman Street, Dubbo
Time: 9.00am - 5.00pm
Cost: \$220.00 (Inc GST) Non NALAG Members
\$200.00 (Inc GST) NALAG Members
(Includes morning tea, lunch, course notes and certificate of attendance).

[More Information & Register](#)

August 2011

Unspeakable Grief

The Grief of Domestic Violence

Presented by Trudy Hanson OAM
*Grief Counsellor & Educator
Manager NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief Dubbo*

When: Thursday, 25th May 2011
Where: The Curran Centre
St Augustine's Church
12 Gordon Street, Coffs Harbour
Time: 9.30am - 4.30pm
Cost: \$260.00 (Inc GST) Non NALAG Members
\$220.00 (Inc GST) NALAG Members
(Includes morning tea, lunch, comprehensive manual and certificate of attendance).

[More Information & Register](#)

Introduction to Sandplay Therapy

Presented by Cathy Banks
Grad.Dip Couns & Psychotherapy, B.Bus Psych/Mktg, Dip Mgt

[More Information & Register](#)

When: Friday, 26th August 2011
Where: The Curran Centre
St Augustine's Church
12 Gordon Street, Coffs Harbour
Time: 9.00am - 4.30pm
Cost: \$260.00 (Inc GST)

Register for a course

To register for any of these workshops please complete the relevant Registration Form and return with payment to:

NALAG (NSW) Inc
Education & Training
PO Box 379
DUBBO NSW 2830

To download further information and/or registration forms visit <http://www.nalag.org.au/events.html>

Bookings & Enquiries:

For bookings and enquires please contact the NALAG Centre for Loss and Grief. Group discounts over 8 people are available, please enquire.

NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief Dubbo
Welchman Street, Dubbo NSW 2830
Ph: 02 6882 9222
Fax: 02 6884 9100