

Welcome

A warm welcome to the readers of this winter edition of our newsletter for friends and families affected by homicide.

This new-look edition features articles from *Skylight* about helping children respond when they are faced with difficult times, resources and links as well as tips from a Victim Support volunteer. We also introduce you to Patricia Pressnell, Family Support Worker in Counties Manukau and Julie Ryle talks about the benefits of equine therapy using the Eagala model.

Victim Support is here to help you. If you need help, please contact us on 0800 842 846 and our Contact Service will connect you with a trained volunteer.



About Us...



Patricia Pressnell

I came to New Zealand six years ago and immediately registered with Volunteering Auckland. I knew that I wanted to use my skills which include a deep empathy and a real desire to help others. I'd done quite a lot of voluntary work in the UK, mostly with animals and the elderly, but I wanted to see what else was 'out there'.

This edition we talk to Patricia Pressnell, a Family Support Worker - Homicide, based in Pukekohe.

Victim Support was the first agency to reply to me and so my journey started. This was around five years ago. I started as a volunteer and then became a paid Support Worker. When the role of Family Support Worker came up I was asked if I would like to do this for six months. I accepted and was fortunate to be offered the permanent position when it became available. The rest is history of course.

My main role is to support people whose lives have been affected by homicide. I provide an end to end service to families from the time the homicide occurs until the trial, and beyond. An important part of my role is to advocate for victims with various agencies, ie welfare centres, Housing New Zealand, Immigration, Police,

“My main role is to support people whose lives have been affected by homicide.”

Courts, Oranga Tamariki, cultural groups and so on.

The judicial process can take up to two years if you consider all the hearings and eventually sentencing and possible appeal hearings. For families this is a long and arduous journey which has been forced upon them. Most people will have never experienced anything similar in their lives and will never again. It profoundly affects people in so many different ways.

It's certainly been a vast learning experience for me. I always wanted to study law but regrettably it didn't happen for me. I have a deep interest

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Children and Grief

As homicide Support Workers we often observe the many forms of grief experienced by family members and friends affected by homicide.

In some of these situations we can support those affected directly, however, in the case of minor children, our best practice guide is clear that we are not to work directly with minors. We fortunately have some flexibility by working indirectly with children via their caregivers.

“Children are often the silent victims when family members are grieving.”

Support Workers become aware of those young people affected when we start preparing the relationship tree, generally coming across those children by default. When we're meeting with families the children are often there or if not present, they're spoken about. Families seem to feel comfortable sharing their children's relationships with the deceased and how those relationships are going to be affected following the loss of their loved ones. The sad realisation that the deceased won't be present at children's

milestone events is further opportunity for sharing and for us to appreciate, support and listen to victims.

Children are often the silent victims when family members are grieving. As well as trying to understand their own grief, they are usually living in a situation where the people around them are also grieving. Their whole family dynamic has changed.

We have access to many age appropriate resources to help children affected by homicide, with some great books available through organisations like *Skylight* which we can source for you. I've had positive feedback from a number of families who have used these books as they provide an opportunity for discussion when the caregiver is reading with or to the child.

Making a Memory Book is a resource I've also suggested as it is an exercise that caregivers can participate in with children. *Skylight* has a downloadable flyer to help guide families through this.

In some areas around the country they are fortunate to have the *Seasons* programme which is specifically designed for children suffering grief and loss. We can refer our families to



Chris Cowell

this free programme via our local offices.

When caregivers have shared with me that a child's emotions have become overwhelming or are interfering with their everyday activities, they are having ongoing nightmares or similar,

I have encouraged those families to visit their local GP to access counselling for that child if necessary. I remind families who I am supporting that I am not a counsellor but that this is something they may want to consider looking at if they need to.

I've been asked by families how they can discuss the death of their loved ones with children. The child's imagination will be working overtime with the bits and pieces that they've overheard, so I encourage open and honest explanations relayed in a manner that the child will hopefully understand and absorb. Repeated explanations are also often required.

I encourage family members to include their children's thoughts and the affect that the homicide has had, and is going to have on their future lives, when they are preparing their Victim Impact Statements.

HSW Chris Cowell

About us... (continued from front)

in the judicial system in New Zealand and learn something every day, as the old adage goes.

My main aim is to make sure, to the best of my ability, that I can provide support and information through every legal event and make sure that people are adequately supported.

Throughout my journey I have met the most wonderful people. The depth of despair and unhappiness, anger and emotional turmoil goes beyond human comprehension, but somehow these brave people have managed to display a courage and fortitude which I have admired and respected so much.

No one can predict how long things will last but at the present time I am enjoying my job and my life in New Zealand. New Zealand has been so good to me and I am so lucky I found Victim Support.



Something Has Happened – an activity book for children aged 3 - 6

years, the book can be used to express thoughts and feelings. There are guidelines for a parent or carer to help the child complete the activities.

When Tough Stuff Happens – an activity book for children aged 7 – 12. This book can be used to express thoughts and feelings by completing the activities and can be used in a range of difficult situations facing young people.

Both books are available for purchase at the Skylight online shop - skylight.org.nz/shop



Library corner

Sharon's Story

Our heartfelt thanks to Sharon, whom we supported following the homicide of her daughter's father, for sharing her story.

My daughter Jenna was 10 at the time she lost her dad.

We had been separated for about two years and our separation was a really difficult time for her. We had an access arrangement and it was his weekend to have Jenna - the offender was the ex of Jenna's dad's new partner, who broke into the house. Jenna was in bed sleeping at the time but got up when she heard screaming.

She saw her dad after he was stabbed so for Jenna, it was not only about losing him but because she was so young and witnessed it she really struggled. Jenna saw her dad covered in blood, she was so distressed at the time but even now, she won't talk about it. She couldn't sleep without being in my bed and I felt helpless, lots of people gave me advice, some of it helpful but mostly a lot of it was judging my parenting from people who had never been in this situation.

Jenna saw a counsellor a few times, I thought this would be the answer but she was just not ready. Jenna would get really angry at school and often had to come home because she couldn't handle it. We decided to see another counsellor and this one worked, she related better to Jenna and gave us both strategies on how to manage her anger - some of this was through expression in a safe way and that seemed to work.

During the really difficult times, especially the sadness and anger I wished I knew how to support her better, but I never expected that I would end up separated

from her father, let alone for him to be killed. The shock of that happening still replays in my head as if it was a dream. Jenna told me that she tried to protect me from it by not talking to me, she never wanted me to know what she had been through, how she felt - especially if she was upset because she didn't want me to feel upset.

There were times that I am really thankful that I had support of a few good friends who tried really hard to understand. They helped me provide better support to my daughter who really needed me to be there for her, it was awful at times and to be honest, there were times that I felt like we might not get through this. The last 8 years have been up and down and things are definitely getting better for Jenna, she is now 18 and is in her first year at university - it breaks my heart that this happened to her but I am so proud of who she is today.

Sharon

Children and Grief - where to go for help

There's a range of places to go for information, help and support for children after a homicide.

- Victim Support - up to 30 funded counselling sessions with local approved counsellor. Some criteria may apply. Call **0800 842 846**.
- GP - visit your local doctor for counselling referrals.
- School counsellors - ring your child's school office to discuss counselling for your child.
- Skylight - provides information, resources and books for children experiencing trauma, loss and grief. **skylight.org.nz**
- Oranga Tamariki - Ministry for Children, government agency responsible for the wellbeing of children. **orangatamariki.govt.nz** or **0508 326 459**.
- Barnardos - provides support, information and education for all New Zealand children. **barnardoes.org.nz** or **(04) 385 7560**.
- Youthline - supports young people to receive help and access support. Call **0800 376 633** or text **234**.
- Children's Commissioner - advice for people who are concerned for children. Call **0800 224 453**.



For friends and families affected by homicide

Equine Assisted Therapy: Horses helping to heal

Julie Ryle, Certified Eagala practitioner & Chair of the Midland Region Eagala Networking Group (NZ) talks to us about the Eagala Model.

Founded in 1999, the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (Eagala) is the leading international non-profit association for professionals incorporating horses to address mental health and personal development needs.

The Eagala model is solution-oriented. It utilises horses as metaphors to help clients access their own solutions to life challenges. Working alongside the client is an Eagala certified treatment team, that includes a mental health professional, an equine specialist, and the horses.

Eagala is an experiential modality. It's about doing. It promotes engagement and can involve the clients questioning, investigating, experimenting, solving problems, being creative, learning by trial and error and reflecting on their interaction between themselves and the horses. All of this takes place on the ground, there is no riding involved.

Horses live in herds and express a range of emotions - fear, anger, grief, relaxation, happiness, and affection. Like us, they too have distinctive personalities. Horses are prey animals and have an exceptional ability to read non-verbal communication, they sense the difficulties and often 'mirror' the human behaviour.

As soon as the client steps into the arena/paddock they have started to make changes. They have no labels. Horses don't have biases which helps clients of all populations and cultures feel emotionally safer in sessions. They use the time to make meaning out of what they came to work on, it's an individual process. Clients build on their resilience and learn through self-discovery, identifying the changes they need and want to make.

Eagala can be used with individuals, families and groups, and is used across the world and is continuing to grow because it has strong outcomes. There is growing evidence about the positive effect of equine assisted therapy, especially in the treatment of trauma and adverse life events.

There is a growing interest in equine-assisted psychotherapy supporting the psychological health and family relationships of service members, veterans and their families worldwide.

For more information about Eagala visit eagala.org

References - Eagala NZ Brochure 2016

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CONTACT

VICTIM SUPPORT

Get Help: 0800 VICTIM (0800 842 846)
enquiries@victimsupport.org.nz
victimsupport.org.nz
facebook.com/victimsupportnz

DISCLAIMER: The information contained in this newsletter is for general information purposes only. The information is provided by Victim Support and in some cases includes the personal opinion and experiences of victims themselves. While we endeavour to keep the information up to date and correct, the opinions expressed are not necessarily those of Victim Support.



Because grief happens and support matters...

Profile - Skylight

Skylight is a national not-for-profit trust that enables children, their families and whānau to navigate through tough times by facilitating their access to expert information, education, professional services and support.

They also provide education, training and support for professionals, agencies and others who assist those dealing with grief, loss and trauma.

Their services and programmes are built with trauma informed practice and focus on building resilience. They deliver services directly to children, young people, adults, families and whānau, and have also developed partnerships with other organisations to deliver services.

A network of partner counsellors has expanded the reach of their services throughout Aotearoa.

Skylight programmes and services include:

- Counselling services with a fully trauma informed team of counsellors throughout Aotearoa
- Working with parents, caregivers, and extended whānau to help them deal with difficult issues, shared and safe parenting and conflict resolution
- One-on-one counselling support and group programmes for children who have witnessed/experienced domestic violence in the Wellington region
- Providing group programmes for children dealing with family change and other issues (eg bereavement, a parent in prison, parents with addiction or mental health issues)
- An umbrella agreement with the *National Sexual Violence Survivor Advocate (NSVSA)*, Louise Nicholas and her team. Management of NSVSA remains with Louise, but Skylight provides some support to assist efficient and effective operation
- 0800 phone support providing a channel for information, resources and issue sharing
- An extensive resource centre that has books, information, resources, and research designed to provide support and build resilience for individuals, families, whānau and communities – and tailored information packs are emailed and posted throughout Aotearoa
- An online shop with a broad range of books, games, and other resources
- Trauma informed and resilience building Professional Development for community organisation staff nationwide
- Tailored training to organisations to increase staff resilience
- *Parenting Through Separation* workshops in the lower North Island
- Training facilitators to deliver the *Waves* post suicide bereavement programme nationally
- Training teachers and guidance counsellors to deliver the school-based resilience building programme, *Travellers*, nationally.