

# Special Interest Group on Postvention and Suicide Bereavement Supplement

As of 2007 the IASP Special Interest Group (SIG) on Postvention and Suicide Bereavement has been successfully producing their own SIG newsletter and disseminating this amongst IASP members and the public. As of June 2015 this SIG newsletter will be appearing as a supplementary item in the periodic IASP newsletter.

This will detail all the on-going events of this SIG and news in the area as before. Past editions of the newsletter can be found at:  
<https://www.iasp.info/postvention.php>.

For this edition of the newsletter the Postvention and Suicide Bereavement SIG have included the below two pieces, one detailing a piece on Mates In Construction, an Australian Initiative, as covered by John Brady and secondly a memorial piece for John Peters (RIP).

## MATESHIP Matters Tour Solidarity not Sympathy

Queensland, Australia, 2015

In late February, early March of this year, John Brady from MATES in Construction led a speaking tour of internationally renowned speakers on suicide prevention, to Tropical North Queensland and to Outback Western Queensland. The speakers were Sean McCarthy, who has been working in the area of suicide prevention in Ireland for many years and doing innovative work with sports coaches around suicide prevention. Kevin Briggs from San Francisco - Kevin was an ex motor cycle policeman who was known as the 'Guardian of the Golden Gate Bridge' for his work in helping people not to jump from the bridge. The third speaker was Kevin Hines who survived a jump from the Golden Gate Bridge - less than 1% survives.

John was asked about the tour and in particular the regions he was visiting and why a theme such as "Solidarity not Sympathy" was chosen?

"We chose Northern Queensland because there had been a number of recent suicides and the community had approached MATES in Construction for help as some of these occurred within the construction community," he said. Cairns and Townsville were looking for ways to raise community awareness of suicide and some effective preventive strategies.



Sean McCarthy from Ireland, Kevin Hines from the US, John Brady from Mates in Construction and Kevin Briggs from the US, under the Tree of Knowledge in Barcaldine

"We linked with local networks in the construction community such as MBA, BUSSQ, QBCC, CSQ, and with local groups such as the Suicide prevention network, Edward Koch Foundation and Standby,"

"By doing this we were able to create a simple event where both support and inspiration could be found. Both events were well attended and we are still getting positive feedback,"

The tour then headed to Western Queensland for quite different reasons.

"The Uniting Care Community had asked if we could combine with their networks to support the communities in Barcaldine, Longreach, Jundah and Stonehenge. They are experiencing the ravages of a long drought and all that goes with that, as well the plight of a locust plague."

Sean McCarthy commented that the tour gave him a new understanding of isolation while both

Kevin's were taken by the desolation of the drought upon the land and the wildlife - thousands of dead kangaroos!!

The "theme of Solidarity not Sympathy" came from discussion with the local community.

"The community was sick of "city do gooders" coming out to lecture them on what they needed to do to look after their mental health - we don't need sympathy, we need solidarity."

This then changed how the events were approached and where they were held.

"We made a choice to simply tell our stories as briefly but as honestly as we could - a good mixture of tragedy and humour with some simple lessons thrown in for good measure!"

"We wanted them to hear our stories of struggle, survival and hope so they could then feel free to tell their stories of struggle, survival and hope.

Each event went for about one hour but the people stayed and talked with us for hours afterwards. Kevin Briggs was even invited to a station down the road from Stonehenge (50 minutes on dirt in a 4 WD) to pat a pet kangaroo. Sean, Kevin and Kevin were blown away by the hospitality, resilience, and tragic stories of these people and their communities.

“In Barcaldine, we had 60 people come to a night session under the Tree of Knowledge; In Jundah we shared breakfast with 30 workers in a shed who faced an uncertain future. In Stonehenge, we had lunch in the centre with the Flying Doctor – every family from the area was represented; at Longreach we had over 100 people at the Jumbuck Motel with more than half still there talking two hours later. – The support was phenomenal” said John obviously moved by the experience. “It could only have happened with key community people getting behind it and inviting the community to participate.”

Jane Williams, a key organiser from Longreach/Barcaldine commented that she has never seen such numbers at anything to do with mental health; the tour obviously hit the right nerve. When asked what the tour had taught him, John's reply was emphatic; “People matter; people's stories matter – each story is unique – who will listen for that uniqueness?? This is the lesson we have learnt at MATES in Construction and has been reinforced during this tour”.

“We don't need sympathy; what we need is a mate who can see we are struggling and then has the courage to listen to our story without trying to fix us”, he said.

John said that positive feedback from the communities continues to come in on a regular basis.

The tour emphasised to all who took part the extreme difficulties that there are in providing support and services to people in remote isolated areas. For Sean it highlighted the need to look at and focus on how do we, provide postvention support to individuals and communities impacted by suicide.

#### For further information on Mates in construction visit;

<http://matesinconstruction.org.au> or contact John Brady at; [jbrady@matesinconstruction.org.au](mailto:jbrady@matesinconstruction.org.au)

## John Peters (RIP) Memorial Piece

By Dr. Michelle Linn

I first met John Peters when I spoke at the IASP conference in Killarney, Ireland, nearly eight years ago. He sat in the back of the room but he was one of the most vocal attendees. At the time I thought he was one “those parents” (anyone who has spoken at a conference with grieving people knows what I mean) who ask a ton of questions but it wasn't long before I found out how wrong I was.

After we returned to our respective countries, I received an email from John, indicating that he wanted to work with me and find a way to bring me to the United Kingdom to speak. I had no idea the relationship I would forge with the man who would become my “UK Dad” and how he and his wife Jean and daughters Wendy and Heidi would become such an integral part of my life.

I travelled to England three times to speak at events that John had planned and each time he and Jean rolled out the red carpet, particularly because he wanted to make sure that I saw parts of the United Kingdom most Americans didn't. “They never leave London,” he would lament, taking me across Wales to meet his relatives and even to the Irish Sea where we rented a surfboard that he managed to fit inside their little car so I could do some surfing while I was there.

John and Jean's son Dale had died by suicide in 1992 and that propelled their involvement into SOBS and then IASP. What John wanted most was to see change, to see suicide bereavement recognized as one of the three pillars as suicide, to have equal footing at conferences. He also started collaborations at the University of Manchester and the year before he died, we talked about what we could do for suicide

attempt survivors. He spent hours on the SOBS bereavement phone line, listening to the grieving and their stories, even taking calls up until hours before his death.

As his health began to decline, his heart giving out, I saw him visibly slow down during my last visit. He told me had given up his work with the Welsh Men's Choir because he came to the realization how his health was compromised and the suicide work was much more important to him.

Even as his health deteriorated, we continued our emails, he as the “Mzee” he called himself, Kenyan for “wise uncle.” My marriage had ended and Jean told me on my last visit six months ago that after I had flown back to the states in 2013, John thought of men he wished he had introduced me to. While John had a list of ideas for me (some of which I am working on: including my Chef Chelle food blog), he didn't want me to be alone. At his death on April 28, 2014, I was well into a relationship and I would be engaged by the fall. In the months as the relationship progressed, he was hopeful where it was going and told me to invite my “UK parents” to the wedding. Jean, Wendy, and Heidi will represent him here in Albuquerque, New Mexico, for it.

John never asked for credit; he just wanted to see things go forward, to happen, for the bereaved to get the support they deserve. He was the kind of bereaved parent who didn't want others to experience what his family did. As the postvention movement continues to grow, don't forget the people who got it there, especially those in the background who pushed it forward and never forgot its importance.



John and Jean Peters with Dr. Michelle Linn.