

CONCLUSIONS

This evaluation has told us that:

1. an occasion of remembrance and thanksgiving meets a variety of needs for those who attend
2. the invitation has sufficient information and is sent at a suitable time prior to the service; the tear-off slip allows us to plan the seating, service sheets and refreshments
3. the venue, timing and format of the service appears to address the needs of those who attend
4. the balance between the religious, spiritual and secular content appears to work
5. for those that stay for refreshments, it gives the opportunity for further support through talking to staff, volunteers and one another
6. the regular review of the occasion, including feedback from the staff and volunteers who run it, ensures that we are flexible in responding to suggestions.

It is clear from the 71% of those who returned the questionnaire that this Occasion of Remembrance and Thanksgiving is positive and worthwhile. The initial contact and structured ceremony provide a safe, controlled environment, formal but intimate, in which the bereaved can experience their grief. For many perhaps the only other ritual has been the funeral, usually about a week after the death when the bereaved would be numbed and shocked. Our services may help the bereaved to move on and offer relatives and carers an opportunity to seek further support.

What is not clear is why some do not attend: in July, only 22% of the 58 deaths were remembered by the 49 who attended; in October, 35% of 65 deaths were remembered by the 49 who attended. We will continue to review and vary the content of this occasion, but we need to do a larger survey of the needs of the bereaved to ascertain from them what would be of most benefit at particular times in the first two years after a death. **BC**

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WEB WATCH

Bereaved adult siblings

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The relationship between siblings is potentially the longest of all human relationships. Yet when a brother or sister dies, surviving siblings often sense that society does not recognise the impact of their loss. For many, this can lead to confusion, anger and unresolved grief as full permission to grieve is denied. Looking specifically at adult sibling loss, I find that the internet seems to reflect this lack of recognition with noticeably few resources for this kind of bereavement. Those that do exist however, are worth exploring.

The Sibling Connection at www.counselingstlouis.net has been created by Pleasant Gill White, a USA-based psychotherapist and bereaved sibling. On this extensive and imaginatively conceived site, she briefly considers some of the implications of sibling loss as a child, adolescent, student and adult, raising such issues as the possibility of being over-protective in adulthood, compulsive care giving, and guilt. The student section includes links to find appropriate counsellors in the USA, UK and Canada and includes personal stories submitted by site users.

The **articles** written by White herself vary in depth and quality. Her outline of the basic grief theories of Bowlby, Kubler-Ross and Rondo lacks detail and in 'Factors that influence sibling grief' important aspects are listed but left unexplored. Of more interest is her article '**Bibliotherapy** for bereaved siblings' on the use of books as healing aids, giving details of how to use them and questions for bereaved readers to consider. She emphasises that such self-help can raise unresolved issues so emotional support is essential. White also considers some '**families' of emotions** that can follow the death of a sibling, including word banks that may help clients identify their feelings and experiences.

Other articles consider the long-term effects of childhood sibling loss, its effect on family and marital relationships, the impact of the family reactions on surviving siblings, continuing bonds between living and dead siblings, and the link between creativity and healing.

Throughout White stresses the importance of learning about the grief process and comparing one's own experiences with those of others, with a brief mention of two other cultures. She **recommends** certain popular **films**, each demonstrating different aspects of the grieving process and describes fiction and non-fiction **books** for siblings, listed in age-appropriate categories (the titles link directly with Amazon). Site users can also sign up for a **newsletter**, which appears to be free, providing site updates, articles and book reviews. There is a FAQ section and an extensive **bibliography**, **links** to other useful websites (click on Support) and a collection of **personal stories** provided by site users. Finally there is a well-used **message board**

which appears to offer a lot of support to bereaved visitors.

Although previously reviewed in Webwatch, the international organisation **The Compassionate Friends** (TFC), which has branches in the USA, UK, Canada and Australia, needs to be mentioned again in this context. This organisation originally focused on parents, but swiftly recognised that bereaved siblings could be 'forgotten mourners' and has consequently produced a number of excellent resources.

Go to www.compassionatefriends.org/ and click on **Sibling Resources**. Included here are two '**brochures**'. *Death of An Adult Sibling* briefly examines the loss of shared family history and family roles and the strain on relationships, while *When A Brother or Sister Dies* is aimed at teenagers. For North American visitors, the site gives **details of support groups** for bereaved siblings and details of relevant conferences in the USA and Canada. There is also an internet **chat room** for bereaved adult siblings and teenagers, described by one user as an 'incredibly supportive environment'.

An **online forum** provides a message board on which to post comments and questions, and there is a sibling **pen pal program** for people of any age. Throughout this site there is a feeling of protection and security. For example, the forum is not a public board and, like the pen pal scheme, can only be accessed through contact with a TCF representative via the website. A **book** and **video** specifically for siblings can be ordered from the site and the **sibling newsletter**, with a special addition for the newly bereaved, is available as a free download.

Finally, Atlanta and Western Australia TCF groups have created their own sibling websites, providing some touching articles and poetry submitted by site users. **BC**

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