

## Newsletter, July 2012.

### **Seasons for Growth**

- Provides peer-group support *programmes* for children, young people and adults challenged by grief, loss and change.
- Gives those *experiencing* loss a voice – ‘*This is my experience*’- to say what they’re feeling, and to develop supportive relationships.

For details of the programmes being run in England and Wales please see our website <http://seasonsforgrowth.co.uk/> ; and for the international website see <http://www.goodgrief.org.au/home>

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### **A message from Sister Mary Ellen, the Chief Executive Officer for Good Grief,**

The *Seasons for Growth*® paradigm emphasises that no two seasons are the same. Each time we revisit our loss, the experience remembered while the “same” is “different”.

How true! How true, I thought as I drove to work this morning. Here it is the first day of winter in the southern hemisphere and we are surrounded by sunshine, while last week we were dressed in raincoats, with umbrellas held high. There’s something special about winter sunshine which holds hope for us all amid the wintry perspectives of our “grief and loss” experiences.

As the celebration of the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee approaches, I am sure the Queen is pondering all the events of the past 60 years through mixed lenses. She is such a model for resilience, regularly adapting the monarchy to the changing circumstances of the Commonwealth. How often must she have felt the weight of meeting the



perceived expectations of joy and goodwill for all amid the “pressure cooker times” as family members faced media scrutiny, public criticism and or as old “hurts” resurfaced? Our seasonal paradigm reminds us that all these feelings are OK, and that what is important is how we manage these feelings and move forward.

The new edition of *Seasons for Growth*® for Adults has been a wonderful addition to Good Grief's suite of programs. It offers people, challenged by the loss of a relationship, employment, a loved one or some other significant change event, an opportunity to reflect on their experience, share with trusted others and learn a new ways to move forward.

During my recent visit to the UK it was wonderful to meet a number of *Seasons for Growth* Trainers and Companions. I know the passion and commitment to *Seasons for Growth* evident in their engagement in conversation and the sharing of ideas is expressed by Trainers and companions across England and Wales. So on behalf of the *Good Grief* Team here in Australia, I would like to thank you for the difference you make to the lives of the children, young people and adults in your care.

May you enjoy the blessings of a summer filled with sunshine and life renewed in the weeks ahead.

With gratitude,  
Mary Ellen O'Donoghue rsj  
Chief Executive Officer  
Good Grief Ltd Australia

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## 2012 - an overview

As we heard in London from Sr Mary Ellen, the 'Seasons' metaphor works world-wide. *Seasons for Growth* has been established 16 years now in Australia, where it arose from changes in society – including divorce, concerns about suicide, and a new focus on the concept of 'risk'. Very few programmes have this longevity. It works! In England and Wales the programme has now been running for nearly fifteen years.



Last year - 2010/11- brought growing concern over future funding and staffing in the context of the new government's spending review. 2011/12 has seen those worries hit home, with loss of grant funding and enforced withdrawal of professionals' time for *Seasons* in some areas. At the same time we have also seen positive developments. Leeds and North Wales are both

looking at the new Adult programme, which brings much greater opportunity for training and support in the field of adult loss and bereavement. Wales is developing

peer mentoring/ buddying to keep mentoring going in times of economic difficulty (see below).

Meanwhile in relation to funding we have received a £5k donation from an Order of Sisters. Opportunities need to be explored for joint funding proposals between the national office and local areas.

However, our main asset in these trying times remains the commitment and passion of Trainers and Companions in ensuring that Seasons for Growth remains accessible, and, we hope, increases in its availability nation-wide.

For the period April 2011 to March 2012, 1,314 children accessed the programme (1,151 for primary level and 163 for secondary level); 6 adults accessed the programme; 10 companions trained in the Adult programme; and 122 companions trained in the Children programme.



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### **Refreshed and redesigned – The SfG Adult Programme (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition)**

On her recent visit to the UK, in April 2012, Sr Mary Ellen introduced and provided training for our Trainers in the use and roll-out of this new programme, completely re-written from first principles. Training for it is separate from training to be a Companion for Children, entailing a quite separate 2-day programme. Companions



don't have to have trained in the Children programme first. As with the Children's programme however, would-be trainers must run a group as a Companion before rolling out the programme as a Trainer. This new programme brings new opportunities for us – for working with and developing new adult bereavement groups. Adults will be responsible for their own costs.

*There are two parts -*

**I The seminar** – a presentation for adults about Grief and Loss which can be used as a 'stand alone' session – e.g. for a school staff session after a suicide – or as an introduction to and preparation for a small group programme:

**II The small group programme.** 4 x 2 ½ hr (or 8 x 70 mins sessions), with a workbook, mirroring the peer-support programme developed for children and young adults. The 4 sessions are based on the 4 seasons: Autumn – the concept of seasons and change; Winter – My Story, and Grief reactions; Spring – Feelings, and Memories; Summer – Forgiveness and choices/ moving forward. The greatest amount of time, thought, planning and care was taken up redesigning the new material on forgiveness

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## Seasons for Growth activities in England and Wales

**Tower Hamlets**, with funding support from St John Southworth , had 17 Companions at the reconstructor run by Caroline Sibley on 7<sup>th</sup> Feb, and it is hoped they will all now implement the programme. Ged Flynn trained them in Nov/Dec 2011.

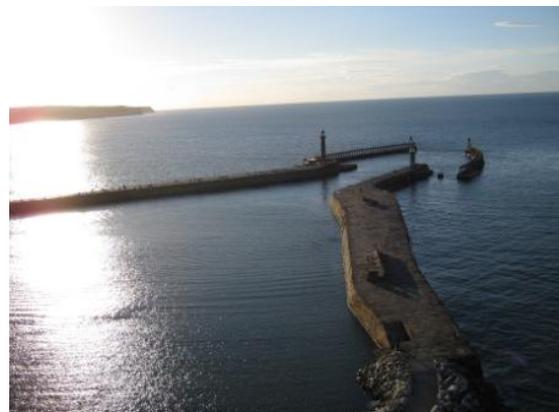
### In Hillingdon

Seasons for Growth has very sadly been de-commissioned from Hillingdon Community Health, bringing to a close a very valuable partnership between Health and Education . School Nursing time is no longer available to deliver the programme, or train and update new Companions.

None of this detracts from the remarkable achievements in recent years. Since April 2011, 175 children are known to have completed or are currently undergoing a Seasons for Growth programme . Feedback from teachers, Companions, parents, and children themselves has indicated positive impacts on behaviour and emotional wellbeing of children who have gone through the programme. Meanwhile 2 Companion training sessions have taken place, training a further 25 Companions; and 2 Information sessions have been hosted for potential new Companions.

Overall 78 Companions have attended a reconstructor this year. 62% of all schools and 3 Children's centres in the borough now have Seasons for Growth Companions, with a further 11 organisations having trained Companions.

Adult Programme training was provided in September 2011 and January 2012. This resulted in a further 10 adult Companions, bringing the total number of adult-trained Companions to 21. One Adult programme is in progress at time of writing this report, with at least two more being planned.



### Two Hillingdon Case Studies

*A seven year old child showed the extent to which the programme can influence and support families beyond the Seasons meetings. Her father was on an extended tour of duty in Afghanistan. The activities undertaken in Seasons supported both the child and also the family when the child shared what we had learnt and took home some of the items we made*

*during the programme. Some of these (in particular the heart and flower activities) were sent to dad on the frontline and we understand that these supported and helped him in knowing what was going on back at home. Her mother felt greatly supported and very positive in how it had helped her child to cope with this challenging time and had given the child strategies which it hoped would support should this arise again. It is interesting to see that, although the programme was intended and targeted at the child, the ripple effect reached across the world and helped the whole family.*

*A 15 year old student at a Tuition Centre, who lost her mum to cancer when she was very young and had never seemed able to come to terms with this loss, was enabled for the first time, through the Seasons For Growth programme, to express how she felt, and was able to share her grief with the others present. A noticeable change has occurred in her attitude due to Seasons for Growth. It is apparent that she is able to listen to others and understand that others have sadness in life too. She has also been showing a lot more empathy towards our other students at the centre and undoubtedly speaks about her future in a much more positive way. She is at present preparing for her GCSEs, is working with toddlers in a local nursery, and is also arranging a charity walk to raise money for disadvantaged children - altogether great steps forward.*

## **Update on Seasons in North Wales**

As in many areas of the country, funding is still being sought to secure investment to support the on-going coordination of Seasons. Trained Companions continue to have to focus on core business, not always having the time to deliver groups and/or mentor others. At the same time there has been an increased level of interest both from the Welsh Assembly Government and within Health Board covering North Wales in relation to support for children who have experienced loss - recognition of Seasons at a strategic level; and evidence of its becoming more embedded within joint planning/commissioning.

North Wales is now benefiting from a larger pool of skilled and experienced Companions, who are more familiar and practiced at delivering the programme. There is a growing interest in the Adult programme. Attempts to keep the mentoring system going has led to some companions signing up to support each other as peer "buddies



A good indication of the more strategic steps forward being made in Wales is the focus there on evaluation and recognition of Seasons in research. The programme features in and receives good commendations in the 2009 research - *'Research into the Child Bereavement Services in Wales - Interim Report for the Palliative Care Implementation Group'*. (Jane Fitz Sept 2009). More recently Companions have responded really well to a request relating to using pre and post measures in evaluation forms. An agreement has been reached with Australia that North Wales can lead the way with regard to the re-vamp of child pre and post measures.

## News from the North West of England

Chrysalis Bereavement Support Service is a project which currently operates under the Catholic Children's Society in Runcorn. We now have Leanne Jones trained as a Companion Trainer – many congratulations to her - and she has led 2 training events this school year – one at the end of November 2011 and the other at the beginning of July 2012. Both of these trainings took place in Chester, 11 attending the first one, 15 the second.

In the meantime, Barry Lyonette trained another 11 Companions in March in Shrewsbury. Coordination in Shropshire of the network meetings and de-briefing arrangements beyond first programme delivery has been taken on by Helen Bayley, who works for Shropshire Local Authority, and trained as a Companion in 2010. Helen mirrors the coordination role that Sue Posada agreed to take on as part of her educational psychology post in the Stockport area. It is good to know that each of those local authorities feel it a priority to include this role in the job description of a paid worker, albeit on a part-time basis.

Our next companion training event will take place again in Chester on 29/30 November 2012. So far 12 people, mainly from schools' staff, have booked their place.

On June 15<sup>th</sup> 2012, we held our Annual Re-Connector in Chester. 81 Companions came along to renew their accreditation for another year and receive their certificates. We invited David Trickey to speak in the morning session on the impact of traumatic death on children, young people and families. It was a great day, and the evaluations speak for themselves!

Throughout the area which we service, 29 programmes have been delivered this school year, and 167 children and young people have benefited from being given the opportunity to process their grief.

Leanne Jones is also now trained to deliver the Adult Programme for Seasons and we will be looking to bring a group together in the future.

The passion and enthusiasm for Seasons for Growth remains high and is being recognised within our Bereavement Support Service as an essential element that can be offered to alleviate the pain suffered through significant change and loss. Long may it continue!

## The Master Trainers and training of new trainers...

***“The Master Trainer (TM) is the person whose role it is to accompany, support and recommend for accreditation any aspiring Trainer(s) through the recruitment, selection and initial learning processes which lead to Trainer Accreditation within the Seasons for Growth programme.”***

### Trainer Musings

- It is good to see growth.
- Seasons for Growth is surely about human flourishing if it is about anything. Many of us have been privileged to accompany children, young people and adult learners through the seasons of the grief cycle. Many of us have been touched by the sharing of grief stories and by the gifts that the Seasons for Growth process offers. As Companions, we will each have been invited to dwell with our own pain, to find healing and to learn new ways of living as a result of the process that Seasons for Growth affords us.



- It is also good to witness organisational growth too. It has been my privilege to work with Fiona Holden from North Wales in accompanying other Companions who wished to train as Seasons Trainers. We needed to build up our group of Trainers to cover new regions which had already shown the need to sustain existing provision.
- Back in Autumn/Winter 2011, we trained six new Trainers in the Seasons for Growth Children and Young People's Programme: Jo Scott (Weston Super Mare), Joy Holmes (Lancashire), Leanne Jones (Catholic Children's Society, Shrewsbury Diocese), Liz Hall (N Wales), Michelle Pye (Weston Super Mare) and Wendy Hart (Lancashire). Since then, these provisional Trainers have been working towards accreditation as Trainers and working with others in the programme to hone their new skills.
- Working through the programme and sharing tips on how to maintain fidelity to the process have been important aspects in sharing the training programme with new Trainers. Trying to share skills on how to identify, respect and work with a group's differing learning styles has also formed part of the training. But it is good to see growth: new Trainers, new ideas, new questions ... new challenges.

- It is good to see people coming forward to accompany others' personal growth, not least in these days of economic uncertainty. It is surely good that we hold fast to a fundamental belief that seasons come and go but grief is as much an opportunity as it is a threat. Good grief is a vehicle for personal growth. It demands that we attend ever anew to our knowledge, skills and our attitude to ourselves and to others. Good grief is a challenge to us as communities too that we hold out appropriate resources to those who wish to grow: time, care, strategies to cope, personal attention and challenge.

[Ed: You can contact either Fiona or Ged through the National Office.]

GED FLYNN, Master Trainer

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## New Trustees

**Colette Joyce** has stepped down as Treasurer due to new work and personal commitments. However, she has agreed to continue to provide financial support until we are able to recruit a new treasurer. The trustees thank her warmly for her work as treasurer over the last 3 years.

**Ged Flynn** has also stepped down as a Trustee, following his change of role and the responsibilities of his new position as Chief Executive Officer for POPYRUS Prevention of Young Suicide. ( See <http://www.papyrus-uk.org/> ) He continues, of course, to have a key role with Seasons for Growth as one of our two Master Trainers, alongside Fiona – also a former Trustee.

The Trustees have registered Seasons for Growth with a trustee recruitment organisation - Reach – who provide a '[TrusteeWorks](http://www.reachskills.org.uk/)' service. (see <http://www.reachskills.org.uk/> ).

Two new developments have already occurred. We are very pleased to have been joined on the Trustees board by **Jill Winter** – Jill spent 30 years in marketing and general management mainly in Unilever companies in the UK, then after retiring early, 8 years as a tutor on the Open University MBA programme. For the last 10 years she has been a volunteer mentor, mentoring young entrepreneurs starting up new business, and was also the CEO of a small charity.

Meanwhile Ged's longstanding colleague with Catholic Children's Society for the diocese of Shrewsbury, **Barry Lyonette**, was approached about trusteeship, and has agreed to become a Trustee. His knowledge of and enthusiasm for Seasons, as well as his experience as a primary school head, will be hugely beneficial to the board.

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*Footnote/ thought for the day ...*

## **SOME REFLECTIONS ON WORKING ON LOSS AND BEREAVEMENT ISSUES WITH THE ELDERLY**

There are, it seems to me, a wide range of issues around loss associated with growing older, issues which are very poorly attended to – if at all. How well do we spell out these sources of grief, and name what growing old involves with our elderly? Or is our reaction rather to jokingly dismiss them (especially with our own parents and family members) and not have the conversation?

We are not comfortable with the very vocabulary and language which best describe old age; hence titles such as 'Over 60's and 'Senior Citizens'. Because of growing numbers living longer, old age itself is being subdivided into stages or categories such as the fit and active 'younger' elderly, and those who are much more dependent in the 'last stage of life'. Age *per se* is not a good indicator of need. There are active, outgoing 90+ year olds, as well as much younger folk who are considerably damaged through physical or mental impairment and social or emotional loss.

Whether they are regarded as losses or gains - which will vary of course for different individuals in different circumstances – some of the significant changes associated with growing older include:

- Stopping work or '*retiring*'( a potentially multi-layered word) – ceasing paid employment
- Increased occurrence or likelihood of debilitating illness, disability, injury
- Often a move of home or residence (either self-planned, or something brought upon us)
- Out-growing or surviving the rest of your family or siblings (although at the same time the family in another sense grows – grandchildren, great-grandchildren ..)
- Possible major change in relationships. e.g. divorce (still a loss even though it may be a relief or celebration)



*Some potential associated losses include:*

- Loss of work-colleagues and friends
- Sense of worth (as a productive worker) of 'significance'/ history of accomplishments. Does society respect our 'elders', or are they more likely to be shelved, ignored, discounted and patronised?
- Of mobility/ activity / interests
- Of independence
- Of earning capacity/ money (especially if resources are depleted or used up to pay for care)
- Of health and sensory skills (hearing, sight, taste ...) (Not always admitted or faced up to by the individual affected).
- Children moved out or moved on (some gains as well as loss here!) with potential loss of contact
- Loss of access to or contact with grandchildren if own children's marriage breaks up.
- Bereavement – of own parents, of a partner, and of a child ...
- Loss (or growth) of faith in light of all that has happened.

Some losses could well be outweighed by the gains. For example, no longer being in paid employment could also mean no longer being involved in the rush-hour rat-race. Some losses we may embrace, whilst others bring us pain. On the other hand, the opposite also pertains – even a gain can bring a loss. For example, a very joyful wedding day can also bring some tears - moving from/ 'losing' 'home'.

How comfortable is this - or any earlier - government in tackling the issues arising from the growing numbers who are living longer? Social attitudes towards ageing and the elderly can vary widely – are they viewed as respected elders, core members of the extended family, or a burden and drain on the economy? What potential contribution has Seasons for Growth to offer to this increasingly sensitive area of national policy, particularly in beginning to tackle issues around Loss more openly?

John Joyce, Trustees.

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**Articles/ ideas/ News welcomed for the next Newsletter!**

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