



South West
Compassionate
Communities
Network

Annual Report 2023

growing
ComPaSSion

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***Kaya!** The South West Compassionate Communities Network acknowledges the traditional owners of the land, the Noongar Wardandi people and their continuing connection to the land, waters and community. We pay our respects to all members of the Aboriginal communities and their cultures; and to Elders past, present and emerging.*

Purpose



Every person, every family and every community in the South West of Western Australia knows what to do when someone is caring, dying or grieving.

Partners



Department of Health



Government of Western Australia
WA Country Health Service



Report from the Chair

2023 has been a very productive year that progressed our mission of improving death literacy in the community so *everyone knows how to support someone who is caring, dying or grieving*.

Under the strategic stream 1: **community development and activation**, the South West Compassionate Communities Network (SWCCN) had successful **Dying to Know Day** activities with a cemetery tour, a concert at the cemetery, a tour of Barrett's Care Centre, a tour of the Bunbury crematorium, a lantern ceremony in memory of our dead, a death cafe and screening of a palliative care film "Live the life you please" with a panel discussion. Many thanks to Chief Executive Kristy Constantine and the Bunbury Cemetery board for partnering with us and offering their excellent grounds and venue. We warmly acknowledge the excellent organisation and leadership of Heather Wade.

Under **education/ training**, a **Connector training program** was held in March this year and was well attended by about thirty community members and health professionals. In April, SWCCN hosted an Advance Care Planning workshop for the community presented by Palliative Care WA.

A special acknowledgement to Mellisa Teede, CEO of the South West Development Commission (SWDC), for sponsoring the International Women's Day breakfast and offering us a platform to spread our message and increase awareness.

Under the Stronger Communities program, we were able to obtain a grant to purchase a **cooling blanket** which will aid families to keep their dead loved ones at home for about a couple of days to support their grieving process. The community will be able to use it next year once we developed some guidelines around loaning it. Many thanks to Nola Marino for her support.

Under strategic stream 2 of **partnerships** with key stakeholders to affect system change, our **Connectors program research trial** showed excellent outcomes in reducing social isolation, and building community connectedness, in addition to reducing hospital admissions and ED presentations, reducing hospital length of stay and increasing the use of outpatient services. Estimated net savings of \$518,701 would be achieved from adopting the Connector program, assuming enrolment of 100 patients over an average 6-month participation period. Thanks to WACHS South West for partnering with us. Our deep appreciation goes to our Compassionate Connectors as without their altruism and passion for serving the community, we would not have had such excellent outcomes.

Report from the Chair...cont

Also under stream 2, we partnered with the City of Bunbury to develop a **Compassionate Bunbury Charter and Toolkit** to guide the community, these being the product of many community consultation sessions on how to grow compassion in Bunbury, facilitated by Dr Julieanne Hilbers. We thank WA Health End of Life Care Program for their seed funding and thank Julieanne for a task well done. The City of Bunbury subsequently won a WA Palliative Care Award for this work.

A further partnership was developed with the SWDC and the Bunbury Geographe Chamber of Commerce to run a session on **Compassionate Workplaces**, which was well attended by about 50 people from a variety of businesses. Further training on advance care planning and grief support is planned for next year. We thank SWDC, and CEO Mellisa Teede, for their financial support, the Chamber and CEO Julie Broad for their in-kind support and Julieanne for facilitating this successful session.

In closing, we thank all those who have contributed along the way in our current committee (Heather, Brian, Stephen, James, Raquel, Carolyn, Frieda, Tresslyn, Elizabeth, Kristy, Dom, Shamara). Very special thanks to our departing treasurer and then assistant treasurer, Brian Wade, for his hard work, tenacity and skills in getting us a number of things organised beyond the financial role: sorting out the constitution, the website, facebook, IT matters....We are indeed very grateful!

Our focus moving forward is to build on the work we have done with the Connector program, Compassionate Bunbury Charter, Dying to Know Day and Compassionate Workplaces. To both continue and grow these initiatives along with developing new bodies of work around home based and ecological death care.

This coming year will be a transition year supporting SWCCN to grow as a not-for-profit organisation. This will require us developing a broad funding base and building strategic partnerships. Our new committee moving forward will be central in building these strategic partnerships. We also anticipate there will be working groups (or sub-committees) made up of committee and general members to support different bodies of work.

Until then, we wish everyone a well-earned rest over the festive season with your loved ones.

~ Chair, Professor Samar Aoun

Dying to Know Day 8 August

A big **Dying to Know Day** weekend in Bunbury. Tours at the Bunbury crematorium, cemetery, care centre, concerts, lantern ceremony, Death Cafe and more!



"Death, we all have one. By communing with the dead while living we are able to form our own deaths a little better. 'Knowing' the dead means we can think of ourselves as not being alone, there are any number of souls to go by as we practice mortality."
~ Brendan Kelly cemetery tour guide



SWCCN at the Bunbury Branch – Seniors Activity and Information Day at the South West Sports Centre in March.

Picture: Committee member and Connector Frieda Evans

Screening of 'Live the life you please' movie and Q&A with the support of the Bunbury Cemetery Board in May.



Picture: Nola Marino MP, Dr Byron Scott, Maeve O'Malley, Pat Kelly, Prof Samar Aoun

Compassionate Connector Training

On the 27 March 2023, The South West Compassionate Communities Network and WACHS SW ran their fourth whole day training program for Compassionate Connectors. Thirty five people attended: 15 volunteers from the South West and seven volunteers from Perth all with an interest to start the program in their own areas. Eight SW health professionals who have been referring to the program and 5 original Connectors (mentors to the new Connectors) also came along.

Connectors are community volunteers who help those affected by advanced illness and their family by identifying what additional formal and informal social and practical support they need. Their role is to enhance their existing network of care by enlisting the support of Caring Helpers in the community who help with things like walking the dog, doing the shopping, collecting medications, providing transport to appointments, going to the library, mowing the lawn, gardening, making a snack, tidying up or that all-important cuppa and a chat.

The training session included information on public health palliative care, the importance of compassionate communities, death literacy, advance care planning, grief literacy, communication skills, self-care, understanding advanced illness, the role of WACHS palliative care and chronic disease teams, and volunteer processes and procedures.

The training laid the foundation for building the knowledge and capacity of community members to know what to do when someone is caring, dying or grieving which is everyone's business! Connecting formal care with informal care is key to a better quality of life and a better death.



Compassionate Communities Connector Outcomes



The Compassionate Communities Connector program involves volunteer **Connectors** supporting people living with advanced life limiting illnesses/palliative care by enlisting volunteer **Caring Helpers** from the community to enhance the person's existing networks.

Research associated with the project found positive impacts on patients and carers:

- ✓ Improved social connectedness (practical and social/emotional)
- ✓ Reduced social isolation
- ✓ Increased community links
- ✓ Improved coping with daily activities
- ✓ Increased support networks

Relative to the control group, the intervention group cared for by the Compassionate Connectors were:

- ✓ **63%** less likely to be admitted to hospital
- ✓ spent **77%** less days in hospital
- ✓ were **44%** less likely to use an Emergency Department
- ✓ and were **x2** as likely to use Outpatient Services.

Potential for \$ savings

\$AUD 518,701 would be achieved from adopting the Connector program, assuming enrolment of 100 patients over an average 6-month participation period.

References

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/26323524221139655>
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/26323524231205323>

Education

Our Chair Professor Samar Aoun was the **2023 WA Australian of the Year** and took the opportunity to conduct 44 presentations and 21 media engagements. Here is a snippet from your presentation at the Oceanic Palliative Care Conference held in Sydney.



"For palliative care to be accessible to everyone and everywhere, and for a good death to be the norm rather than the exception, one message was coming loud and clear that we need to affect system change (or in academic lingo- need a paradigm shift). But we have been hearing this for a long time now and if we do not do this change ourselves, no one else will do it for us in some of the entrenched systems (that are not serving us well anymore). In the next 20 years or so, we will not have enough hospitals for us to die in or the paid workforce to look after us. Surely it is time to seriously rethink care at end of life?"

Compassionate Communities is about system change: a shift in the culture of care and support; care that is more sustainable and affordable; but needs high levels of community control and ownership. It is time to develop and support community-led initiatives because we have the evidence on their effectiveness in reducing social isolation and healthcare usage, and people dying according to their values and their choices. I heard from many attendees that they felt energised and inspired by this knowledge. Hopefully when we get together in two years-time, the conference will be a showcase of how everyone has affected system change in their own areas.

This is absolutely everybody's business and responsibility. It affects 100% of us. Be the change you want to see."

Compassionate Bunbury Charter & Toolkit

SWCCN partnered with the City of Bunbury to launch the Compassionate Bunbury Charter and Toolkit. This project was made possible by funding from the WA Department of Health.

This Charter recognises that local government, individuals, families, neighbourhoods, workplaces, schools, community, faith based, voluntary and other organisations and services all can play a part in talking about death, leading up to death and in bereavement.



The community identified ten areas for growing compassion:



The City of Bunbury is now the custodian of the Charter on behalf of the community. This body of work has been recognised by Palliative Care WA.



Pledges involved the development of educational material and the Compassionate Workplace initiative.

“

Be willing to stand beside the gaping hole that has opened up in their life, without flinching or turning away. Your steadiness of presence is the absolute best thing you can give.

~ Megan Devine, *Refuge in Grief*

”

There is no timeline for grief and no solution to fix it. The process of grief is actually part of healing.

You can make a difference by...

- Staying connected and ensure your help meets their changing needs.
- Being thoughtful – drop off a care package.
- Being a good listener and be curious – ask questions.
- Respecting a person's experience – don't compare or challenge it.
- Focusing on the now, not give platitudes about how things will be better later.
- Continue to talk about the person who died. Your friend will be thinking about them everyday.
- Getting consent before offering advice.

If you or someone else you know needs a bit of extra help and support:

Talk to your GP
Your GP can link you to professional services.

Contact the Compassionate Connectors Program
Each person/family is matched with a Connector who will help them to get the additional practical and social support they need.

Email swcomcomnetwork@gmail.com or telephone 0457 873 533

COMPASSION. We respond with humanity and kindness to each person's pain, distress, anxiety or need. We search for the things we can do, however small, to give comfort and relieve suffering. We find time for those we serve and work alongside. We do not wait to be asked, because we care.
~ National Health Service, 2010

References
[Palliative Care Australia](#)
[Refuge in Grief](#)
[National Health Service](#)

Be a compassionate friend in times of need

#growcompassion

SWCCN received \$12,650 through the Stronger Communities Programme. This has enabled us to purchase a Covercool cooling bed. This will assist with providing culturally appropriate home based after death care for those living in rural or remote parts of the South West.

Picture: Nola Marino MP with Chair, Professor Samar Aoun





Bunbury Workshop



The South West Compassionate Communities Network (SWCCN) brought together workplace leaders to start a discussion on how we can collectively recognise and build compassionate workplaces in our region. Over 50 people attended and feedback was overwhelmingly positive with many members pledging to take action in their workplace.

Research has shown that compassionate workplace cultures can make a positive contribution by increasing morale, supporting employee retention, reducing absences and increasing productivity.

We were pleased to work with South West Development Commission, Bunbury Geographe Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Perron Institute to support this event.



Picture: Dr Byron Scott (WA Country Health Service), Mal Osborne (City of Bunbury), Joanne Eggleston, Jeffrey Williams (St John of God Hospital, Bunbury), Prof Samar Aoun, Melissa Teede (South West Development Commission), Emily Hamilton MP, Posy Barnes (JSW Training & Community Services)

Financial Report

July 1, 2022- June 30, 2023

Financial Summary

Cash Account	
Opening Balance	\$37,570.82
Plus Income	\$20,085.91
Plus Account Transfers	\$0
Sub-Total	\$57,656.73
Less expenditure	\$21,617.84
Closing Balance	\$36,038.89
Reconciliation	
Cash Balance	\$36,038.89
Unpresented expenditure	\$0
Less cash at hand	\$0
Sub-Total	\$36,038.89
EOY Bank Statement Balance	\$36,038.89

Income

Step Beyond refund	\$10,000
Catering refund (City of Bunbury)	\$85.91
Grant - South West Development Commission	\$10,000
Total	\$20,085.91

Financial Report

July 1, 2022- June 30, 2023

Expenditure

Volunteer South West subscription fee	\$110.00
Dying to Know Day 2022	\$71.36
Compassionate Bunbury Charter Project Lead	\$16,022.14
Graphic Design (Bunbury Charter)	\$462
Microsoft Teams annual subscription	\$108.24
Portable banner	\$160.55
Catering	\$374.60
DMIRS fee (Constitution)	\$48.80
Annual insurance	\$1607.85
Room hire (Nannup)	\$33.00
Exhibitor Booth hire (Smart2Ask)	\$30.00
Web Hosting	\$48.00
Facebook Ad campaign	\$36.30
Compassionate Workplaces Project Lead	\$2120.00
Compassionate Workplaces general expenses	\$385.00
TOTAL	\$21,617.84

