

LIFE

Nobody's an island when we grieve

BY HAZEL BRADLEY

TEARS flowed as personal stories of grief were shared at the inaugural WA Compassionate Communities Forum in Bunbury last month.

The Community Connector program was featured at the forum, hosted by the South West Compassionate Communities Network.

Volunteers with the program are given training to support those nearing end of life, carers and people who are grieving.

Palliative care professor Samar Aoun, who chaired the forum, said connectors go into homes, reduce social isolation and connect the family to the wider community, which can help in different ways.

Professor Aoun said the forum was a resounding success.

"It really opened up the conversation about death and dying and advanced care planning," she said. "Attendees appreciated the honest and safe space to have those conversations."

Professor Aoun, of the Perron Institute and La Trobe University, said Compassionate Communities, an international movement, recognises that care for one another at times of crisis and loss is not just a task for health and social services - it is everyone's responsibility.



"IT'S EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY": Samar Aoun, left, and compassionate community connector volunteer Toni Jacobsen. **Photo: Taryn Barrett**

"Research has shown that when a person is seriously ill, they spend 10 per cent of their time with health professionals, and 90 per cent of their time with family, friends, carers and community networks, or sadly on their own," she said.

Topics discussed at the forum included how to grow a compassionate community, build partnerships with palliative care and other health services and local government, and expand the community role in supporting the bereaved.

Professor Aoun said attendees were given the knowledge, skills and resources needed to establish compassionate communities. "We're encouraging expansion of the Compassionate Communities networks in all parts of the state, similar to what we have achieved in the South West."

The program also offered activities such as tours of the Bunbury crematorium and memorial gardens, designed to increase death literacy.

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