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LIVING WITH DYING

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An introduction to Leeds Bereavement Forum

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Date

Wednesday 2 August 2017

At first I thought that writing this blog might be a little daunting, as I only started as the new Development Worker at Leeds Bereavement Forum in mid-June. However, in a short amount of time, I have been fortunate to have seen and heard so much about the vitally important work of our forum. This includes helping to host two of our regular [death cafes](#) and attending a very moving and insightful lunchtime presentation from our series of special interest talks. I have also dealt with numerous enquiries over the phone, by e-mail and in person, as well as being part of a number of multi-agency partnership working meetings.

Let me start by being honest. Although I don't shy away from challenging subject areas, I did initially wonder if a job involving death might be a bit depressing and/or morbid. Would I get upset about people's stories and feel powerless to help them?

Whilst it's true that people's stories can be upsetting, my experiences so far have been overwhelmingly positive. People frequently tell us of their relief at being able to talk openly about dying, both in relation to plans for their own and/or their experiences of bereavement. Many people find that death is one of the few subjects they do not feel they can discuss with family and friends and they often express their thanks at being able to share their thoughts and feelings. It is not always clear where and how to access bereavement advice and support and so we feel a strong sense of having made a difference on a daily basis. A recent comment from an event attendee was *"Thank you very helpful - I'm going to be kinder to myself"*.

Leeds Bereavement Forum is a small charity working to develop and improve bereavement services across Leeds. Our work falls into three broad areas which often overlap. These are:

- Signposting individuals (and the professionals working with them) to the most appropriate local and national bereavement service.

- Providing training, information, events and conferences to people who work in the area of bereavement, as well as working in partnership with organisations across Leeds to improve the provision of bereavement services.
- Campaigning to help people talk more openly about dying, death and bereavement and to make end of life plans. We also work in partnership locally and nationally with [Dying Matters](#)

It's our 21st birthday this year as the forum was initially established in 1996. We have many achievements to be proud of, including, most recently, helping to launch the [Leeds Suicide Bereavement service](#).

This year, our annual conference was based around the theme of [Living with Dying: Past, Present and Future](#) and we were delighted to be able to involve members of the 'Living with Dying' project team. We learnt about the significance of objects and how these can help us to explore past attitudes to death, dying and loss. It also raised questions about the present day medical model of death and sparked discussions on how things could be different. We will be following the progress of the project and its findings with great interest and considering ways that these could influence attitudes to death, dying and loss in the future.

If you would like to find out more about the work of Leeds Bereavement Forum, there are many ways you can keep in touch with news and developments including our [website](#) - where you can sign up to our newsletter - or follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) @LeedsBForum.

Barbara Stewart
Development Worker
Leeds Bereavement Forum

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