

Child Bereavement Support (Singapore)

Our story so far

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Child Bereavement Support (Singapore)

The loss of a beloved child is something that most parents can hardly bear even to think about, and cannot begin to understand. Bereaved parents who have been through this nightmare, and have had to learn to live with this enormous feeling of loss and sadness, share a special bond of understanding.

Child Bereavement Support (Singapore) (CBS) started out as a small group of bereaved mothers, realising that there was no formal support network in place in Singapore, and that there was a great need for something like this. Some of us knew each other already, but we got together as a group as a result of a visit to Singapore in April 2004 of the founder of The Child Bereavement Trust (CBT) in the UK, Jenni Thomas. When we met we immediately felt the strong and special bond that we all shared in our terrible experiences of losing our children, and as we talked about CBT we felt inspired to try to start something here in Singapore.

The original five mothers who met that day were Sonya, Marina, Stefanie, Trish and Susie. Our experiences were very different, but we shared an important bond. We got the ball rolling, and soon after met Ning's mother Val, whose local perspective was invaluable, and who was a great help particularly in organising our memorial events. The stories of our children are included in this book. Along the way we have met many other bereaved parents – from a variety of racial, religious and cultural backgrounds. We are united in our sorrow and pain and yearning for our children, but also in our desire to help each other by sharing our different experiences as we struggle along our individual journeys of grief.

Traditionally, the culture in Singapore has not encouraged emotional support or discussion on bereavement, especially child bereavement, and people often find it difficult to talk about such things. As a result, many bereaved families find they have no one to turn to and no one to help them in their most desperate time of need. Those of us who lost our children here in Singapore sometimes found that an already terrible situation was horribly exacerbated by a lack of understanding, respect and compassion among various professions we encountered during our bereavement. And we were all desperate to find someone who might understand, someone who had been through a similar experience, and was willing to lend support.

We have all found that meeting other bereaved parents is what has made the biggest difference to us, and given us the most support, the most hope and the most comfort. And so in honour of our beloved lost children we set up Child Bereavement Support (Singapore) to provide a network of bereaved parents throughout Singapore (and including parents who have since left Singapore and stay in touch). Our aim

has been to offer support to all parents in Singapore who lose a child – no matter how recently or how long ago or in what circumstances, no matter the age of the child, and no matter the racial or religious background of the family. In our first eight years we have connected with over 300 families and we hope we have made a real difference.

Until July 2012 we were a registered charitable society, with Sonya as President and Val, Marina, Susie and Rick, Kendra, Patrick and Michelle, Aida, Nick and Jeanne, Adriana, Petrina, Rahimah and Dr. Lim all sharing committee roles and helping with setting up our website, organising events and running workshops with hospitals. We held open support group meetings almost every month at the NKF Centre at Kim Keat Road – numbers varied from 2 to 27 and every meeting was different. We hope that everyone who attended found them helpful. We held 3 memorial events – in March 2006 and 2008 we organised a balloon release in East Coast Park, with music and poetry at a sunset picnic, and in December 2010 we were again at the East Coast, this time with poetry readings at a candle lighting, as part of the annual global candle lighting organised by The Compassionate Friends. We organised training lectures and workshops with many hospitals and also with the Singapore Police Force, where we brought Jenni Thomas over from the UK and used our own personal experiences as valuable ‘real life’ learning. We worked in small groups with hospitals and doulas and encouraged the recording of hand and foot prints (especially of tiny babies), and a respectful and loving treatment of babies and children and their grieving families.

After 16 years in Singapore, where all her 5 children were born, and where Max died, it is finally time for Sonya and her family to move to England to give the children an understanding of life there. So CBS is starting a new chapter, no longer the ‘official’ registered charitable society, but still offering support to bereaved families, and organising a network of bereaved parents. Val will run the network in Singapore from July 2012, and Sonya will stay involved from England. Of the original five founders, Stefanie moved to Canada and Trish to Australia, and Susie and Marina are still involved in Singapore. We all remain connected and determined to make a positive difference to help all parents who lose a child here in Singapore – whether that child was still inside his mother’s womb, in early infancy, at any stage of childhood or even into adulthood.

Nothing can take away the pain of such loss, but the sharing of support, compassion and understanding can help to lessen the load.