

**The Australian Inaugural Postvention Conference
24th – 26th May 2007 University of New South Wales
Evaluation Report**

Background

The Inaugural Postvention Conference was held at the University of NSW in May 2007, presenters included international experts and key Australian specialists in the area of suicide bereavement. Funded by the Department of Health and Ageing, "Living Hope" was held from 24-26 May and was hosted by The Salvation Army's Suicide Prevention and Bereavement Support program. A Conference Organising Committee support the development and staging of the Conference. Members of the Committee .
Diana Sands - Director Bereaved by Suicide Service Chatswood

Leonore Hanssens	Charles Darwin University, NT
Elizabeth Benson-Stott	Aggregate Corporation Pty Ltd,
Dagmar Ceramidas	Centre for Ageing and Pastoral Studies, St Marks National Theological Centre, Charles Sturt University
Harold Stewart	Department of Health
Jill Fisher	StandBy Response Service
Kathryn Leader	
Susan Beaton	Lifeline Australia
Jill Chapman	Star Bear Program
Rod Hurley	Department of Health & Ageing.
Alan Staines	The Salvation Army
Wilma Gallet	The Salvation Army
Wayne Koivu	National Suicide Prevention Advisory Committee

Conference Delegates

About 300 participants, including researchers, policy makers, advocates, front-line workers, clinicians, clergy, caregivers and the bereaved, attended the conference. Invitations were sent to approximately 60 support groups and one delegate from each of these groups was sponsored to attend the conference. This included, payment of Registration fees, travel and accommodation costs.

Conference Objectives

- To increase knowledge and awareness of the issues affecting people bereaved by suicide.
- To present an opportunity to introduce the National Suicide Bereavement Framework
- To bring together survivors, caregivers, emergency service personnel, clergy, researchers, mental health professionals, youth and welfare workers to participate in the conference and hear experts in the field of suicidology.
- To provide an opportunity for families and friends to participate in a Remembrance and Healing Ceremony.

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- To develop closer linkages and collaborative approaches between individuals and agencies involved in Suicide Prevention and Bereavement Support services.

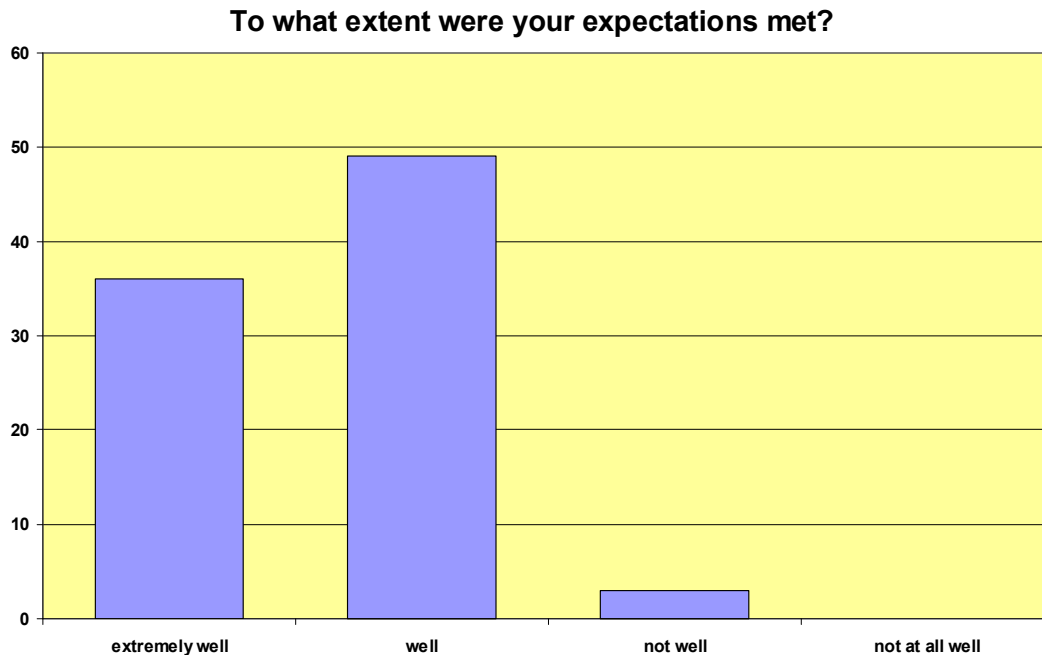
Each of these objectives were met, as can be evidence by the feedback received from conference participants and guest presenters.

Conference Evaluation Questionnaires

Evaluation Questionnaires were issued as part of the Conference Kit and all delegates were encouraged to complete these. Over half the delegates completed the evaluation forms and the results of these are detailed in the Tables.

General Impressions of the Conference

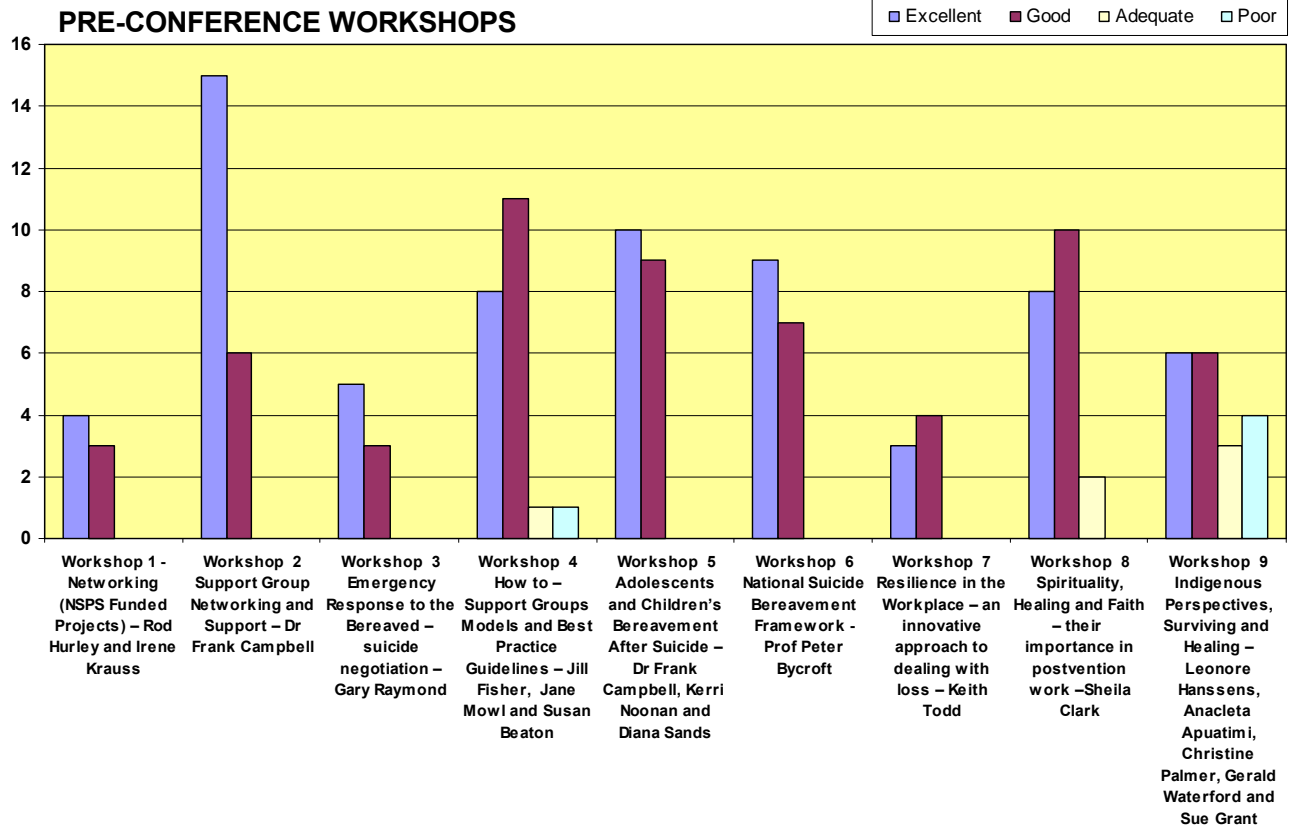
Over 90% of those who responded to the question relating to their expectations, stated that their expectation were met.



Pre Conference Workshops

Nine pre- conference workshops were held were held on Thursday 24th May. The workshops were well attended and the feedback suggests that participants found the presentations to be of a very high standard, with over 90% of participants stating that the workshop they attended was either good or excellent. The only exception to this was Workshop 9, where 63% of participants rated the workshop as good or excellent 37% of participants rated the workshop wither adequate or poor.

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Plenary Sessions

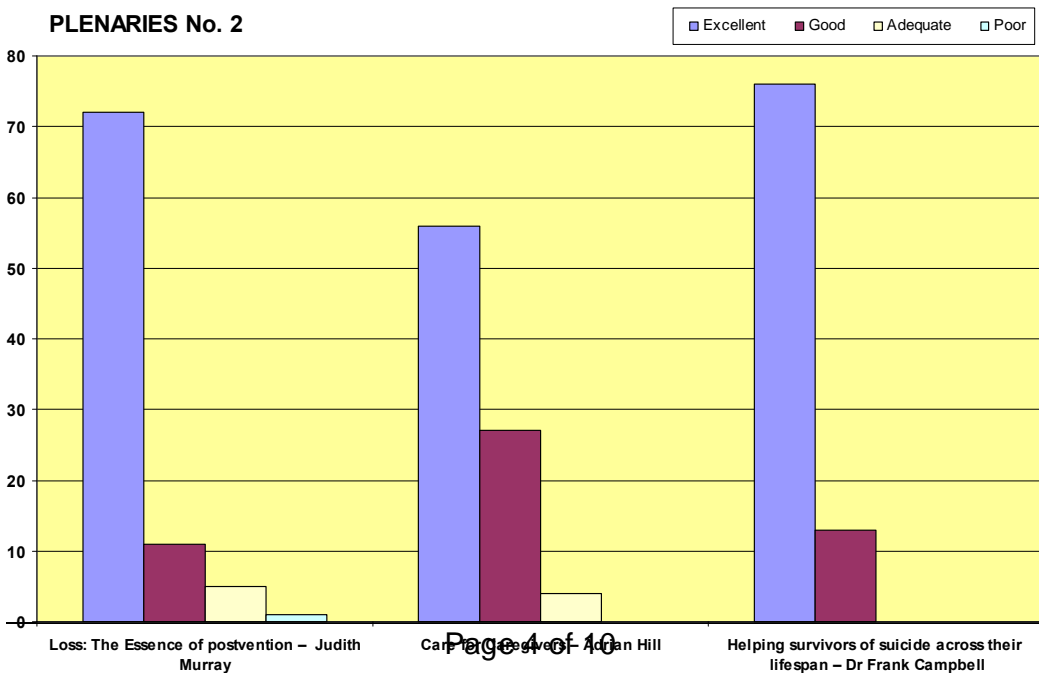
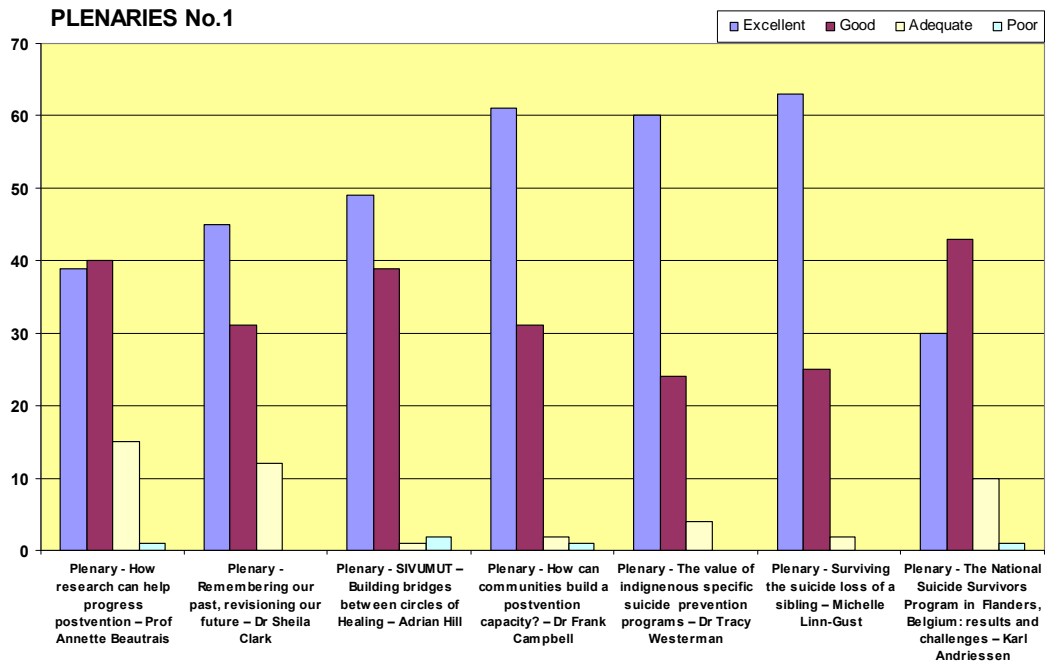
Seven Plenary sessions were held in the Main hall of the conference venue over the course of the 3 day conference. International plenary speakers at the conference included Associate Professor Annette Beautrais (New Zealand), first vice-president of the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP); Adrian Hill, President of the Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention; Dr Frank Campbell (United States), Executive Director of the Crisis Center Foundation and the Office of Clinical Research and Consultation at the Baton Rouge Crisis Intervention Center; Karl Andriessen (Belgium), Chair of the Taskforce Postvention of the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP); and Michelle Linn-Gust (USA), Survivor Division Chair for the American Association of Suicidology.

Australian plenary speakers included Dr Sheila Clark, a GP who practises privately in grief/bereavement and trauma counselling; Dr Tracy Westerman, Managing Director of Indigenous Psychological Services (IPS); and Judith Murray, Director of the Master of Counselling Program at The University of Queensland. Professor Ian Webster, Chairman of the National Advisory Council on Suicide Prevention, chaired the conference opening and Professor

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Peter Bycroft and Irene Krauss presented a key plenary session which articulated the National Suicide Prevention Framework.

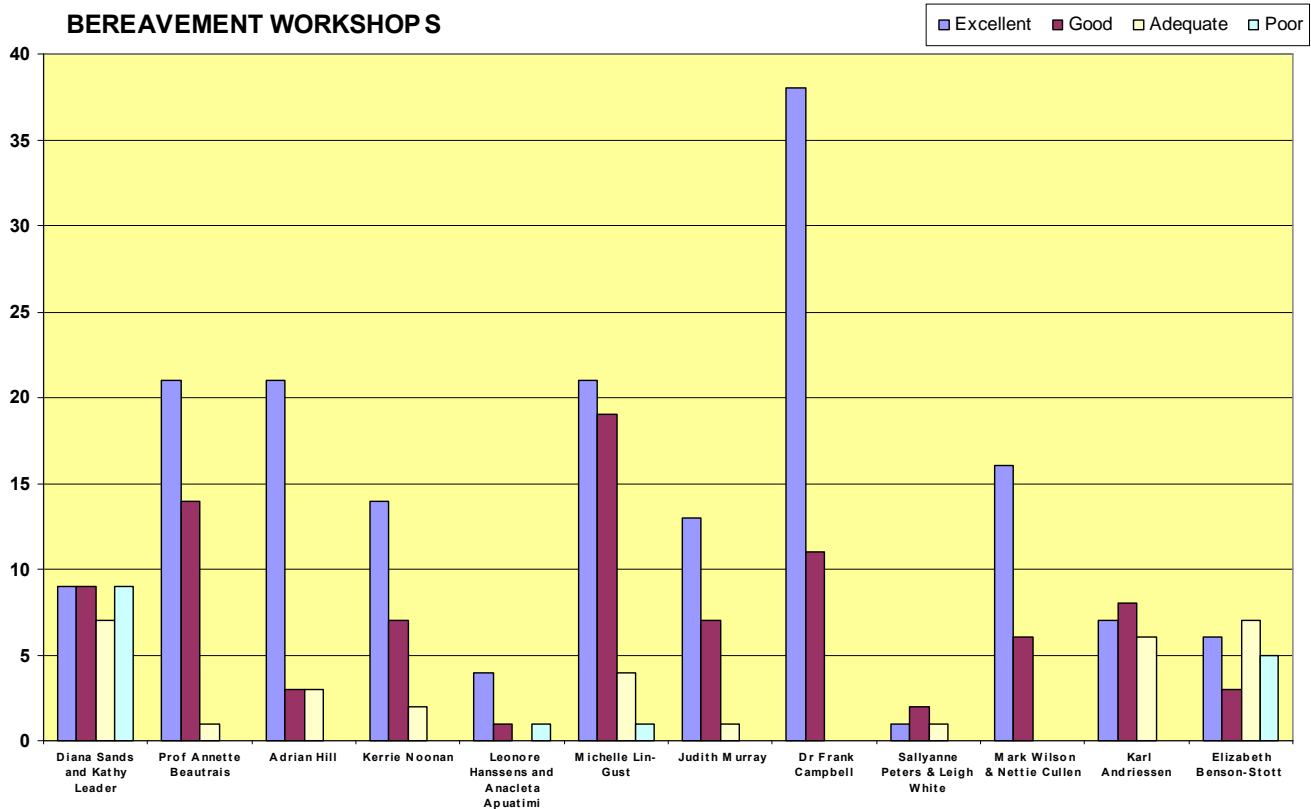
The overall feedback shows that the plenary sessions were a resounding success with the vast majority of participants rating each plenary session as either Excellent or Good.



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Concurrent Work Shops

There was a great variety of topics presented in the Concurrent Workshops (refer attached conference Brochure and Book of Abstracts) which provided a great deal of choice for participants and was very well received.

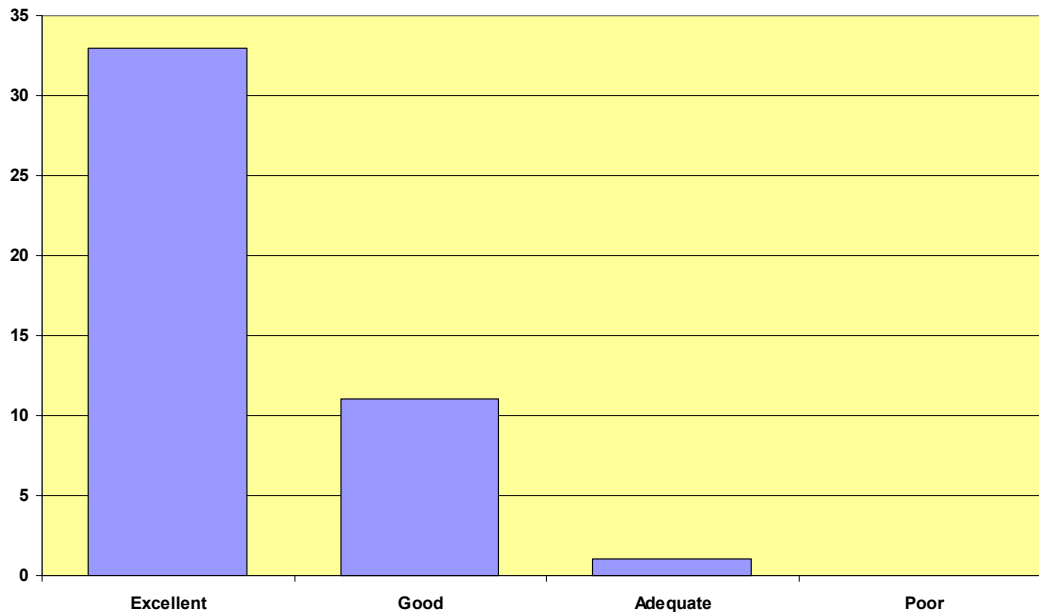


Healing and Remembrance Ceremony

A number of people who had not participated in the broader conference, attended the Ceremony with their families. The experience for most people was quite therapeutic and moving. The Ceremony was tastefully conducted and those who have been bereaved were well supported. They were provided with mementos of the occasion and live doves were released in memory of loved ones.

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HEALING CEREMONY



General Comments from Conference Speakers and Delegates

Dr Frank Campbell .

"When it comes to suicide prevention there's probably no organisation that's had a larger footprint around the planet than The Salvation Army. In the world of suicide prevention they are the oldest organisation that's contributed, and certainly congratulations to them for 100 years [work in suicide prevention].

"The Salvation Army covers such a wide array of services and the thing that I appreciate about them is that they work way upstream from the place at which people choose to die. We don't know how many lives they save because of the other work they do in the area of helping the homeless and helping the needy and all the other individuals who might one day find themselves in a place of distress where suicide would be their natural response to that distress. "So I think that The Salvation Army for 100 years has taken so many people out of the river of risk that we may not know what the true rate of suicide would be today were it not for The Salvation Army."

Alan Staines, Chief organiser of the conference and Director of the Salvation Army Suicide Prevention-Bereavement Support project.

"One of the reasons why I feel it's so necessary to work with the bereaved is because research has shown that those who have been bereaved [by suicide] are at risk themselves." "But there is hope, even though the pain is unbearable, we want to support you in this time and help you whenever we can."

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Conference attendee, a mother who lost her daughter to suicide.

Commenting on Postvention support received from a Salvation Army support group, stated: "The group has given me strategies to deal with this horrific event and, through specific tasks undertaken within the group, has lifted an incredible burden of guilt, regret and debilitating sorrow."

Wayne Koivu

A number of people commented after the Healing Ceremony, that although their loss had been many years ago, this was the first time they felt that they "had permission" to properly grieve their loss and were with a group of people who truly empathise with how they were feeling.

Dr. Sheila Clarke

Letter to Alan Staines re Conference

Dear Alan

Congratulations on the success of the conference! You have succeeded in bringing together for the first time in Australia a wide variety of postvention stakeholders and in increasing the awareness of the actions necessary for the support of those bereaved by suicide. I felt the conference was a very affirming, supportive and energising three days. I noticed that some vital networking and coordination were able to be advanced and feel confident that the future holds promise and hope.

You have enabled all this to come about by your instigation of the idea of the conference and by all the very hard work you put into it. Thank you for involving me. It has been a great privilege.

Sheila

From: Christine Tamsett

Sent: Monday, 28 May 2007 4:13 PM

Subject: Convention

Hi Allan,

The conference was an excellent time of brilliant speakers and a brilliant atmosphere. I feel privileged to be a part of the conference and we should have more conferences of such distinction

Please congratulate your team and yourself for achieving such a success

Chris Tamsett (Major)

MANAGER

Brisbane Recovery Services

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From: Name with held
Sent: Monday, 28 May 2007 6:17 AM
Subject: Living Hope Conference

Dear Alan,

My husband and I attended Saturday's session and I wanted to thank you and your co-workers for such a lovely healing service as well as access to some really great talks. We lost our son, newly married and a young doctor, 2 1/2 years ago. My husband, also a doctor, had overdosed 4 1/2 years ago. Although he was not expected to survive, he did so but is now physically and mentally disabled and I am his fulltime carer. I lost my mother only 8 days before Saturday. She had been very ill for very many years and I was also her carer. So I was feeling a little shell shocked and not sure whether I'd be able to cope on Saturday. However, I thought that it was much more likely to be helpful so we came along after all. I am very glad we did because people, especially the professionals who just wandered over to say hullo, reached out to us and touched us. Thank you. It was a very worthwhile conference and I was so impressed with the genuine caring and warmth that we felt from everyone. God bless.

From: Ian W Webster
Sent: Sunday, 27 May 2007 11:44 AM
Subject: Well done

Dear Alan,

Congratulations on organising the Postvention Conference. A fine achievement which obviously engaged the interest and involvement of so many good people.

Thanks too, to Wayne for his support of Alan and others. Alan, please pass on the appreciation of everyone to Lois and her unsung efforts.

Best wishes.
Ian

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From: Dianne Gaddin
Sent: Sunday, 27 May 2007 2:24 PM
Subject: LIVING HOPE

To each and everyone of you, I would like to say how much this postvention experience meant to me. This was a most positive experience in my healing journey, and each one of you 'touched' me in a way that I cannot quite describe - but certainly positive and validating.

The last 3 days have been a special stepping stone on the path to moving forward. Thank you all for making this possible.

Dianne Gaddin

From: Val and Frits [mailto:valandfrits@bigpond.com]
Sent: Tuesday, 29 May 2007 10:45 PM
To: alanstaines@optusnet.com.au
Subject: Living Hope Conference - Appreciation

Dear Alan,

I tried to fax this to you today, but not sure if it went through.

I am writing to thank you sincerely for sponsoring myself and my daughter Naomi Wallace to the Living Hope conference. What an experience ! I did gain some understanding in different areas, and several of the sessions were of particular interest to Naomi and myself. You must have put so much into the organising, the catering arrangements, contacting speakers etc. It was a great way of coming together with other bereaved and professionals in the field.

Naomi and I especially enjoyed the dinner on Friday and want to thank you for your generosity in that area also. We made pleasant contacts over dinner and had a delightful evening. We found the Auction with Frank Campbell very enjoyable and the Dinner was beautifully presented.

As we filled in our assessment forms before the Healing ceremony, there is one small comment we would like to add. The service was very special and to meet with so many others who were bereaved we found very connecting and affirming by being able to acknowledge that loss together. We would like to suggest that the Panel which took place at the end of the day in future might be placed before the Healing ceremony, as Naomi and I both felt that it would have been a good note to finish on.

Yours truly
Val Groenhuizen

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Conclusion

The Inaugural Australian Postvention conference was an outstanding success. It was a unique opportunity to bring together workers in the field, Australian and International experts and people bereaved by suicide, with a common bond to increase the understanding and support providing to people at risk and those bereaved by suicide.

The Salvation Army was pleased to host this conference in partnership with the Department of Health and Ageing and would welcome the opportunity to work closely with the Department in facilitating similar events in future.

Wilma Gallet
30th June 2007