

accord extra

Association of Christian Counsellors and Pastoral Care UK

Suffolk Open day

By Christine Pinder

For the last three years our local ACC group in Suffolk has run an Open Day. This was an idea that grew out of the conference back in 2017, and for us it started as a one off that was very much an experiment, just to see what would happen. I would not be exaggerating to say that we have been blown away by the response. Each year we have had about 70 people attending and each year the feedback has been extremely positive and encouraging.

The aim of the day has been to support people who are involved in pastoral care in the local community. This year's theme was Supporting People through Loss. We invited local counsellors and others with an interest in bereavement to come and speak and they covered an array of subjects, including Understanding Loss and Grief, Infant Loss, Children and Loss and Traumatic Grief. The theme that seemed to emerge from these sessions was the need to break the 'Conspiracy of Silence', which still exists around death, making it much harder for people to talk about their concerns and fears, and of course that affects children as much as it does adults.

We also had a short session looking at death cafés, a meeting place for people to talk about death, without any fixed agenda. I know this inspired some people to



think about setting up a death café in their own area. Have a look at <https://deathcafe.com/> if you're interested.

We always invite local charities working in pastoral care to come along with a display of their work so that people can find out about what is going on around the region. This includes Christian counselling services, parish nurses, youth work, marriage support charities and others. We've discovered that people find having time to network, a particularly helpful aspect of the day and the displays enable this, along with a set time for people to meet up in groups with others from their local town, where they can talk about projects that are running in their own churches, share ideas and meet other like-minded people.

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For myself I find the days to be one of the most inspiring things that I do. As I take a minute here and there to watch people participating in workshops I'm struck by the work that the local church along with ACC and PCUK do together. Just this year there were people supporting children and families in the local hospice, school chaplains, parish nurses, midwives and counsellors supporting people through miscarriage or stillbirth, support groups for the elderly, the bereaved parents network and many others all represented together. It seems like a veritable army of people involved in bringing God's love, expressed in untold hours of care and support, to the local community. In my eyes this is truly the church in action at its very best.

If anyone is interested in starting a similar venture in their own area it isn't as difficult as you might think. A small group of people to organise it is really important. Once you have that, you need a venue and speakers, and then the main work is in publicising as widely as possible. Finally you need gallons of tea accompanied by truckloads of cake, and that's all there is to it!

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