

## Support in wake of suicide

### Local mother encourages others to join group for those bereaved by suicide

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JANINE Stewart knows the value of spending time and sharing stories with those who have been through similar experiences.



With this in mind, the local resident said the development of support groups for those bereaved by suicide, through Wangaratta Area Suicide Prevention (WASP), had been a vital addition to the district in recent years.

After losing her 34-year-old son, Daniel, to suicide in May, 2020, Janine said she had searched the area for support groups designed for parents bereaved by suicide.

“I was living in Albury at the time, but could only find one in Melbourne which offered a regional Zoom session,” she said.

She said these online gatherings were a great lead-in to joining the WASP support groups, which she heard about via a newspaper article.

“The Zoom meetings helped a lot, and it’s been great since last year to meet with people face-to-face in these groups, which are very welcoming,” Janine said.

She said guidelines around confidentiality and behaviour within the group had helped create a safe space for sharing and reminiscing, and helping with feelings that emerged for those bereaved by suicide.

“Family and friends have been the most amazing support, but I was struggling to keep moving forward. I wanted to meet with people who were on the same path, and listen to their stories, experiences and feelings,” she said.

“Unless you’ve walked in those shoes, you don’t have a clue. You can tick along for days and weeks, and then one thing washes over you and you get stuck.

“I know there are people, including parents, out there in Wangaratta who have lost loved ones to suicide, and I would like to help them.”

Janine said she relished the chance to speak about Daniel, who she described as a caring, kind, well-organised, bossy, talented theatre nurse who loved life, loved people and was extremely generous.

“I don’t ever want to not talk about Daniel; I want him spoken about and talked about on a daily basis. He was my best friend,” she said.

“In the early stages, you can’t see a way forward, but I know there is still so much enjoyment in life, even though he’s not in it. Of course, you would love one more chance to talk to them or give them a hug, but you can’t do that.

“I would really love to be able to help a little bit with other parents, and to be with people who are on the same journey.”

Janine encouraged other local residents who have been bereaved by suicide to turn up to one of the groups and see whether it may be for them.

“Just come along and try, and see if it helps,” she said.

“You can reminisce and talk about things like birthdays and Christmas and special events, and get some great ideas about marking them, and find help with moving forward.”

The next sessions for the WASP support groups for those bereaved by suicide will be held on Wednesday, February 22.

The teal (morning) group meets from 9.30am to 11am, and the purple (evening) group from 7pm to 8.30pm in the community room at the Wangaratta Library.

The groups meet on the fourth Wednesday of each month.

• If this media article causes you any distress, please phone Lifeline on 131 114 or the Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.