

Bethell Hospice unveils Butterfly Bereavement display at Headwaters Hospital

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LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

A new art display by Bethell Hospice was unveiled at Headwaters Hospital on Thursday, Nov. 20, to recognize those who struggle with grief and loss.

In recognition of National Grief and Bereavement Day and National Children's Grief Awareness Day on Nov. 20, this initiative provides a butterfly to each participant, who are encouraged to draw, decorate, and colour it however they see fit. The process allows participants to express and release their grief in a healthy, controlled way to help in the healing process.

The butterflies on display were arranged in hanging circles to represent the circle of life and how people express themselves when confronted with it.

Kim Delahunt, president & CEO of Headwaters, said that displays like this one are positive examples of what happens when healthcare organizations work together, and praised Bethell Hospice for its continued support of Dufferin and Caledon residents.

"This is a profoundly important project, and it's, of course, created to honour the national bereavement month," she said. "This project is much more than an art installation. I think it speaks to all of us. These butterflies, which I'm told there are more than 3,500, represent love, remembrance and the transformation that accompanies grief."

"Grief touches every one of us at some point in our lives, and healing is nurtured when we come together to support one another," she added.

Margaret Paan, executive director of Bethell Hospice, said that she is extremely grateful to Headwaters for cooperating with them to set up this display.

Over the five years that Butterfly Bereavement has operated, participation has skyrocketed, and Bethell Hospice needed to expand its spaces to host the displays, and Headwaters was quick to step up.

"We reached out to the hospital three years ago, during our fourth year, and we said 'could we expand this a bit?'" Paan said. "Headwaters didn't miss a beat. They said 'yes, absolutely, how can we work together?'"

Thanks to Headwaters' support, Paan said more people in the community will know they are not alone, that others are struggling, working through their own grief in their own ways, and that support is available.

"I think bringing grief and loss out into the community is really important," she said. "Letting people know that they're not alone is important. This display gives people coming up and down the hallways an opportunity to see that, to see all the people that participated and reflected."

There is no other group where this reinforcement is needed more than with youth. Thanks to investments by the Ontario government, Bethell Hospice now has a registered social worker who specializes in working with youth, Jessica Marsella.

She said that helping children move through grief is both complex and slow, requiring patience and adaptability.

"According to the children and youth group network, one in 14 children will experience the death of a parent or sibling," Marsella said. "Despite these statistics, it can still be a challenge for parents, caregivers and even service providers to connect these children

with appropriate support in their communities. Children are often said to be the forgotten mourners, with their resilience, flexibility and play-oriented processing serving as protective factors.?

She continued, "These traits can be misunderstood as a lack of understanding or care. The reality is that they express themselves differently from adults. The Butterfly Bereavement project draws attention to the importance of ensuring even our littlest members of our communities have access to the care and support that they need."

As National Grief and Bereavement Day and National Children's Grief Awareness Day pass, Bethell Hospice, Headwaters Hospital, and their partners continue to advocate for compassion, communication, and understanding throughout the grieving process.

They also hope the butterfly displays will continue to inspire and comfort those who pass them, reminding them that everyone processes grief differently, but support remains available for everyone, no matter the circumstances or age.

In addition to Headwaters, a butterfly display was unveiled at the Orangeville Public Library on Mill Street, with a viewing event on Nov. 21.

For more information on the Butterfly Bereavement project, visit <https://bethellhospice.org/>.