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Butterfly Bereavement Project art installation opens at local hospital, Orangeville Library

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LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

As National Grief and Bereavement Day passes, the Bethell Hospice wants to open up hearts and minds to processing grief and loss through a series of art displays in Dufferin County.

The displays in town will be located at the Headwaters Health Care Center ambulatory wing, with a general viewing event today (Nov. 20) from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. Another display will be at the Orangeville Public Library on Mill Street, with a viewing event on Nov. 21, from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m.

Titled the Butterfly Bereavement Project, the idea is simple: helping those struggling with loss express their feelings through art.

Bethell Hospice executive director Margaret Pann said it grew out of a desire to find a way to offer a more visible support mechanism to those in need.

?It really comes out of National Grief and Bereavement Day,? she said. ?The real crux of it is that we all experience grief and loss; it's a shared thing. We were thinking, really, about how we could make that more visible to people in a way that also can offer support to each other.?

Paan continued by saying that the butterfly is already a symbol used in the grieving process and also represents the cycle of life. They are the sum of someone's grieving feelings towards another.

?It's the way I think people see it, the light, the shape of the butterfly, it means a lot to people,? she said. ?When you see one of our displays, you know that each and every one of those butterflies was made by somebody that who was likely thinking about someone important to them.?

?Those butterflies are like many hearts and memories and a lot of love put together,? Paan added.

The project now numbers 3,500 butterflies and counting, potentially 4,000. While initially starting out with only a handful of participants four years ago, the initiative has expanded rapidly across the county, with thousands participating. Bethell Hospice has also had to expand its chosen venues in order to accommodate the size of its displays.

Even still, Paan said that everyone is encouraged to take up a butterfly and express themselves.

?I would encourage people to reach out, because you aren't alone, and there are supports here to help you,? she said.

?We have kits that anyone can use. You do this as an exercise at home and in comfort, even with your family, because that's what this is all about. None of us are alone in grief. I want people to be able to reflect, whether that's through the butterflies or another means.?

Paan also wanted to extend her thanks to the Ontario government for continuing to invest in counseling and support services across the province. Because of recent investments, more opportunities and programs have become available, including a new grief and bereavement services provider for youth and children.

?The Ministry of Health has invested heavily into grief and bereavement services in the last two years,? she said. ?Sylvia Jones has

been very supportive, and we've gotten more money now to run our programs and even expand them. We are extremely grateful to them.?