

BRIDGE FOR A DYING WISH

Most times, Jeremy McKnight does not remember what he has said when talking with community groups about palliative care. He just knows it matters. Little more than a year has passed since his 19-year-old daughter Shannon died at home in Mount Glasgow. Her dying wish was to help make palliative care easier for others in rural areas where after-hours services were stretched thin or non-existent. She helped create Shannon's Packs, a kit with the medicines, tools and information sheets so more people could die at home in relative comfort.



Jeremy McKnight is working to improve 'death literacy' so more people are informed about dying at home.

Shannon had been in hospital for two years with leukaemia. It was with the help of Creswick-based doctors Alison O'Neil and Claire Hepper, who voluntarily visited Shannon at all hours, that she could die at home surrounded by loved ones, four days after moving out of hospital. The McKnights have helped build her legacy into Shannon's Bridge, working to improve death literacy and training up more rural palliative care workers across the state. Part of this is talking.

"It's hard, a constant reminder," Mr McKnight said. "It sounds silly but I don't remember what I speak about afterwards. I talk from the heart. I talk to people about our experience and it brings it all back, but they are the ones going through it now – we've already been through it – and in that moment their needs are greater than ours."

Mr Knight said death and palliative care was still too often a taboo subject, yet 80 per cent of Australians wanted to die at home, given the choice, and less than 11 per cent actually did. So, he shares his story and often finds one or two people approach him after a presentation, then suddenly a whole group did. "It's a scary area but people want to know about it," Mr Knight said. "Talking about dying isn't going to make it happen but you don't need to dwell on it. Plan it and move on."

Shannon's Bridge hosted public sessions at the Creswick Community Health Centre and Maryborough Wellness Centre recently as part of National Palliative Care week.

Article courtesy of the Ballarat Courier, text by Melanie Whelan and picture by Dylan Burns

Shannon McKnight

25 Nov 1996 ~ 3 Mar 2016

*"I'm glad I decided to stay home,
I'm comfortable and I love you"*



Shannon and father Jeremy loved watching lightning storms from their beautiful Victorian home.

This is where she wanted to be.

Connecting Shannon and her family with help and services was vital to help make her wish of staying home to die a reality.

Shannon's Bridge is a new, not for profit organisation to help connect patients and existing palliative care services and supports.

We are here to support you with issues about illness, dying and loss.

The aim is to remove the taboo and change attitudes about death and dying. The focus is on not just a "good death" but "better living".

Shannon's Bridge is based on the "Compassionate Communities" international movement to help people to live well within our communities to the very end of our lives.



What does a Volunteer need?

- ✓ Ability to be sensitive & respectful
- ✓ Awareness of confidentiality
- ✓ Good communication skills
- ✓ A sense of humour
- ✓ Non-judgmental approach
- ✓ Willingness to engage in training

Want more information?

Shannon's Bridge welcomes interest and questions from members of the public, other volunteer groups, faith or spiritual groups, community organisations, service providers, a local government, health services, educational institutions.



Contact

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Connecting patients and families with services to help with home based care at end of life.

Shannon's Bridge Limited – ABN 68 615 831 742

Shannon's Pack



A combination of emergency symptom control equipment & instructions to deliver the care and support for patients and families.

"But what can I do?"

Most have experienced the feeling of helplessness when we hear about a member of our community who is critically ill.

People want to help but often we don't know how.

Shannon's Bridge aims to

- Improve death literacy
- Assist with Advance Care Plans
- Link families with local services
- Train volunteers to provide help

Social & practical help might include

- ✓ Shopping
- ✓ Collecting medications
- ✓ Transport
- ✓ Light gardening, housework
- ✓ Small household repairs
- ✓ Sitting with a patient
- ✓ Assisting with pets
- ✓ Writing letters, non-legal forms
- ✓ Just being there as a friend

The first pack was created when Shannon needed the contents to help make her comfortable at home when she was dying. We are sending the packs out to GPs across Victoria.

Donations welcome

gofundme.com/2825bdje