

FFMPU eNews

May 2013

Welcome to the first edition of the Families and Friends of Missing Persons Unit eNews bulletin for 2013.

There has been much discussion in recent days about the young women located in the US after many years missing. Opinions have been expressed about their experience, their situation and their ongoing needs. For many families, including the families who have spoken with us at FFMPU, this story brings renewed hope of seeing their missing loved one again, whilst “spark(ing their) worst fears.”¹ The story has also sparked renewed interest more locally about NSW and Australian families. Families who have spoken to the media have welcomed the opportunity to share their experiences and raise awareness of their missing loved one – for their missing person to be ‘seen’ by as many people as possible.

Our priority as always is to provide support and counselling to families and friends. This takes many forms – individual and group meetings, telephone conversations for a minute or an hour, skype and email. This year we continue to focus on raising awareness of missing persons’ issues and the work of our unit by providing training and education, conducting research, and providing the most up to date publications for the families we support and others in the missing persons sector.

¹ Webster, M. (2013, May 10). *Discovery of Cleveland girls rekindles mother’s pain*. Illawarra Mercury.

Family Forum 2013

The 5th annual FFMPU Family Forum was held in Parramatta on Saturday 13 April 2013. The Forum was attended by 18 family members and friends of missing persons, including a number of young people. The day was an opportunity for families to come together, to share ideas, provide mutual support and hear about updates in the missing persons’ field.

The Forum opened with a presentation from guest speaker, Deputy State Coroner Magistrate Paul MacMahon about the Coronial investigation of missing persons’ cases in NSW. Families also received an update about the work of the NSW Police Missing Persons Unit and current policing practices from Chief Inspector Paul Roussos.

During the forum, the young people took part in the “In the Loop” group for young people and provided a presentation to Forum attendees about the group



and their work in creating an illustrated book aimed at informing the community about their experiences as young people living with missing and ‘not knowing’.

At the end of the day, family members had the opportunity to take part in two small groups. The first involved family members sharing their experience of having a loved one missing. They talked about social media and other ways to raise awareness of their missing person. The other was a family-led initiative – a quilting workshop described in further detail over.

A Forum summary will be posted to the FFMPU website in the upcoming weeks.

Some feedback about the day included:

"The latest updates are very encouraging."

"Was able to ask questions and have some points clarified."

"I am less fearful now I understand how a Coronial inquest works."

"Good to see how other people are handling their lives with a missing person as part of every day."

A Family Initiative - the Quilt Project

Family members and friends from the Wollongong FFMPU group meeting have begun making a memory quilt for their missing family member or friend. This is an initiative led by a family member. Each 'quilter' is creating a unique fabric square to represent their missing loved one.

If you're asking *why make a quilt?* family members tell us that for some it is an opportunity to raise awareness of missing people in the community, create a ritual and a lasting legacy and to connect with other families and friends. The hope is that the quilt will be displayed in centres throughout NSW and possibly Australia. Some families say it can be comforting to physically do something for their loved one. Whilst the group started in Wollongong, families from further afield have now joined in. There is no age limit or ability requirement. Young people and older people are making squares and you do not have to be an 'expert quilter'.

For more information about the quilt or anything else in this newsletter please contact **FFMPU** on **1800 227 772**.



Making the quilt

Staffing - Cathie Valenzuela

Catherine (Cathie) Valenzuela started working with the FFMPU in March 2013. She is employed as a part-time counsellor/group worker while Emmanuel Kassiotis is acting in another position. Cathie completed a Bachelor of Social Work at University of Western Sydney and recently graduated with a Masters in Counselling and Applied Psychotherapy through the Jansen Newman Institute.

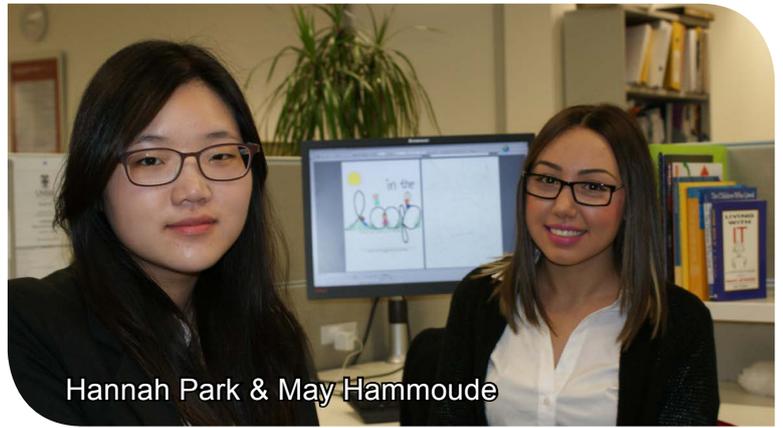
Cathie has worked with clients and families who have experienced life-changing events either due to trauma and injury, illness or life long conditions.

She has an interest in the areas of trauma, loss and adjustment and supporting clients and their families through difficult and challenging situations. Cathie has been part of working groups to raise awareness of the needs and issues impacting families and carers in relation to mental health. She is currently part of the Spinal Injury Social Work Focus Group aimed at identifying and addressing gaps in services and meeting the needs of clients with spinal cord injury and their families. Cathie is committed to improving service delivery to meet the needs of the clients and families through different projects such as developing and facilitating an education and training program for mental health service providers on ways they include and work with families.



Students

May Hammoude and Hannah Park are 3rd year social work students from the University of New South Wales. May and Hannah commenced a 65-day placement with FFMPU in January and will be with FFMPU until June. They have been working on a number of projects, including one compiling a 'clearinghouse' for written material about missing persons' issues and ambiguous loss. When finalised it will be available on the FFMPU website.



May and Hannah have also met with the young people who are part of **In the Loop** and attend the Saturday group meetings. They are working with the young people, combining their writing and drawings into a book they hope will raise awareness and understanding of the experience of young people; and importantly highlight the need for inclusion when a loved one is missing.

Family support groups

Adult groups

The groups for family members and friends with a loved one missing are continuing throughout 2013. **The next Sydney group will be held in Parramatta on 31 May 2013.** Please contact FFMPU for further information about support groups.

The **Quilt Project** will not replace group meetings but there will be time towards the end of each meeting to work on the project.

In the Loop

The group has met twice this year and will meet again at the beginning of June. The next meeting is in Campbelltown on 1 June 2013. The young people continue to work on ways of sharing information about their experiences with those closest to them and with the wider community. An update will be available after the June meeting.

Research & Conferences

Research projects - FFMPU

Two of the FFMPU team members are currently beginning research in the missing persons field. There is little research that focuses specifically on their identified areas of study – the support needs of young people and the Coronial process. At events such as the Family Forum and other support group meetings, family members and friends have spoken about the need for more information and research into the Coronial process and adults and young people have sought assistance to better understand, support and include young people with a missing loved one.

Liz Davies is commencing research on *"Identifying and responding to the psychosocial support needs of children and young people when a loved one is missing."* Liz is undertaking this study with two supervisors from University of Western Sydney. Liz's objectives are:

1. To identify and understand the psychosocial impact of 'missing' on children and young people;
2. Explore the coping strategies they employ, collaborate with them to develop a range of resources to meet their needs; and
3. Better inform and engage the community about missing persons issues as they relate to children and young people. You can contact Liz at liz_davies@agd.nsw.gov.au

Stephanie Dartnall has commenced research of the *Coronial investigation of missing persons' cases*. The objectives of the proposed research are to:

1. Develop an in-depth understanding of Coronial practices in missing persons' investigations; and
2. Investigate the experiences of families and friends of missing persons of the Coronial process.

Stephanie will undertake this research as part of her role with FFMPU and as a PhD candidate with Charles Sturt University. It is hoped that this research will increase understanding of the process for families who may be faced with a Coronial inquest, but also to help educate service providers and policy-makers about the opinions and experiences of families and how best to support them throughout this experience. Stephanie is also working on an updated guide for families of missing persons about the Coronial process in NSW, in consultation with families and the Coroner's Court NSW. For updates and further information on Stephanie's research she can be contacted at stephanie_dartnall@agd.nsw.gov.au

A Research Focus Group - UNE

Sasha MacBride, from the University of New England (UNE), is facilitating a focus group for the siblings of missing people in Parramatta on Saturday 25 May. Sasha's study is focusing on the lived experience for siblings of long-term missing people. She has obtained ethics approval to undertake this research and is happy to discuss this further. If you are available on Saturday 25 May, over the age of 18 years, the brother or sister of a family member who has been missing for more than six months, and speak fluent English, you can contact Sasha MacBride at smacbrid@une.edu.au for more information.

Conference

The Centre for the Study of Missing People is hosting the *1st International Conference on Missing Children and Adults. Working Across Borders* is being held at the University of Portsmouth (UK) from the 18-20 June 2013. Liz Davies is attending and will present about the work of FFMPU and the evolution of the FFMPU support groups for adults and young people. The conference is open to anyone with an interest in missing persons' issues. Further information and the conference agenda can be found on their website:

<http://www.port.ac.uk/departments/academic/icjs/csmp/conference/>

Community Education and Meetings

This year, the FFMPU team has been busy providing training and speaking at a variety of forums including, presenting at a number of operational police training days, the Goulburn Police Academy, Police Consultative Group on Missing Persons (NMPCC), hospital social work departments, Lifeline, a regional crisis centre, and a correctional facility. FFMPU has a number of conference and speaking engagements through 2013 in its continued endeavours to raise awareness about missing persons' issues and the needs of families left behind.

Members of the FFMPU team have also met with the National Association for Loss and Grief, the Mental Health Association and Alzheimers Australia. The experience of ambiguous loss and missing people overlaps in all of these areas and the opportunity to work collaboratively with these organisations is welcomed and appreciated.

Publications

FFMPU has been working on updating publications and creating new information sheets based on the requests and needs of families. Recently we have updated two publications that are now available on our website:

- *When someone is missing: Making a police report and assisting the investigation*
- *Information for young people when a loved one is missing*

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CONTACT DETAILS

For further information about this material or other topics, please call us on:

Phone: (02) 8688 8173 or 1800 227 772 • **National Relay Service:** 1800 555 677

Fax: (02) 8688 9631 • **Email:** ffmpu@agd.nsw.gov.au

www.missingpersons.lawlink.nsw.gov.au