

## #StarsInMemory – Connected by Care – United by Loss.

**Join us on Tuesday June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020 to unite in loss and commemoration**

The Covid 19 pandemic has produced widespread personal loss and tragedy, with the Care sector often located at the centre of this. Each person who has died during the pandemic leaves enduring memories amongst their loved ones and those that they have touched in their lives. However, despite the daily statistics, the personal losses remain largely invisible and there have been few opportunities for people to share their grief collectively, or to link this grief to previous and existing loss and bereavement.

As the world moves slowly out of lockdown, we hope to create a moment to connect by care and unite in loss. On June 30<sup>th</sup> we invite everyone to make a star and place it in their window or post on social media under the hashtag **#StarsInMemory, in recognition of those who have**, and those who continue to experience loss and bereavement in their lives. Stars can be any size, made in any material and decorated according to individual preference.

Whilst we recognise that the pandemic is not over, we hope that this mutual act of remembrance will help to recognise the many losses that people have experienced and to make these visible through the metaphorical light cast by the collective stars.

*"Loss is a very personal thing and affects us all in many different ways. However, across care we have also felt and responded to this loss as only a community can. Coming together, sharing our strength and sharing our tears. In some small way, we hope that by recognising this loss together, we can show not only our individual pain, but also shine on a light on how we are united in our love, respect and regard for those who are no longer with us".* Vic Rayner, Executive Director, National Care Forum

We welcome any individuals, groups and organisations joining with us. At present **#StarsInMemory** is supported by:



Setting Standards for Retirement Communities



For further details of bereavement support - <https://tinyurl.com/ydagkws9>

If you are interested in joining do let us know- please email [communications@napa-activities.co.uk](mailto:communications@napa-activities.co.uk). We are adding people and organisations all the time. Or just go ahead and make/post your star on Tuesday June 30<sup>th</sup>

**#StarsInMemory**



## **#StarsInMemory – Connected by Care – United by Loss.**

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In April 2020 shortly after the UK went into lockdown we were honoured to be invited by Sean Holland, the Chief Social Worker for Northern Ireland, to write a blog which acknowledged the ways in which the effects of Covid 19 were impacting on the people of Northern Ireland. The published blog, written as a response to Sean's invitation, recognised the unparalleled death toll during Covid 19, as well as the effects of social distancing on the rituals and processes which traditionally follow the loss of a loved one. The blog can be found here:

<https://www.scie.org.uk/care-providers/coronavirus-covid-19/blogs/covid-death-rituals>

Following publication of the blog we invited comments from the people of Northern Ireland and received some personal stories, as well as interesting discussion on the ways in which English death rituals and euphemisms like 'lost' were perceived to be infiltrating Northern Irish culture, as a result of Covid19.

Since publication of the blog, as the daily death toll continued to rise, Care Homes found themselves at the centre of political and media debate, with the highly contagious nature of Covid 19 raging through the sector. Social distancing and the lockdown, led to restrictions on people visiting dying loved ones in Care homes resulting in little or no time to say an important final farewell, or even to process the sudden and unexpected death of someone who only weeks before may have been physically fit and healthy.

As the immediate impacts of the Covid 19 wave begin to subside, there is a gradual move to 'return to normal'. However, with over 40,000 confirmed deaths, there will be many people for whom that 'normal' is no longer possible, as they continue to grieve the deaths of loved ones, alongside, in many cases the loss of the opportunity to say goodbye. Grief and its consequences are largely invisible to others and yet the immediate and long-term impacts on emotional health and social networks are well documented. In Kenneth Doka's\* work on grief (1989) he argues that grief disenfranchises us, whilst other contemporary grief theorists including Neimeyer\* (2001) suggest that meaning making is one of the key ways in which people come to terms with grief and loss. This has been seen throughout the Covid 19 outbreak, from 'clap for the carers' to the 'thank you NHS rainbows, but to date there has been little collective recognition that aims to bring bereaved people together in a shared show of grief, akin to the clapping ritual.

Shared rituals and activities can help to create this collective meaning and reduce the 'disenfranchisement' that bereaved people may feel, by making grief visible. **'StarsInMemory'** is one suggestion for this, drawing from a legend attributed to the Inuit's:

*"Perhaps they are not stars, but rather openings in heaven where the love of our lost ones pours through and shines down upon us to let us know they are happy."*

The idea is that people respond to a central call to make a star to remember a loved one, or some form of significant death/loss before or during Covid 19. The stars can be customised and original – there is no template. At a given time on 30<sup>th</sup> June date people who want to join in on this collective idea can put their star up in their window, or post it on social media as a public and unified display of grief and loss. By public we also include the option of displaying a star in a digital space, in, for example posting a picture of your star on the social media platforms Twitter, Instagram or Facebook with the hashtag **#StarsInMemory** copied in. The stars can then be left on show, or taken down, according to individual choice. The metaphor of the star responds to the legend, but also 'casts light' on what is hidden and gives visibility to this.

This shared show of the losses encountered during Covid 19 is one way in which the pandemic, presents us with an opportunity to highlight the work of Care homes and to learn from each other in the sharing of grief. We hope that you will join us on the Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> June as we remember all those who have been lost throughout the pandemic period, COVID19 related or not. We will display our act of remembrance by placing a star in the windows of our homes and by placing a picture of it on the social media site Twitter – using – as we suggest the hashtag **#StarsInMemory**