

# GRESKO Agape

An international songwriting project for change, loss and grief  
bringing together hospice patients and school children

**Donna Hastings<sup>1</sup> Giorgos Tsisis<sup>1,2</sup> Stephen Fischbacher<sup>3</sup> Suzanne Butler<sup>3</sup> Mary Dionisi<sup>4</sup> Alik Tserkezoglou<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> St Columba's Hospice Care, Scotland | <sup>2</sup> Queen Margaret University, Scotland

<sup>3</sup> Fischy Music, Scotland | <sup>4</sup> Galilee Palliative Care Unit, Greece

This presentation showcases an innovative international songwriting project that took place during, and in response to, the covid-19 pandemic.

Promoting death and dying awareness, this project brought together hospice patients and school children from Scotland and Greece respectively to explore issues of change, loss and grief through the creation of music and songs.

Highlighting the work of hospices, building school knowledge and resources around death and dying, as well as strengthening the hospices' relationships with their communities locally and internationally were key components of this work.



[dhastings@stcolumbashospice.org.uk](mailto:dhastings@stcolumbashospice.org.uk) - 1



Following the [award-winning work](#) of St Columba's Hospice Care and Fischy Music, this online project brought school communities together with hospice patients to explore change, loss, and grief.

Hospice patients from St Columba's Hospice Care in Edinburgh and from the Galilee palliative care unit in Greece came together with children from George Heriot's School and from Elliniki Paideia respectively. The group named themselves **GRESKO Agape**. They met over a number of weeks and wrote songs exploring, expressing and sharing experiences of change, loss and grief in life.

In the closing event delegates got the opportunity to hear more about the project and people's experiences of it. This included a performance of the songs written and sharing audio-visual examples from the process of the project.

The project took place between September and December 2021 and it was kindly funded by The D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust.



## Step 1: School staff training:

Training was offered to school staff in Scotland and in Greece regarding childhood loss and bereavement and how to support this in the school setting. The training also outlined the potential role of music and the arts, and included a brief songwriting workshop.

## Step 2: Songwriting process:

This step included three phases:

- i) A meeting of all participants from both schools and hospices. Participants were introduced to the project, met each other through creative activities, and had brief virtual tours of their respective settings.
- ii) Four songwriting sessions (one-hour weekly sessions) with each group of children and patients in Greece and Scotland respectively.

iii) A closing meeting with all project participants.

In step 2, children and hospice patients met and wrote songs exploring, expressing and sharing their experiences. The participants named their group 'GRESKO Agape' highlighting not only the cross-cultural (GREece - SCOTland) nature of their work, but also 'agape' (the Greek word for love) as a core idea and feeling that connected their diverse experiences and explorations of loss, change and grief in life.

## Step 3: A celebration closing event:

This large public event conveyed the songs and their key messages around the strength that people receive from memories of their deceased loved ones and from the support of their family and friends.



Watch the project video:  
<https://vimeo.com/657354776>

*"Yesterday's session celebrating the GreSko Agape project was absolutely fantastic. I was blown away by the young people, their enthusiasm, talent, openness and courage. What a brilliant collaboration. Well done everyone! Inspirational - I hope it may seed more such projects elsewhere." – Closing event attendee*

# GRESKO Agape

The evaluation outcomes and the learnings gained from this project will inform the development of future collaborative initiatives in the field. This includes advancements in the use of digital health and creative arts approaches to support public health approaches to palliative care and promote death education and health promotion. Intercultural dialogue has also been a key component of this project that calls for further attention and action.

*The project was amazing and it would be incredible to be able to offer this to future groups of children [...]. Here [...] we have a foundation that fully funds children that have experienced a parental bereavement. We offer the 'Seasons for Growth' programme throughout the whole school and the project really felt like a celebration for the children that have been through the Seasons programme. Thank you so much for offering this wonderful opportunity and we would love to work with you again in the near future.*

It really helped with forming strong connections between all in the group: compassion, empathy and realising one is not alone in our experiences of change, grief and loss.

*I was initially very sceptical that we would and could write a song in 4 one-hour sessions on Zoom and that it would be a therapeutic and useful way to spend my time. However I've found the loss song writing project so rewarding, thought provoking and cathartic. Indeed it's been a true privilege to listen to the young people and other Hospice patients as we shared our personal experiences of heartfelt loss. Week on week, I've really looked forward to singing and dancing with Fischy Music, the other Hospice patients and the young folk [...]*