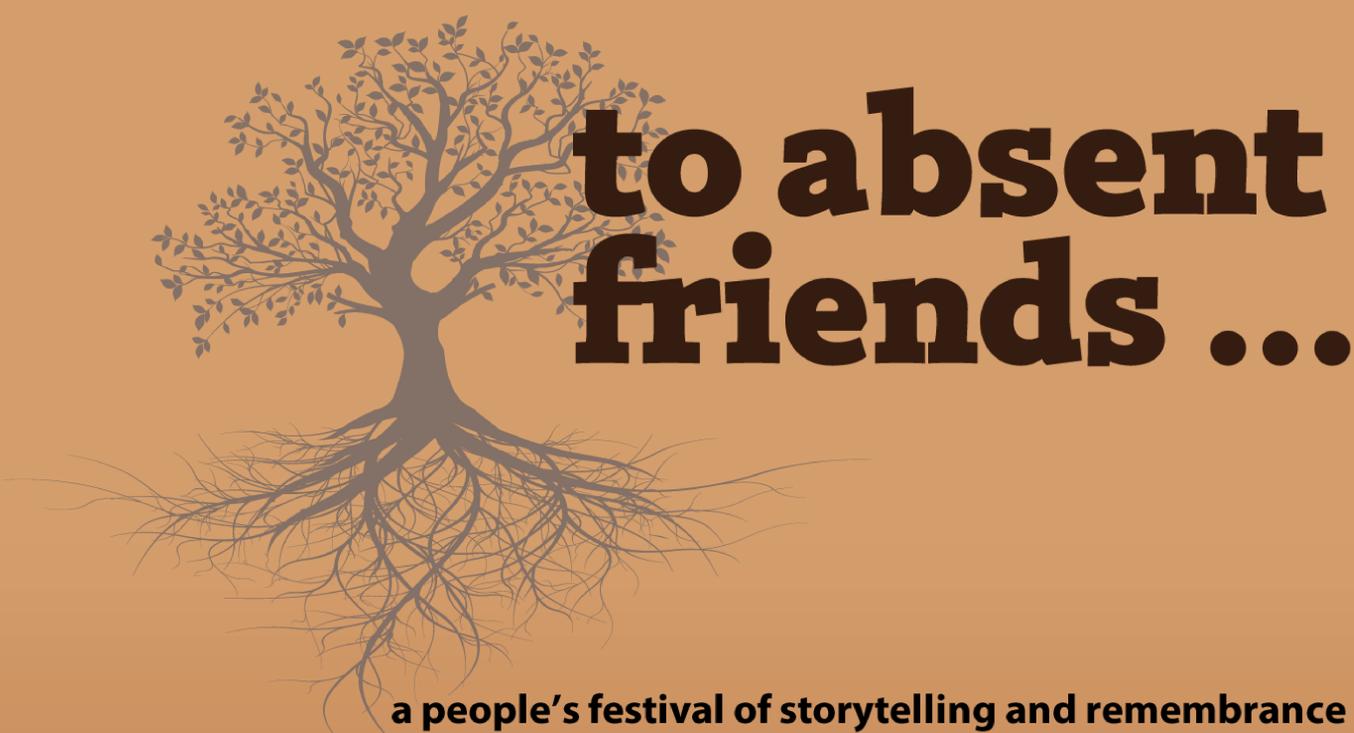


Is Scotland Ready to Create Its Own Day of the Dead?

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Is a national community-based festival of storytelling and remembrance a culturally acceptable way of building individual and community resilience in dealing with loss?

◆ The Need for Action

Social and personal support mechanisms are important in helping people to cope with bereavement, yet religious and/or community-based support networks are non-existent for many in Scotland. People want to support others through bereavement, but often struggle to know how. Rituals of remembrance can build solidarity, yet many traditions relating to the expression of loss have faded. Improving experiences of bereavement is part of a public health approach to palliative care.

◆ What We Did

To Absent Friends, a people's festival of storytelling and remembrance (TAF) was planned for 1-7 November 2014 and 2015. Carefully designed resources including website, film, leaflet and participation ideas were produced to encourage participation. These were promoted via the professional and personal networks of the authors & via the media.

◆ What Happened?

Events and activities ranged in size and scope, and can be divided into four broad categories:

- ❖ public events, open to all
- ❖ community events, run by organisations for their own members and invitees
- ❖ private events, enacted by individuals, families and groups of friends
- ❖ online activities.

Although we organised a small number of events, the vast majority of the activity that took place was conceptualised and carried out by individuals and organisations on their own initiative. The Festival provided the excuse, the opportunity.



◆ Results

Quantitative and qualitative data for evaluation of TAF 2015 was gathered via online survey of participants; structured questionnaire to event organisers; web and social media metrics; direct observation.

In 2015 over 5000 people participated, from a broad variety of organisations and demographics. 1.75 million were exposed to the festival via the media. 98% of survey respondents reported taking part was a positive experience. Qualitative responses indicate that participation was of deep significance for many.

◆ Conclusions

People from all backgrounds chose to take part: from north and south, rural and urban, old and young, rich and poor, from various cultures, ethnicities and backgrounds and from varied circumstances and experiences of loss. Enthusiasm to create and organise events was not confined to those working in the fields of bereavement, palliative and end of life care. TAF inspired involvement from people working in many other fields, for example the arts, education, sports.

We conclude that the festival is an acceptable approach and enthusiasm exists in Scotland to create a time of year when remembering dead loved ones is socially accepted and supported within mainstream culture.

◆ For More Information

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