

To Absent Friends ...



... a people's festival of
storytelling and
remembrance

Activity Report and Evaluation 2015



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Executive Summary

Introduction

In Scotland widespread cultural reluctance to think and talk about declining health, death, dying and bereavement causes various social harms. This is now widely recognised in public policy. The Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care (SPPC) established *Good Life, Good Death, Good Grief (GLGDGG)* to address these issues. *GLGDGG* is an alliance of individuals and organisations working together to make Scotland a place where people can be more open about death, dying and bereavement.

People who have been bereaved can experience social isolation because people don't know what to say or how to act towards them, and it is therefore important to develop community capacity to support people who have been bereaved. With this in mind, *GLGDGG* initiated *To Absent Friends (TAF)*, a Scotland-wide festival of storytelling and remembrance which gives people across Scotland an excuse to remember, to tell stories, to celebrate and to reminisce about people they love who have died.

To Absent Friends is unscripted and unbranded. Anyone who wishes to can participate in the festival in whatever way feels right for them, in public or in private. The festival takes place across Scotland in public spaces, over social media, among friends, families and communities, and in people's minds and hearts.

Aims

The aims of *To Absent Friends* 2015 were to:

1. Model openness about remembering, celebrating, reminiscing and sharing stories of dead loved ones.
2. Create a focal point which encourages participation from existing *GLGDGG* members.
3. Encourage people and organisations outwith the health and social care circles traditionally associated with the Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care to engage in remembrance activities.
4. Increase the number of events held in TAF 2015 compared to TAF 2014.
5. Support groups that are frequently socially excluded to engage in meaningful remembrance activities.
6. Create opportunities for media coverage, as this is an important way of bringing these issues to people's attention and illustrating that it is socially acceptable to discuss them in public.
7. Learn more about what makes a culturally-acceptable opportunity to remember dead loved ones in Scotland. For example, do the general public like the idea of the festival, what kinds of activities work best, and how best do we use our resources to support a festival that will eventually become self-sustaining?

To Absent Friends 2015

To Absent Friends took place from 1-7 November 2015, and incorporated a wide and varied programme of events including:

- public events, open to all, including a high profile launch event
- community events, run by organisations for their own members and invitees
- private events, held by individuals, families and groups of friends
- online activities.

The festival also provided an opportunity for *GLGDGG* to explore new potential partnerships, and to conceptualise, share and trail new ideas that have the potential to be built on in future years. The festival was covered in various local, national and specialist media.

Evaluation

To inform evaluation of the festival, information was gathered relating to:

- website metrics
- social media activity
- reach
- activity reports
- an online survey
- qualitative feedback from reports, survey and other sources.

Conclusions

To Absent Friends was successful in meeting its aims. A huge range of different kinds of organisations and individuals participated, and feedback showed that people's experiences of the festival were overwhelmingly positive. Much was learned this year that will inform future work:

- **Local ownership is the key ingredient for success** - events that were best attended or particularly well-received were, in general, conceived and organised by one or two enthusiastic individuals, for a community of which they were part.
- ***To Absent Friends* inspires local creativity** - a key strength of the festival is its ability to be adapted to meet the needs and passions of the individuals and communities involved – *To Absent Friends* can be whatever people need it to be.
- ***To Absent Friends* has the potential to engage people from all walks of life** - *To Absent Friends* prompted engagement from north and south, rural and urban, old and young, rich and poor, and from people from various cultures and backgrounds. Enthusiasm to create and organise events goes beyond those working in the fields of palliative and end of life care, inspiring involvement from people working in various other fields.

- **The SPPC plays a valuable role growing the festival** - people appreciate and use ideas and resources produced by the SPPC, and they acted as a catalyst for participation in *To Absent Friends*.
- **The Samhain Supper should be explored and promoted further in future years** - four completely different types of Samhain Supper were held – from the intimate and private to the public and formal. Feedback from participants indicate that each one was a unique and worthwhile event.
- **Money helps** - there is plenty of creativity and enthusiasm for participating in *To Absent Friends*, and in the current financial climate of extremely limited resources, providing just £250 can give the support an organisation needs to undertake something fantastic for their local community.
- **Being able to plan helps** – a lack of recurrent and predictable funding for *GLGDGG* poses challenges in making mid-term and long-term work plans. However, experience from working with the RSNO where more time was available to plan allowed maximisation of the impact of the resources available.
- **Supporting and growing *To Absent Friends* takes time, knowledge, skills and occasional disappointments** - engaging with new audiences, supporting and publicising local activity, producing resources and following through new ideas all takes the time of dedicated staff and builds valuable experience and learning for the organisation.
- **A little extra capacity can make a big difference** – the addition of some freelance support enabled the festival to work with new partners, reach new audiences and secure more media coverage.
- **Media interest comes in all shapes and sizes** – national, local and specialist media reach different people and are all worth engaging with.
- ***To Absent Friends* has good scope for future growth and positive impact** – experience now suggests that the festival is acceptable, readily understood, engages diverse organisations and individuals, is positively received, easily adaptable, of meaningful significance to participants and of near-universal relevance. It therefore has great potential for growth.
- **The value of *To Absent Friends* cannot be measured in numbers alone** - although *To Absent Friends* reached a wide number of people, its effectiveness lies in the depth of engagement which some people have with the festival. It is clear from feedback from organisers, participants and audiences that remembrance has a deep and lasting effect on them.

Background

Death, Dying and Bereavement in Scotland

In Scotland there is a widespread cultural reluctance to think and talk about declining health, death, dying and bereavement.

This can cause social harms, for example:

- People who are dying or who have been significantly bereaved can experience isolation because people don't know what to say or how to act towards them.
- People die without wills, leaving complicated situations for their families and friends.
- Health care professionals struggle to have conversations with their patients about what care or treatments they want as they approach death. This makes it hard to plan the care that a person really wants.
- If the fact that someone is dying is not acknowledged then opportunities to resolve issues and say important things like '*goodbye*' or '*thank you*' may be missed.

Good Life, Good Death, Good Grief

The Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care (SPPC) is addressing these issues by working to make Scotland a place where people can be more open about death, dying and bereavement.

With this in mind, the SPPC has established and developed *Good Life, Good Death, Good Grief (GLGDGG)*, an alliance of individuals and organisations who share the vision of a Scotland where:

- people are **better informed** about the practical, legal, medical, financial and emotional issues associated with death, dying and bereavement
- there are **adequate opportunities** for discussion of these issues, and it is normal to plan for the future.
- **public policies** acknowledge and incorporate death and dying, and **health and social care services** support planning ahead and enable choice and control in care towards the end of life

And, because formal services are a small part of people's lives and deaths...

- where **communities and individuals are better equipped** to help each other through the hard times which can come with death, dying and bereavement.

The GLGDGG Approach

GLGDGG was established in 2011, with reference to the theory of Professor Allan Kellehear¹ and drawing on UK and international approaches. In academic and theoretical terms, it can be framed as a health promoting or public health approach to palliative care, as it aims to work with communities to improve

¹ *Health Promoting Palliative Care* Kellehear (1999)
http://media.wix.com/ugd/14d74a_195cc5fb820a4906bc9970abb87533cd.pdf

people's experience of death, dying and bereavement. *GLGDGG* is led and run by the small staff team (4.6WTE) at SPPC in addition to ongoing work to support improvement in the provision of palliative care by the health and social care system.

Several factors have been key in shaping the approach adopted by *GLGDGG*:

- The key principles outlined within the report published by *Living and Dying Well* Short Life Working Group 7.
- The complexity of the issue *GLGDGG* is working to address - different groups and communities within Scotland have different strengths, weaknesses, problems and priorities relating to death, dying and bereavement. Those groups and communities themselves know best what their strengths, weaknesses, problems and priorities are.
- The strengths of the SPPC and *GLGDGG*, which lie in strong networks of engagement and an ability to work flexibly and innovatively.
- The absence of recurrent and predictable funding for *GLGDGG*, which has posed challenges in terms of making mid-term and long-term work plans, having staff capacity to undertake significant pieces of work, and to evaluating the impact of work undertaken.

The approach adopted by *GLGDGG* prioritises finding ways of supporting and engaging with communities to empower and educate in ways that are respectful to cultural and individual needs and preferences:

- Much of the work of *GLGDGG* is determined and undertaken by members themselves.
- *GLGDGG* acts as a support and a sounding board to enable individuals and organisations undertake the change they think needs to happen.
- *GLGDGG* also provides (and signposts to) resources for people who are dealing with death, dying and bereavement in a personal capacity.

To lead and support the alliance's membership the following national network activities are undertaken:

- providing information and resources about public health and health promoting approaches to better death, dying and bereavement
- identifying and sharing good practice
- providing leadership, ideas, inspiration, practical tools and small grants
- generating media coverage/national dialogue
- influencing public policy.

The work of *Good Life, Good Death, Good Grief* and its members is very varied because the experience of death, dying and bereavement can be improved through work in many domains.

Policy Context

This report has been written for a general audience and tries to avoid technical jargon and the less accessible aspects of the language of public policy. However, it is worth highlighting at the outset that *To Absent Friends* is highly relevant to a

number of key Scottish government priorities and current policy concerns. The importance of more openness about death, dying and bereavement is a key concern of the *Strategic Framework for Palliative and End of Life Care* (2015). Such openness is a pre-requisite for the person-centred ambition of the *Quality Strategy* (2010). *Realistic Medicine* (2016), the Chief Medical Officer's Annual Report, emphasises shared decision making and the avoidance of over treatment towards the end of life, both of which require open and honest conversations between public and professionals. *Palliative and end of life care in Scotland: The rationale for a public health approach* (2016, Scottish Public Health Network) calls for further development of community engagement approaches to building resilience to deal with death, dying and bereavement. The work of *Good Life, Good Death, Good Grief* (see below) and *To Absent Friends* are good examples of 'asset-based approaches' which build on the strengths and resources of communities and individuals to enhance wellbeing. *To Absent Friends* is only possible through 'co-production'².

Bereavement

One of the social harms *GLGDGG* is working to address is the social isolation experienced by bereaved people.

Each year 220,000 people in Scotland are significantly bereaved. Many people who have been bereaved experience social isolation, for example Age UK's *Loneliness and Isolation Evidence Review* found that bereavement is one of the factors which increases older people's risk of experiencing loneliness and isolation, and that loneliness and isolation are more common among people who are widowed. The Children's Hospice Association Scotland and the Compassionate Friends UK have both made moving films about the difficulties parents who have experienced the death of a child face because people don't know how to act around them.³

Various academic models exist which attempt to describe how bereavement affects people, and most of these articulate the importance of finding ways of acknowledging a loss and moving forward, while maintaining some sense of connection to the person who has died. Continuing Bonds theory suggests that when someone dies, people slowly find ways to alter and redefine the relationship they have with the person – we continue to have a bond to someone once they have died, but the nature of the relationship is changed. Recalling memories of a person's life and the time spent with them is generally seen as something that can be helpful.

² The Scottish Co-production network describes co-production as: 'describing a relationship between service providers, service users and wider community resources that draws on their knowledge, ability and resources to develop solutions to issues that are claimed to be successful, sustainable and cost-effective, changing the balance of power from the professional towards the service user'.

<http://www.coproductionscotland.org.uk/about/what-is-co-production/> (accessed 7 April 2016)

³ The Compassionate Friends (2013) *Say their name* (a film) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GS9z3dwMhZs>

Children's Hospice Association Scotland (2013) *The 100% Project* (a film) <http://www.chas.org.uk/100percentproject/whatis100>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GS9z3dwMhZs>

Bruce Rumbold and Samar Aoun have looked at bereavement as part of a public health perspective on palliative care. They propose that, when thinking about how to better support people who've been bereaved, it is important to look not only at data from clinical encounters, but at bereavement as it is lived out in everyday life. They suggest that most people manage to live with and through bereavement without developing mental health problems, and that this is because their social and personal support mechanisms meet their needs.⁴ Rumbold and Aoun suggest that it is important to develop community capacity to support people who have been bereaved.

Rumbold and Aoun suggest that rituals of remembrance and memorialisation build solidarity – they are ways of acting that '*transcend or replace the struggle to find words of comfort*'. This kind of memorialisation does seem to be something that people yearn for and new rituals of remembrance appear to be emerging spontaneously. For example, sponsored events in memory of dead loved ones, mourning on social media, and more interest in personalised funerals that are a celebration of life rather than contemplation on death. However, after the funeral is over, the active remembrance of dead people isn't something that is currently well supported in Scottish culture. Religious and/or community-based support networks and rituals are non-existent for many people. Families, friends and communities genuinely want to support people through bereavement, but often struggle to know how. Many find that hearing someone talk about their grief and about the deceased can cause them discomfort and embarrassment.

To Absent Friends, a people's festival of storytelling and remembrance aimed to address these issues. Most people in Scotland, apart from the very young, will have lost someone who was important to them. For some people the death of a loved one maybe a recent event and they might describe themselves as bereaved and experiencing grief. For other people a long time may have passed since the death and a process of adjustment may have taken place. People's responses to loss are very individual, variable and only partially about how recent the loss was. Many people will have experienced several deaths and they are likely to feel differently about each loss. The experience of loss is infinitely variable but also universal. *To Absent Friends* is intended to be of relevance to a wide range of circumstances, it is not only about recent loss and bereavement. *To Absent Friends* encompasses grief, loss, bereavement, celebrating, mourning, remembering, memorialising, tears and smiles.

⁴ Bruce Rumbold & Samar Aoun *Bereavement and palliative care: A public health perspective* Progress in Palliative Care, 2014, Vol 22, No.3

Introduction: To Absent Friends

What is To Absent Friends?

To Absent Friends is a Scotland-wide festival of storytelling and remembrance which gives people across Scotland an excuse to remember, to tell stories, to celebrate and to reminisce about people they love who have died. It is an opportunity to revive lost traditions and create new ones.

To Absent Friends is unprescriptive and unbranded. Anyone who wishes to can participate in the festival in whatever way feels right for them, in public or in private. The festival therefore takes place across Scotland in public spaces, over social media, among friends, families and communities, and in people's minds and hearts.

In the long term, *GLGDGG* wants to see:

- The *To Absent Friends* festival taking place spontaneously each November, providing a trigger and a socially acceptable opportunity for people to remember and share stories of dead loved ones.
- More communities having the skills and confidence to better share and support each other through loss all year round.

Aims

This kind of culture change will not happen overnight, therefore in the short term, the aims of *To Absent Friends* 2015 were to:

1. Model openness about remembering, celebrating, reminiscing and sharing stories of dead loved ones.
2. Create a focal point which encourages participation from existing *GLGDGG* members.
3. Encourage people and organisations outwith the health and social care circles traditionally associated with the Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care to engage in remembrance activities.
4. Increase the number of events held in TAF 2015 compared to TAF 2014.
5. Support groups that are frequently socially excluded to engage in meaningful remembrance activities.
6. Create opportunities for media coverage, as this is an important way of bringing these issues to people's attention and illustrating that it is socially acceptable to discuss them in public.
7. Learn more about what makes a culturally-acceptable opportunity to remember dead loved ones in Scotland. For example, do the general public like the idea of the festival, what kinds of activities work best, and how best do we use our resources to support a festival that will eventually become self-sustaining?

Activities

To meet the objectives of the festival, the *SPPC*:

- worked with partners to create a programme of public events where people could remember dead loved ones
- worked with organisations who participated in TAF 2014 to put on local events as part of TAF, with a particular focus on socially excluded groups
- promoted TAF and relevant resources to *GLGDGG* and SPPC member organisations and other interested groups
- ran a small grants scheme to support interested organisations to participate in TAF
- designed and printed *To Absent Friends* leaflets and coasters
- captured photographs of key events to enable enhanced promotion of the festival in current and future years
- developed the website with new content, including a programme of events, festival blog, and new interactive remembrance activities
- explored new potential partnerships
- conceptualised, shared and tested new ideas that have the potential to be built on in future years
- toured the *Essence of a Memory* photo exhibition in various venues around Scotland
- worked with local organisations to send press releases to local newspapers
- developed and executed a social media plan in partnership with hospices and national charities
- collected information about the success of individual events, by attendance at events, collecting activity reports from event organisers, collating informal feedback, and a Survey Monkey questionnaire
- collected information about the success of the festival as a whole with reference to numbers of events, geographical spread of activity, numbers participating, social inclusiveness, publicity/media coverage, social media activity, website metrics, and feedback from participants
- reflected on what has been learned from TAF this year and how this can inform *GLGDGG* activity in the future.

To Absent Friends 2015: An overview

To Absent Friends is not like traditional, curated festivals. It exists to encourage participation, and it is non-prescriptive – groups and individuals are encouraged to take part in whatever manner they feel is appropriate.

In founding *To Absent Friends*, SPPC's role is to be an enabler rather than a deliverer of festival activities. As a result of this approach, events and activities ranged in size and scope, and included:

- public events, open to all, including a high profile launch event
- community events, run by organisations for their own members and invitees
- private events, held by individuals, families and groups of friends
- online activities.

This section of the report provides an overview of the activities that took place as part of *To Absent Friends 2015*, illustrated with case studies.

Public Events

Introduction

It is very important for the festival to have a prominent public side - collective acts of remembrance have their own special significance, bringing people together and allowing sharing of experiences. As well as being intrinsically meaningful for those who participate in them, these public events help to reinforce that public remembrance is socially acceptable. These events can also act as a hook for publicity on social media and through press and PR.

A diverse range of public events took place for *To Absent Friends 2015*:

Essence of a Memory Competition, online

A competition run as part of Luminare Festival of creative ageing and To Absent Friends, inviting people to capture the memory of a dead loved one in 50 words and a photograph

RSNO Concert, Royal Concert Hall, Glasgow

A concert created by professional musicians and schoolchildren, inspired by personal losses and the stories of older people living in the community

RSNO pre-Concert performance, Aberdeen Music Hall

A concert created by professional musicians and schoolchildren from Aberdeen, inspired by personal losses and the stories of older people living in the community

RSNO pre-Concert performance, Usher Hall, Edinburgh

A concert created by professional musicians and schoolchildren from Portobello, inspired by personal losses and the stories of older people living in the community

RSNO pre-Concert performance, Glasgow Royal Concert Hall

A concert created by professional musicians and schoolchildren from Glasgow and Stirling, inspired by personal losses and the stories of older people living in the community

RSNO pre-Concert performance, Caird Hall, Dundee

A concert created by professional musicians and schoolchildren from Dundee, inspired by personal losses and the stories of older people living in the community

Breakfast Club, Cramond Kirk, Edinburgh

A cafe of reminiscence held after a short church service

A Time of Reflection, St Columba's Church, Glenrothes

Short talks, poetry readings and music, to remember those who tragically lost their lives to suicide

A Hearth for Old Stories, Scottish Storytelling Centre, Edinburgh

Poet and storyteller Margot Henderson used story, song and silence to help people remember loved ones who have died

Cambuslang Remembering, Flemington Hallside Parish Church, Cambuslang

A lighting of candles and balloon release with an opportunity to meet the Bereavement Support Group

Dog Stone, Public spaces across Edinburgh

An interactive storytelling adventure exploring how imagination can be used as a coping mechanism in the event of loss

Get Organised, Usher Hall, Edinburgh

A programme of organ music in memory of absent friends by organist John Kitchen

Courage In The Name of Freedom of Expression, Mitchell Library, Glasgow

An interactive event in which the Scottish Writers' Centre and Scottish PEN remembered writers, poets and journalists who have given their life for freedom of expression

Gone But Not Forgotten, The Blind Poet, Edinburgh

A night of storytelling celebrating the lives of inspirational people with professional storytellers and open microphone slots

Don't Mention The Coal Scuttle! St John's Episcopal Church, Perth.

A discussion about bereavement based on the book of the same name, which features real experiences and anecdotes about the loss of a partner

Essence of a Memory Exhibition, Govan Health Centre, Glasgow

A public exhibition of winning entries from the Essence of a Memory photo competition

Edinburgh Brass Band, St John's Church, Edinburgh

A concert honouring absent friends with a candlelit concert of melancholy and magnificent music

We Remember Them Well, Leith Dockers Club, Edinburgh

Local musicians and writers shared memories of departed friends, with professional actors performing pieces of remembrance

Public Awareness Day, New Victoria Hospital, Glasgow

The Prince and Princess of Wales Hospice set up a stall in the hospital's main thoroughfare, with leaflets and a banner promoting access services in the hospice.

Passers-by were encouraged to participate in the conversation, to share experiences and wisdom

Stepping Stones, South Queensferry and Dalmeny Churches

A six-week course for those journeying through bereavement, with speakers including GPs and others who have been bereaved

Alice Mary Cooper: The Box (Toured Scotland)

A theatre piece inspired by stories of those who have died found in a Dundee time capsule

Four brief case studies follow as examples of some of the public events that took place. They range from large-scale concerts to small-scale storytelling, from daytime outdoor activities to late night pub events, and include participants of all ages from pre-school children to elderly care home residents.

CASE STUDY: RSNO Concert – Launch of *To Absent Friends*

Date: Thursday 29 October 2015

Location: Royal Concert Hall, Glasgow

Participants: Around 200 schoolchildren were involved in creating the performance, mentored and assisted by older people in their communities, professional musicians and creative writing experts. The work was performed to an audience of around 150.

To Absent Friends launched on Thursday 29 October at the Royal Concert Hall in Glasgow, with a special concert that was the result of a five month long collaboration between the SPPC, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, schoolchildren and care home residents. The project was funded through a grant to SPPC from the Royal Bank of Scotland.



Musicians from the orchestra worked with schoolchildren from five areas across Scotland (Craigie High School in Dundee, Walker Road Primary in Aberdeen, Portobello High School in Edinburgh, the RSNO Junior Chorus from Glasgow, and Balfron High School near Stirling). The schoolchildren met elderly local residents to discuss their 'absent friends', and, inspired by those meetings, wrote words and



music to capture feelings and memories. The music was performed on the night by the children themselves, alongside professional musicians, interspersed with video clips of the older people talking.

A pre-concert reception was an opportunity to raise the profile of the festival, and to bring together representatives from many of the different organisations involved in *To Absent Friends*. The reception saw

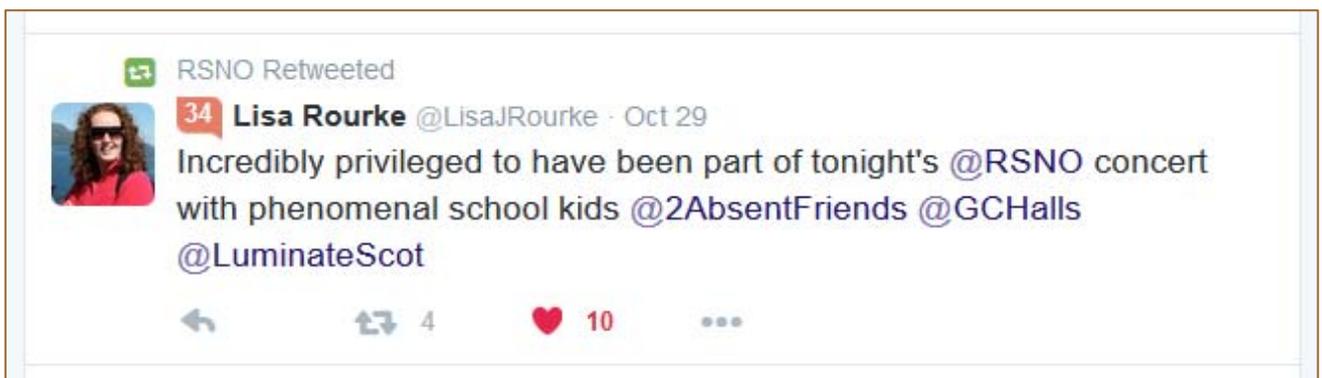
the premier exhibition of the winning entries of the *Essence of a Memory* photo competition with prizes presented by photographer / artist Colin Gray, and a performance by spoken word artist Max Scratchmann.



As well as a full performance in the RSNO Centre at Glasgow Royal Concert Hall, the children and professional musicians gave local performances of the work in Edinburgh's Usher Hall, Dundee's Caird Hall and the Aberdeen Music Hall.

Clips from the concert were broadcast on BBC Breakfast, and the launch event featured in Glasgow's Evening Times, together with a picture of children with the 'elephant in the room' (see Press and Media section).

An online anthology of poetry by the children has been created and hosted on the *To Absent Friends* website as a legacy of the event and the concert was captured on film.



CASE STUDY: Dog Stone

Date: Sunday 01 November and Saturday 07 November 2015

Location: The streets of Edinburgh

Participants: 3 performers, approx. 75 members of the public, mainly families

Devised and performed by theatre company Creative Electric, Dog Stone is an interactive storytelling adventure that explores how imagination is often used as a coping mechanism at times of loss. It was originally created for children, but resonates with audiences of all ages.

It follows the real story of four year old Heather who leaves her memories of her Daddy and Dundee when she moves to Edinburgh to live with her Granny and Grandad. With no children to play with Heather creates her own friend in the form of a stone she finds in Grandad's garden. She ties a piece of string around his neck, walks him around the garden telling him her stories. He is her Dog Stone. Her best friend. But one day Dog Stone disappears too...

“ Many children enjoyed being inside the houses so much they didn't want to leave...we extended our performance time as we had so many families interacting that we couldn't get away! ”

Creative Electric

Participating children said:

“ I have a friend who I can't see but I speak to them too ”

“ Can you tell me another story please? ”

Dog Stone took place on the streets of Edinburgh as part of *To Absent Friends* 2015: outside the National Museum of Scotland; on the Royal Mile; and at Dance Base, Scotland's national centre for dance. Eye-catching white houses caught people's attention, and Dog Stone aimed to engage members of the public as they passed by. Performers encouraged families to share memories, particularly of their Grandparents and of older relatives, and invited children to take part in the storytelling.



Lewie Watson @LewieEh · Nov 1

Great day performing on the streets of **Edinburgh** in **Dog Stone**. Some really beautiful moments shared with the general public.





Dog Stone - an interactive storytelling adventure



CASE STUDY: Gone but not forgotten

Date: Monday 02 November 2015

Location: The Blind Poet, Edinburgh

Participants: Twelve spoken word performers, an audience of around 30, with other pub-goers coming and going

Edinburgh's thriving spoken word scene responded to *To Absent Friends* with *Gone but Not Forgotten*, a night of storytelling and poetry at the Blind Poet pub. The night saw contributions from a dozen different poets, including regulars from the Blind Poetics group, alumni of other leading spoken word groups like Loud Poets, and newcomers who wanted to try their hand in an open mike slot.



Participants said:

“ *Impressive* ”

“ *Heart-warming* ”

“ *Emotionally satisfying* ”

The evening's performances were universally moving, both for those delivering and those listening, and interspersed with lighter, humorous moments. Stories included the tale of a grandparent's escape from the Armenian pogrom, reflections on a teenage suicide, the death of a friend who had been the 'unluckiest man alive', and the sudden death of a parent.





*Gone but
not
forgotten*



CASE STUDY: We remember them well

Date: Thursday 12 November 2015

Location: Leith Dockers Club, Edinburgh

Participants: Around 50 mainly older members of the local Leith community

Led by Citadel Arts, a theatre and writing group working in Leith, *We Remember Them Well* was a warm, friendly gathering of locals at this well-known community hub. Guests were mainly older locals, including retired dockers and their wives, invitees from the Jameson Place sheltered housing complex, people from the I Love Leith Facebook group and a writers' group from South Edinburgh. The event gave people the chance to remember loved ones through words and song.

In advance of the day, people submitted stories, poems, and even a comedy sketch on the theme of remembrance. They were given the option of delivering these themselves or having them read aloud by professional actors. 'Absent Friends' that were remembered in this way included a father, a sister, a close friend, an inspirational primary teacher, and a local minister and councillor. Also featured were stories collected by Citadel Arts through their work on living memory projects with the elderly residents of Leith. This included the life story of one Leither whose widow was in the audience.

“ *It was, by turns, amusing and often touching – and always evocative both of Leith and times past. Thank you all.* **”**
(Citadel Arts member)

“ *First class event* **”**
(Retired Leith man)

Professional writer and raconteur Millie Gray opened the tributes, and members of the writing workshop performed their own self-penned remembrances of those who had died. Music also played a big part. Scots melodies by Laure Patterson on the fiddle caused a spontaneous sing-along, and guitarist John Lamb led a moving rendition of *Sunshine on Leith*. The event included a photo exhibition of Leith memories, and refreshments were also provided. The Dockers Club were very pleased with numbers. Audio recordings were made as a lasting legacy of the day, and an STV crew filmed the event (though were unable to use footage due to technical issues).

Quotes from attendees:

“ *The event was well organised and everything went well thank you* **”**

(Mary Moriarty,
Leith Festival)

“ *It was a lovely event. Thank you for all your hard work.* **”**

(Leith lady who made a tribute to an inspirational school teacher)



*We
remember
them well*



Community Events

Introduction

Scotland is made up of a diverse range of cultures and communities. Communities themselves know best what their strengths, weaknesses, problems and priorities are, and what kinds of events and activities work best for them. What might work for one community may be completely inappropriate in another. Therefore, *To Absent Friends* is designed to be unprescriptive and to provide an opportunity for people to get involved in whatever way seems right to them.

There are several advantages to enabling organisations and communities to conceptualise and host their own events:

- Local or interest-specific organisations can use their existing networks to reach people that national or statutory organisations can find hard to reach.
- It empowers local autonomy and creativity, and the formulation of events that are appropriate and tailored for different communities.
- Locally trusted individuals and organisations model supportive behaviours relating to loss, helping to reinforce the idea that public remembrance is socially acceptable.
- A diverse range of different approaches are tested, providing a range of different ideas, approaches and models to learn from in the future.

Many local organisations and communities participated in *To Absent Friends* by organising events for their own members. Participating organisations included care homes, hospices, sheltered housing complexes, charities, bereavement groups, schools, churches and community centres:

Music Makes My Memories Magical, Peacock Nursing Home, Livingston
Relatives of ex-residents returned to Peacock Nursing Home to hear their loved ones favourite songs performed by professional musicians

Willow Workshop, Ionad na Seann Sgoil, Shawbost, Isle of Lewis
Workshop, led by local craftsperson Dawn Susan, for participants to create objects to remember loved ones by

Dementia Friendly Midlothian Event, Welfare Hall, Dalkeith
Storytelling and poetry to set the scene, followed by a minute's silence, candle lighting, a remembrance tree and a non-religious blessing

Remembering the Light, Falkland Estate, Fife
A simple, creative candlelight ceremony led by poet Jayne Wilding for the bereaved

Remembering You, Letham Gardens, Dunbar
Guests wrote memories on paper and shared them while an entertainer played music

Virtual Remembrance Wall, University of Dundee School of Nursing and Health Sciences
Session on loss and remembrance as part of nursing students' palliative care lecture in which students created a virtual wall of remembrance

Loved and Gone Before, Alexandra Patience with North Coast Community Enterprise Ltd

One-to-one sessions with individuals from the very remote rural community of Sutherland, allowing them to record their memories of someone they have lost

Week of Remembrance, Ardgowan Hospice

Working with secondary school pupils from Inverclyde, creating bucket lists and To Absent Friends walls

To Absent Friends, Waverley Care, Edinburgh

Staff and service users of this HIV and Hepatitis C charity gathered to remember those who have died, with music, poems, candles and a remembrance wall

Week of Reminiscence, Rosepark and Rosehill Care Homes, Lanarkshire

Activities at both centres, including balloon release and an afternoon tea for remembrance

Cafe of Reminiscence, Glasgow Royal Infirmary

Event in staff canteen, encouraging staff to have conversations about death and dying using 'conversation menus' – information and guidance was provided and a memory book created

Wall of Remembrance, ACCORD Hospice, Paisley

Musical memories and stories shared, with written memories displayed on a wall of remembrance

Honouring Memories, St Columba's Hospice, Edinburgh

Creative writing workshop with staff to reflect on patients who have died

Telling Stories to Keep Memories Alive, Marie Curie, Edinburgh

An opportunity for recently bereaved relatives of Marie Curie patients to meet the Bereavement Support Team and share stories, with live music and refreshments

Cafe of Reminiscence, Macmillan Centre, St John's Hospital, Livingston

Conversation over tea, coffee and cake with visitors encouraged to bring a photo or memento of the person they wished to celebrate

Here's To You, Serenity Cafe, Edinburgh

Memorial supper for friends and family who have died due to drug and alcohol use

Festival of Light, Penicuik YMCA-YWCA, Midlothian

Community artist worked with young people recently bereaved to create paper lanterns to be lit and dedicated at a simple ceremony at a local pond

Bridgeton Community Celebration, Bridgeton Community Learning Centre, Glasgow

Celebrating the lives of lost loved ones over soup, tea and coffee and a balloon release

To Absent Friends, Tayberry Storytellers and PAMIS, University of Dundee

A ceremony and storytelling for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities to remember dead loved ones

Remembrance and Film Screening, Limekilns Parish Church, Fife

A service themed around remembrance, including a film screening of To Absent Friends

Film screening and TAF wall, Macmillan Study Day, Edinburgh

Part of the study day was dedicated to reflecting on To Absent Friends, including a screening of the To Absent Friends film, and a chance for delegates to contribute their own personal tributes

Scottish Parliament Dinner, Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh

MSPs from across the political spectrum met to share food and memories, acknowledge loss and celebrate inspirational people who have died

Essence of a Memory Photo Exhibition Tour, various venues across Scotland

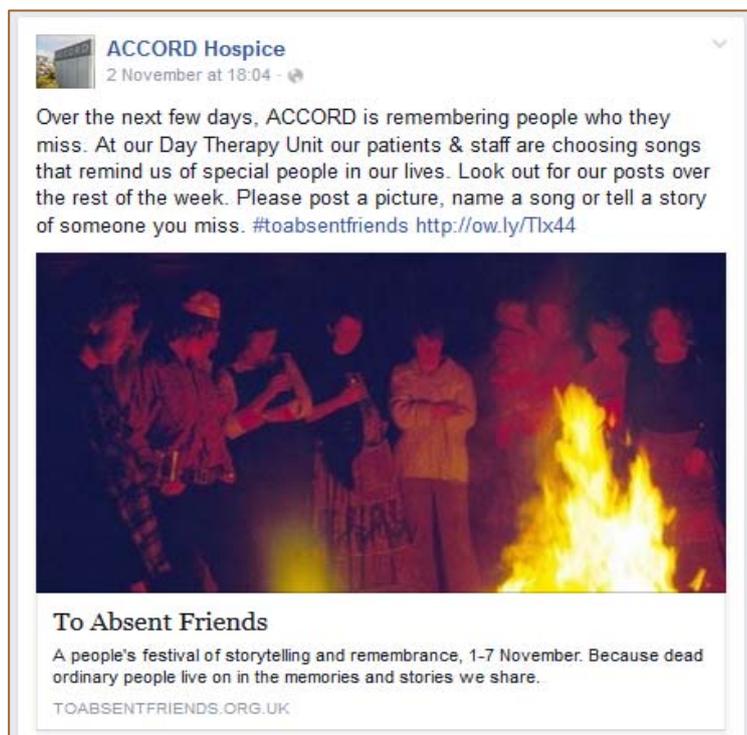
An exhibition made up from the winning entries of the Essence of a Memory Competition, which ran as part of Luminare 2014 toured 18 venues across Scotland in the months running up to the festival. (See page 38 for details.)

Three brief case studies of community events are presented on the following pages, illustrating how three different types of organisations – a hospice, a care home and a charity – interpreted *To Absent Friends* in different ways. They are intended as examples of how *To Absent Friends* can be adapted and taken forwards in different circumstances.

CASE STUDY: ACCORD Hospice, Paisley

At ACCORD Hospice in Paisley, staff, residents and relatives celebrated throughout the week of To Absent Friends, with a range of activities. The week long programme was embraced by the staff of the Day Therapy Unit and supported by the Fundraising Team.

At the Day Therapy Unit, they used music as their medium for remembrance, and listened to many emotive and funny stories through words and song. Keeping to the theme of music, they also wrote memories of loved ones on blank CDs and displayed them on a wall of remembrance.



The hospice was also highly active on social media, encouraging their contacts to share their memories, and many did. This included families remembering their loved one's special music, whether related to a funny story, emotional event or in recognition of a special occasion. The fundraising team planned a variety of posts to social media throughout the week generating a welcome response from the public, and helping to support more openness around talking about death and dying.

“ It's nice to have time and space to specifically reflect on those who we miss and love ”

(Day Therapy attendee)

CASE STUDY: The Peacock Nursing Home, Livingston

The Peacock is a privately-owned nursing home in Livingston with 75 residents. On Tuesday 10 November, they held 'Music Makes My Memories Magical'. Invitations were sent to relatives of ex-residents, asking them to select a piece of music that their lost loved one enjoyed listening to. These pieces of music (listed right) became the focal point of a get together at the home. These songs were then performed by a professional singer and musician, and relatives had the chance to share anything they wanted about their loved one, such as something funny they did in their life.

Favourite Song	Singer
The Impossible Dream	Matt Munro
I Believe	The Bachelors
The Living Years	Mike & the Mechanics
Sweet Talkin Guy or Dream Baby	The Chiffons Roy Orbison
Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag	Unknown
Some Enchanted Evening	Rossano Brazzi
The Wonder of You	Elvis
Travelling Light	Cliff Richard
Anything	Tommy Scott
Take it Easy	Eagles
Vaya Con Dios	Les Paul & Mary Ford
You really got me	Kinks
Magic Moments	Perry Como
Lewis Bridal Song	Kenneth McKellar

“ Our event was a massive success. I think that initially people didn’t know what to expect, but the turnout was great, and we got amazing feedback from the relatives who came along. We were pleased to have a professional singer there and we welcomed everyone with afternoon tea. Naturally there were some tears, but it was a lovely, upbeat afternoon – relatives really welcomed the opportunity to get together and share personal memories. ”

Margaret Bradford,
Activities Co-ordinator, Peacock Nursing Home



CASE STUDY: Waverley Care, Edinburgh

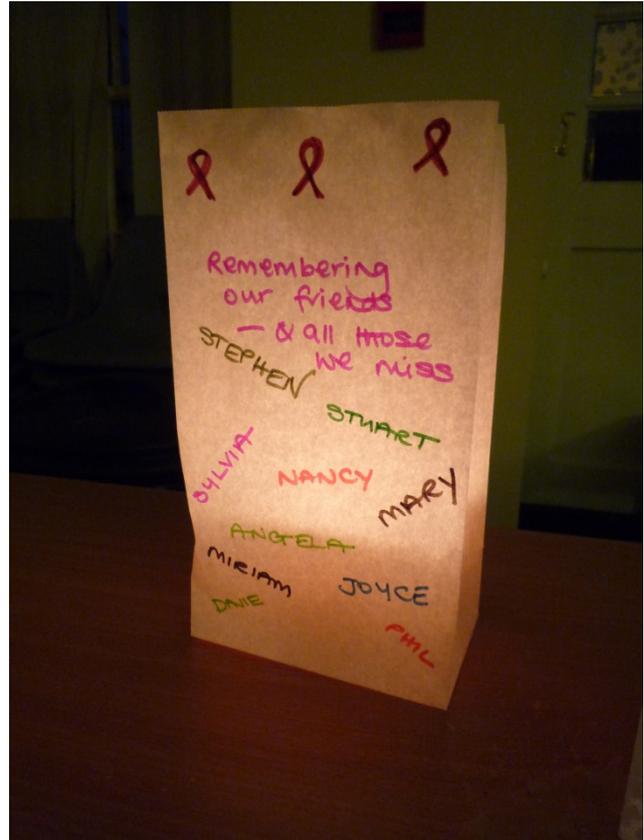
Waverley Care is a charity providing care and support to people living with HIV or Hepatitis C throughout Scotland.

For *To Absent Friends*, they held two gatherings of staff, service users and volunteers. Both events offered an opportunity to remember someone who had died and to take a little reflective space to stop and to honour them. The number of deaths amongst service users in the past 18 months has had a big impact on staff members, some of whom have known and worked with individuals for more than 20 years.

At Mansfield Place, two young musicians from a local school played flute duets, creating an appropriate atmosphere for people to be together in the space without talking to one another. Guests

were offered the opportunity to decorate a candle bag, and poems and pieces of writing were provided to aid reflection. Some people engaged with these, some simply sat and listened. Afterwards, people made a transition from reflection back to engagement with others over tea and cake.

At Milestone House, a remembrance tree was created. Leaves were provided to write messages and a quiet space created for people to take time to reflect and write. The tree was left up until World Aids Day on 1 December when it was taken to a large remembrance event. A similar tree was offered in Waverley's Glasgow offices and, again, its use culminated on World Aids Day.

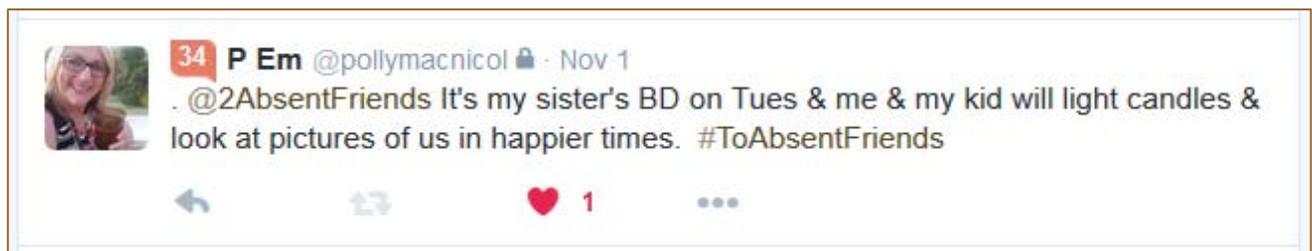


“ The staff who participated greatly appreciated the opportunity. They felt that the space was safe enough for them to engage with their own emotions without ‘looking out for’ other people. Service users have been multiply bereaved and reported that they felt they had been able to honour and respect their loved ones. ”

Marion Chatterley,
Spiritual and Pastoral Care Co-ordinator, Waverley Care.

Private Events

Not everyone who has been bereaved wishes to participate in a public act of remembrance. It is important that these people are not excluded from *To Absent Friends* and that society recognises that people have vastly different situations, experiences and ways of grieving and remembering. With this in mind, the *To Absent Friends* website is designed to be welcoming and sensitive, and provides suggestions for ways to hold private remembrances, either with friends and family, or alone.



Clearly these activities cannot easily be monitored and evaluated like other events - *To Absent Friends* is not about intruding on private grief. However, some people did choose to share their activities on social media, giving an indication that some personal remembrances that were taking place.



Online Events

Web and social media play an increasingly important role in people's lives, and therefore work to promote more openness and supportiveness around loss needs to have a strong online presence. Online activity as part of *To Absent Friends* also has the potential to:

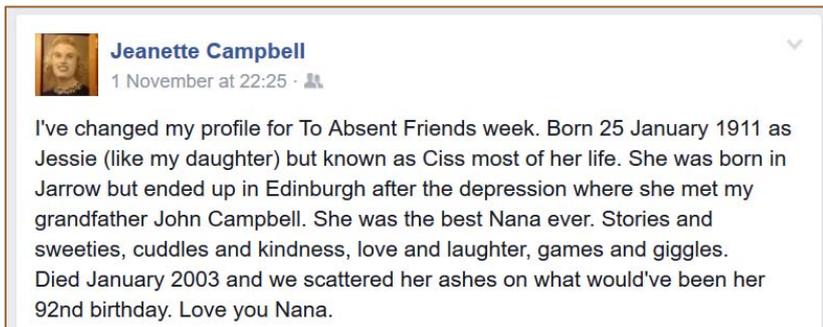
- provide additional opportunities for participation and reflection
- reach people who can't, or don't want to, take part in organised events
- enable people and organisations to easily share their activities on social media
- allow people to actively participate but remain anonymous
- provide another platform modelling that sharing stories of dead loved ones is socially acceptable.

SPPC staff planned and delivered a range of activities across the *To Absent Friends* website and social media accounts, some for the run-up to the week, some for the week itself, and some to continue as an ongoing celebration of *To Absent Friends*.

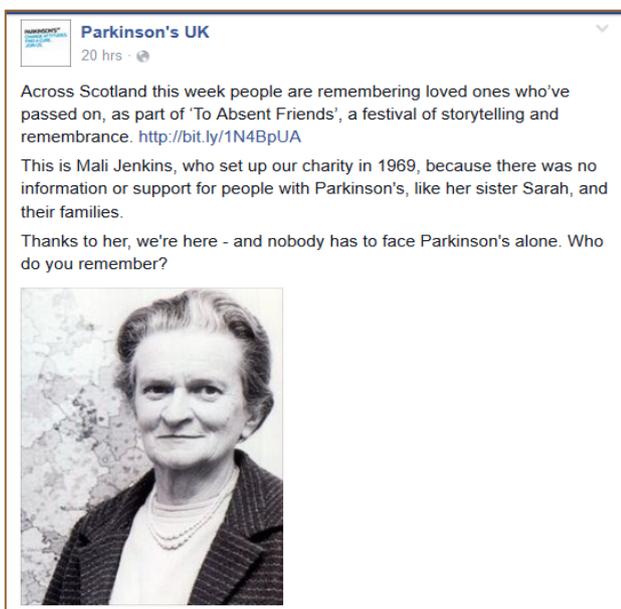
Profile Pictures

During *To Absent Friends* week, people were encouraged to change their Facebook and/or Twitter profile pictures to a loved one who had died.





Some organisations participated too, including the two examples pictured below - Parkinson's UK, who have over 40,000 followers, changed their picture to their founder Mali Jenkins, and St Margaret of Scotland Hospice remembered their colleague Sister Gerard.



It is hard to get an accurate impression of how many people participated in this way. The nature of social media means it isn't possible to track every instance of someone changing their profile picture. Not everyone tagged their tweets, and not everyone's Facebook profile is publicly available. Those that were found, however, proved to be popular. The Parkinson's post, for instance, was liked 276 times, shared 63 times and commented on 25 times. There is likely to be some ripple effect from the instances we are aware of, and some of the profiles which were changed are likely to have been seen by large numbers of people.

“ We've loved providing this opportunity for people to share their loss and memories... People have so much they wish to say to those who have died... It's very moving! Thank you! ”

*Hospice Lecturer,
St Margaret of Scotland Hospice*

Remembrance Playlist

A new section of the *To Absent Friends* website allowed people to dedicate a music video to someone who had died.



the beatles – yesterday

jean wright

When my mum was diagnosed with cancer, our local radio station used to have a segment, "Princess" for that week, and would send out a bouquet of flowers. Someone must have given my Mum's name and when they rang her up on air, they asked her to choose a song. She chose the Beatles "Yesterday" and it was a few years later that I really "linked" the words to how she must have been feeling at that time. Even though she passed away 21 years ago, I still miss her and get emotional when I hear "her song".



the jam – going underground

shirley bailey

This is for my sister, Jackie who died on 22nd Dec 1998. Not a day goes by that I don't think about her. This brings back memories of being teenagers and going to see The Jam in Glasgow and Edinburgh. She always said that Paul Weller's lyrics helped her gain her O Level English and joked that she wanted "Going Underground" played at her funeral. It took a long time to listen to The Jam without a cry. Going to see The Jam exhibition in London recently brought back lots of memories and emotions. A very special part of our lives.

To date, 40 songs have been shared in this way, and the website remains live so people can continue to do so. The Remembrance Playlist also prompted people to share songs directly to social media, and inspired aspects of some community events.

43 Karin from SFAD @KarinSFAD · Nov 11
 Not to late to add your song of #Remembrance @2AbsentFriends @QueenWillRock - Love Of My Life you.tu.be/sUJkCXE4sAA via @YouTube

YouTube

Queen - Love Of My Life (Official Video)



ACCORD Hospice
 6 November at 14:00

Our song of today... #toabsentfriends <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KaFtsqU2V6U>

"Too Young" Nat King Cole

"Too Young," written by Sidney Lippman and Sylvia Dee in 1951 and recorded that same year by Nat King Cole on Capitol Records was a million-selling record an...

YOUTUBE.COM



Ailsa Currie For "to absent friends" week I thought I would share this.... A song from a Paisley girl that got my mother in law Marion on the dance floor at every single event so was requested on many occasions 😊💜 <http://youtu.be/g750ebLVbs>

Feels Like I'm In Love - Kelly Marie | Full HD |

YOUTUBE.COM



Like · Reply · 1 · 5 November at 08:14

Remembering the Greats



st. mirren

DUNKY WALKER

My papa played for Dumbarton, St Mirren and Nottingham Forest and is best remembered for the 1921-22 season at St Mirren where he scored 45 goals in 38 league matches, making him the top scorer in all of Europe. He was very much a family man, having 5 children: 4 girls and 1 boy who tried out for Aberdeen. He fought through World War I and joined up again in World War II but was invalided out due to an old football knee injury. Football was really his life!

(Alison Pendlowski)

The *To Absent Friends* festival is an opportunity for the SPPC to work with new partners and explore ways of engaging with groups whose supportive role in death and bereavement is under-acknowledged. Football and rugby are a hugely important part of Scottish culture, and a great community spirit exists around many local clubs. We wanted to explore how sports clubs might want to interact with the festival, and tailor some opportunities for members of these communities to participate.

A new section created on the *To Absent Friends* website for fans of rugby and football clubs in Scotland to share stories about people that were important to their club. It could be anyone remembered fondly by the club - a player, a manager, a fan, a groundskeeper, a programme seller, even the person behind the club bar. The hope was to create an online gallery with stories from each club.

The idea was widely publicised through a number of avenues:

- direct approaches to Scottish football clubs and supporters' groups via social media
- Football Memories League (a joint photographic archive initiative between the Scottish Football Museum and Alzheimer Scotland)
- Pie and Bovril (Scottish football forum)
- Edinburgh Rugby (details shared in the match programme)
- Scottish Rugby (created an online video to publicise *To Absent Friends* - <https://youtu.be/UF52ajn9V8w>)

Remember The Greats proved less popular than other online activities. Five stories of football greats and two of rugby greats were shared on the *To Absent Friends* website. Again, sometimes people preferred the more spontaneous route of sharing their memories on social media.



brechin city

TOMMY GILMARTIN, PHYSIO

Undoubtedly one of a kind - a man dedicated to his profession who neither sought nor needed recognition for the countless hours he spent treating people.

From the mid-80s into the 2000s, Tommy dedicated much of his free time to helping out, not just the club, but the public at large. He treated the players on training nights and match days and held clinics for the general public on other days. Friday was meant to be his day off, but more often than not you would find a fleet of cars in the car park, and a queue of people in the treatment room. No-one was ever turned away, and everyone left, if not cured, certainly feeling they were one step closer to recovery. Everyone was given time, and no-one was ever charged for his services.

 **Football Memories League.**
1 November at 11:40 · 🌐

To Absent Friends is a festival of storytelling and remembrance, taking place throughout Scotland, 1-7 November. It's an opportunity to share stories of friends and family who have died, but who live on in hearts and memories. For the festival, an online Wall of Remembrance is being created, dedicated to the late greats of Scottish football. Can you think of someone from your club who should be remembered? It doesn't have to be a player, it can be a manager, barperson, steward, or even a long-suffering fan! Send your suggestions, and read the tributes here:
<http://www.toabsentfriends.org.uk/content/football/>

Like Comment Share

You and 4 others like this. Most Recent ▾

 **Rab Mullin** The late John Reid, suddenly taken from us aged just 40 years old. Falkirk fan through and through.. Gone but never forgotten by the lads behind the Hope Street goals. Jamie Finlay Alex Lochrie Martin Finlay
Like · Reply · 👍 3 · 1 November at 12:04

 **Alex Lochrie** left a lot of good memories
Like · Reply · 1 November at 16:33

 Write a reply... 

History Groups

Lost Edinburgh and Lost Glasgow are interest groups on Facebook dedicated to sharing historical photos of the local area, with a combined following of 200,000 people. We contacted them to gauge their interest in participating in *To Absent Friends*, and they shared information about the festival with their followers. This prompted some discussion and sharing among this community: prompting the sharing of stories

 **David Stephen** my grandfather, William stephen, he was a corporal in the royal army medical corps, and was shot in the arm as he jumped off the boat on the shores of Gallipoli, he died from blood poisoning from his wounds in 1926 when my dad was only 4
Like · Reply · 9 hrs

 **Christine Vincenti** The Corries - 'Green Fields of France'. After visiting the Battlefields of France and Belgium, Ronnie Browne announced that he would never sing this song in public again. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyiLfSHSqs>
Like · Reply · 👍 1 · 9 hrs · Edited

 **Mary Haslett** My grandfather, Harry Murray, who ran off to sign up to go to the trenches in France. He lied about his age - only 15 when he signed on. But he survived he said because he was so short - only 5'2". A brave young man at the time!
Like · Reply · 7 hrs

 **Lenny Toshack** Lest we forget....
Like · Reply · 32 mins

 **Lost Edinburgh**
10 hrs · 🌐

This week is To Absent Friends, a people's festival of grief and remembrance, taking place across Scotland between 1-7 November. It's a chance for people to remember loved ones who have died through events and online tributes. On the To Absent Friends website, people can leave stories and photos or add to the remembrance playlist. People are also changing their profile picture to remember someone who has died. Can you remember?
<http://www.toabsentfriends.org.uk/>



Other activities

Feedback from *GLGDGG* members has indicated that people often appreciate and use ideas and resources produced by the SPPC and that they can act as a catalyst for activity. It is therefore important for SPPC staff to explore the development of new ideas and resources.

Essence of a Memory competition



For the second year running, the SPPC initiated the *Essence of a Memory* competition as part of the Luminare Festival of creative ageing, providing a chance for people to get involved creatively, and opportunities to promote *To Absent Friends* throughout October.

The *Essence of a Memory* competition invited participants to take a photo and write up to 50 words

which together evoke a story or memory of a dead loved one. It ran from 1 – 16 October 2015, and was publicised via the Luminare brochure, social media, SPPC and *GLGDGG* e-bulletins, and emails to photography clubs and high schools right across Scotland. There was an over-18s and an under-18s category. Eight winners were selected by writer and former Edinburgh Makar, Ron Butlin, and award-winning Glasgow-based photographer, Colin Gray.

The winning images were displayed at the launch of *To Absent Friends* at the Royal Concert Hall in Glasgow on 29 October, and thereafter at Govan Health Centre from 4 - 11 November 2015. Since then, the exhibition continues to tour various venues across Scotland, including St Andrew's Hospice; Marie Curie Hospice and Kilbryde Hospice. The winning entries are also showcased in an online gallery on the *To Absent Friends* website.

“ It was a lovely exhibition; I had a walk along the corridor and was joined by a few people who stopped to read the words. It would be good to have this again; a changing display helps to engage the public and staff ”

Assistant Senior Nurse
Maryhill Health Centre



Two other exhibitions, one made from winning entries from the 2014 competition, and one exploring the need for the *To Absent Friends* festival, have continued to tour during 2015. Venues included: Ayrshire Hospice (25th Anniversary Conference); Argyll and Bute; Death on the Fringe, Edinburgh; Scottish Government, Victoria Quay; Scottish Government, St Andrew's House; St Margaret of Scotland Hospice; East Ayrshire Hospital; St Columba's Hospice; Queen Margaret University; Crichton University Campus, Dumfries; Dumfries and Galloway Royal Infirmary; Cottiers Theatre; Scottish Parliament; Cruse Conference 2014; Marie Curie Hospice, Glasgow; Talk, TAF, Cornhill Macmillan Centre; Perth Royal Infirmary; Western Isles Hospital, Stornoway; ReadingLasses Bookshop/Cafe, Wigtown, Dumfries and Galloway; GATE event, Aberdeen; Strathcarron Hospice; Dundee Central Library; The Prince and Princess of Wales Hospice; Possilpark Health and Care Centre; ACCORD Hospice; Glenrothes Hospital; St Andrews Community Hospital; Victoria Hospital, Kirkcaldy; Queen Margaret Hospital, Dunfermline; Carnoustie Library.



“ I found writing my short story so cathartic I am slowly filling a wee book with more all about my Dad ”

Jeanette Sultan
Photo Competition Winner

Beer mats

Pubs are an important part of Scottish culture, and hubs of social interaction and storytelling. There is some evidence that pubs are places where men may choose to talk about topics which are not normally explicitly discussed, such as emotions.⁵

To bring the festival into pubs in a way that was sensitive and appropriate, SPPC staff developed a selection of beer mats/ coasters designed to get conversations around to the subject of celebrating and remembering the lives of dead loved ones. Five mats were designed – each had a carefully selected quotation or piece of trivia relating to loss or remembrance, plus a web link to www.toabsentfriends.org.uk



“ *Could I have a full pack please?*

Feedback from my colleagues is that they would be an appropriate subtle message in HPPC if we used them on the coffee tables.

”

Nurse, NHS Fife

⁵ Health Psychol. 2013 Jan;32(1):33-41. doi: 10.1037/a0029874.

The role of alcohol in forging and maintaining friendships amongst Scottish men in midlife
Emslie C¹, Hunt K, Lyons A.

In 2014 SPPC staff worked with St Columba's Hospice and Stewart's Brewery to get 15,000 mats these were delivered to around 150 pubs in the Edinburgh area. Given the success of last year's distribution, a further 35,000 mats were ordered for 2015. Initial discussions with three breweries were positive, but unfortunately all fell through, leaving insufficient time to organise a full delivery run. However, 1,000 beer mats were distributed via an independent Edinburgh pub chain, and beer mats were made available for order to individuals and organisations for their own events. Anecdotal feedback indicates that the mats are well received, and there are several avenues to be explored for next year.



“ I am planning to have a meal for a large group of friends for the first anniversary of my husband's death and when at the Marie Curie cancer centre saw the beer mats.

*I liked 3 of the 5 and wondered if it would be possible to have some...
After the evening I will ask everyone to then leave theirs in a place where others will see it and hopefully bring discussion. ”*

*Extract from an email
from a member of the public*

Samhain Suppers

This year we explored the creation of an event that captures imaginations and has the potential to be personalised and reproduced by a wide variety of individuals and organisations – the ‘Samhain Supper’.

The Samhain Supper is heavily influenced by two established elements of Scottish culture – the Burns Supper and the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain, (pronounced *sow-inn*). The Celts celebrated Samhain from sunset on 31 October to sunset on 1 November, a time when the veil separating the worlds of the living and the dead was thought to be at its thinnest. They brought together the fruits of the harvest and held communal dinners. Burns Suppers are held on the 25th January each year – the first Burns Suppers were held in Ayrshire at the end of the 18th century by Robert Burns’ friends to mark the anniversary of his death. The dinners are a chance to celebrate the life and works of Burns, and include traditional contributions from diners including the Selkirk Grace, the Toast to the Lassies, the Reply, the Immortal Memory, poetry and songs.

Drawing on these two traditions, the Samhain Supper is a chance to come together with friends, family or community members to remember dead loved ones, share food and stories. People might share stories of various special people in their lives, or choose hold a meal in memory of a particular person they all knew. Many will have their own traditions they want to incorporate in the meal – a significant food, a favourite song – others might be glad of suggestions.



41 **Mummy Ninja** @MumOfMerlin · Oct 16

Always have a big Samhain feast with a place set for those who have gone on.

43 **To Absent Friends** @2AbsentFriends

Like cooking? Like chatting? How about having a Samhain Supper for absent friends? We are! toabsentfriends.org.uk/news/news-2015



24 **Katherine Young** @Kate2Spirit · Oct 17

This is our group's tradition also. To break bread with friends is magical we invite the absent to join us.

43 **To Absent Friends** @2AbsentFriends

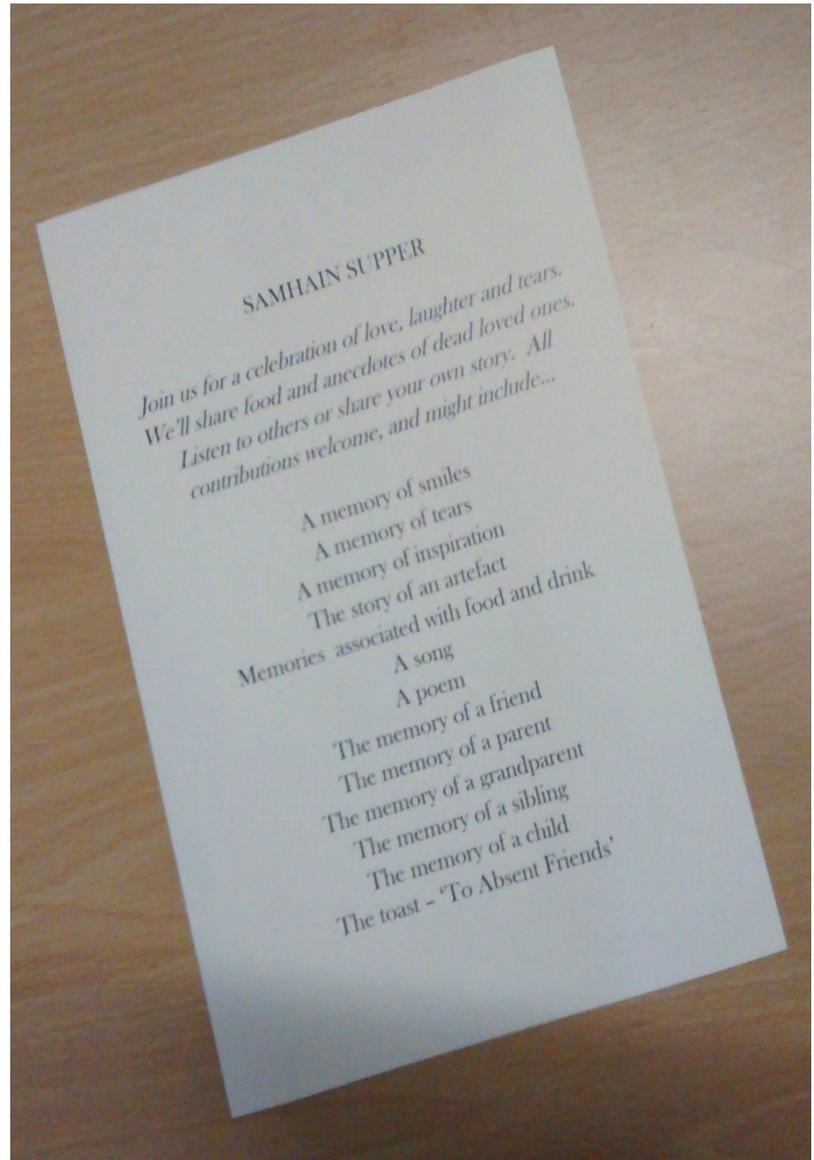
Like cooking? Like chatting? How about having a Samhain Supper for absent friends? We are! toabsentfriends.org.uk/news/news-2015



Four Samhain Suppers were held in 2015:

- **A formal event** – MSPs were invited to an *Absent Friends Supper* in the Scottish Parliament
- **A community event** – Comas, a charity working with drug and alcohol addiction, held a *Here's To You Supper* at the Serenity Community Cafe in Edinburgh
- **A family event** – a family in Dundee held a meal in memory of their Nannie.
- **A couple's meal** – a couple shared food and memories of their grandparents

These different types of events were a chance to explore whether the idea worked, and whether it had the potential to capture imaginations, and to create sensitive and meaningful experiences.



Feedback from participants and enthusiasm on social media illustrated that there is an appetite and goodwill among the public for the concept of remembrance meals of this sort, and that it is worth further promoting this idea next year.

“ It was a thoughtful and enjoyable evening ”

Mike Mackenzie MSP, guest at the Scottish Parliament To Absent Friends Dinner



“ We stopped our busy lives and paused for reflection and thanks for our Nannie, all she had given us and what she meant to us all ... we ate her favourite food: bangers, mash and (burnt) fried onions (we drew a line at kippers!), followed by chocolate and more chocolate. We had a dram (or two) and shared our favourite stories of our Nannie. For those further away, we read their poetry about Nannie and made some hilarious attempts at Face-timing three ways (it was chaos – just how she would have loved it!). We jacked up an old VCR and played a war recruitment film from the Imperial War Museum, in which she proudly was encouraging others to ‘join up’. ”

Partnerships

Health promoting and public health approaches to palliative care advocate the importance of working with communities to create activities that have meaning to those participating in them. Not only does this ensure that activities are culturally appropriate, but it also helps to create community capacity and sustainable activity.

The *GLGDGG* model of working is therefore reliant on the creation of numerous partnerships with various individuals and organisations. Without the commitment and enthusiasm of a wide range of people, there would be no *To Absent Friends* festival, and therefore an important and valuable use of SPPC staff time is initiating and maintaining partnerships with new and existing contacts.

Strengthening old partnerships

A key strength of the SPPC is its networks with those involved in palliative care in Scotland, including all NHS Boards, all hospices, and many key national charities. *To Absent Friends* provided an opportunity to utilise existing partnerships with many of these organisations as activities were developed and publicised. SPPC membership organisations who participated in TAF 2015 include: ACCORD Hospice, Ardgowan Hospice, NHS Fife, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, NHS Lothian, St Columba's Hospice, Marie Curie, Macmillan and Parkinson's UK.

Building on new partnerships

One of the key aims of the festival was to encourage people and organisations outwith the health and social care socials traditionally associated with the Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care to engage in remembrance activities. The 2015 festival built on many partnerships established in 2014 to encourage activity from organisations and individuals not traditionally associated with this area of work.

These included: Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Cramond Kirk, the Scottish International Storytelling Festival, Cambuslang Bereavement Support Group, University of Dundee, Edinburgh Brass Band, Faith in Older People, Isle of Lewis Over 60s groups, Luminare Festival of Creative Ageing, Peacock Nursing Home, Penicuik YMCA-YWCA, the organisers of Portskerra Storytelling Festival, organist John Kitchen, Waverley Care, Scottish Care, Scottish Parliament, St John's Church.

Creating new partnerships

Approaching and working with new organisations takes time, and not all approaches are successful. For example this year significant efforts were made to engage with sports clubs, with little concrete to show for these efforts. Similarly,

“ We cannot thank you enough for your support which allowed us to engage with an audience comprised of our members and the public on the theme of death and dying, which has been a new experience for the Scottish Writers' Centre and one we would certainly consider doing again. ”

*Ruby McCann
Scottish Writers' Centre*

efforts were made to engage with folk clubs – we contacted around 30 clubs about the idea of theming a night 'To Absent Friends'. Having received positive responses from 6, it was not possible to arrange for this year due to the length of time ahead that programmes are planned.

Nevertheless, this year's festival saw the involvement of numerous individuals and organisations that have not previously been involved. These included: Blind Poetics, Bridgeton Community Learning Centre, Citadel Arts, Comas, Dog Stone, Falkland Estate, Govan Health Centre, Letham Gardens Dunbar, South Queensferry and Dalmeny Churches, Alice Mary Cooper, Limekilns Parish Church, PAMIS, Rosepark and Rosehill Care Homes, Scottish Writer's Centre, Scottish PEN.

Having established contact with the above organisations, we will make efforts to maintain and build on these links further in future. Some new contacts were made too late to yield results for TAF 2015, but have the potential to be built on in future to expand reach. For example, a successful meeting was held with Museums and Galleries Scotland (MGS), the national development body for the museum sector in Scotland. MGS publicised details of TAF through their member newsletter, and have invited a speaker from *GLGDGG* to the Scottish Museums Federation Conference in Glasgow in April 2016. Firrhill High School were unable to schedule events during early November, but ran a linked assembly in December. In addition a group of S6 pupils have conducted a school-wide survey to inform the school's approach to bereavement. We also met with a representative from the Beltane Fire Society to discuss the potential of collaboration in future. Contact has also been made with Corporate Communications within the Health Directorates at the Scottish Government, opening up the potential to build relationships and learn from NHS communications teams. Cruse Bereavement Care had planned to be part of this year's festival, and discussions are already underway on how they can participate next year.



“ We have decided to develop it as an annual event, so that we can ensure people who are bereaved during each year are specially remembered ”

Comas



“ The band is extremely committed to the festival and this is now an eagerly anticipated event in our calendar ”

*Peter Ottery,
Secretary, Edinburgh Brass Band*

Publicity/Media Coverage

Publicity and media coverage is an important way of bringing these issues to people's attention and illustrate that it is socially acceptable to discuss them in public. *To Absent Friends* presented many opportunities to engage with the media, though without dedicated press/ PR staff, difficult decisions had to be made about where to target efforts, with tradeoffs between the tasks of actually running the festival versus trying to get national media coverage. Attempts to engage with national media can be time consuming and be unpredictable in terms of success. Local press coverage is also time consuming, but can be easier to achieve, and although these publications have a lower individual circulation their collective reach is great.

Though some national press releases were prepared, it was decided to focus limited available resources on preparing material for specialist publications where enthusiastic contacts could guarantee publication, and also on supporting participating organisations to engage with their local press. National press releases were written and distributed for both the grants scheme and the launch of the festival. Working with local event organisers, separate local press releases were created for events in each area.

Local press coverage isn't easy to track online without paying for the services of a media monitoring company, so it is unlikely the following list is comprehensive. However, publicity generated includes the following:

Specialist media

- eHospice (1 Sep 2015) [*Dragon's Den event gives participants opportunity to be part of Scottish remembrance festival*](#)
- eHospice (7 Sep 2015) [*Competition gives participants chance to remember a loved one who has died*](#)
- eHospice (9 Sep 2015) [*Grants available to support participation in To Absent Friends festival*](#)
- eHospice (26 Oct 2015) [*Festival revives traditions of remembrance*](#)
- eHospice (13 Nov 2015) [*A toast to Absent Friends*](#)
- Marie Curie blog (27 Oct 2015) [*A festival of storytelling and remembrance To Absent Friends*](#)

Scottish Care Magazine

National (Scottish) media

- The List (19 Oct 2015) [*Everything you need to know about To Absent Friends*](#)
- Luminate Festival brochure
- Scottish International Storytelling Festival brochure
- TV Bomb website

National (UK) media

- BBC Breakfast (4 Dec 2015) Feature on *To Absent Friends*
(Viewing figures - 1.5 million)
- Classic FM website [*Ten reasons why the Royal Scottish National Orchestra is one of the most extraordinary in Britain*](#)
(20 Jan 2016)

Local Media

- Edinburgh Reporter (20 Oct 2015) [To Absent Friends, A Festival of Storytelling and Remembrance for Scotland](#)
- Edinburgh Reporter (20 Oct 2015) [Five things you need to know today](#)
- Falkirk Herald
(Circulation – 21,937)
- Glasgow Evening Times (30 Oct 2015) [Concert for our absent friends](#)
(Circulation – 29,951)
- Midlothian Council website (28 Oct 2015) [To Absent Friends – a people's festival of storytelling and remembrance](#)
- Tayberry Enterprise (blog) [Storytelling and remembrance](#)
(4 Nov 2015)
- The Buteman (8 Nov 2015) [Rothesay hospital staff remember 'Absent Friends'](#)
(Circulation – 2,156)
- Stornoway Gazette
(Circulation – 9,549)
- West Lothian Courier (5 Nov 2015) [It's time to remember](#)
(Circulation - 8,513)

International

- Victoria Noe: blog (3 Nov 2015) [To Absent Friends \(You Know Who You Are\)](#)

MEMORIES

Concert for our absent friends



Amy Nicholson, Rion Mann and Matthew Taylor from Craigie High School with the 'elephant in the room'Picture: Colin Templeton

YOUNGSTERS took part in a special concert to remember absent friends.

Children from schools across the city have been able to work

with professional musicians from the Royal Scottish National Orchestra as part of the To Absent Friends festival. It encourages people to remember those who have passed away through storytelling and music.

Last night's concert forms part of a festival of storytelling and remembrance taking place across Scotland from Sunday until November 7.

Music for the concert was composed by the children and was inspired by stories shared by elderly members of the community, of their "absent friends" –

loved ones who are dead but whose stories live on.

Children have also drawn on their own experiences of loss and bereavement.

The project has been made possible by a community grant from the Royal Bank of Scotland.

Other events will be held across the city during the coming week.

Midlothian

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To Absent Friends - a people's festival of storytelling and remembrance

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NEWS BY DATE

- January 2015
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- September 2015

Published on 28 October 2015

People who have died remain a part of our lives – their stories are our stories, yet many Scottish traditions relating to the expression of loss and remembrance have faded over time.

'To Absent Friends', is a festival of storytelling and remembrance which gives an opportunity to revive lost traditions and create new ones. It gives people across Scotland an excuse to remember, to tell stories, to celebrate and to reminisce about people we love who have died.

The second annual 'To Absent Friends' festival will take place across Scotland in early November 2015, and is being supported by Midlothian Council in partnership with NHS Lothian, the British Red Cross and Volunteer Midlothian.

A display will be travelling across Midlothian for a week, giving people the opportunity to share their memories of absent friends on a special memory tree. The display starts off in Dalkeith Library on Monday November 2 before moving to Pescuik Library on November 4 and Lasswade on November 6.

There will also be a range of events in other libraries, care homes and day centres.

- More on 'To Absent Friends' events (media releases)
- To find out about other 'To Absent Friends' events across Scotland, visit the national website

Edition: UK > Community engagement

Festival revives traditions of remembrance

28 October 2015
News | Community engagement



We remember them well, a music and storytelling event, is being held at Leth Cookers Club, Edinburgh, on 12 November

Next week, 1 to 7 November, people across Scotland are being invited to take time out to remember friends and family that have died, as part of To Absent Friends, a nationwide festival of storytelling and remembrance.

The festival hopes to revive ancient traditions of remembering the dead at this time of year, as a way to support those who are experiencing grief and bereavement, and to encourage greater openness about death or dying.

To Absent Friends is part of the year round Initiative *Good Life, Good Death, Good Grief*, run by the [Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care \(SPPC\)](#).

*As a nation, we're not very good at talking about

"We hope through the festival to make it easier for people to talk about loss and grief when they want to and when it helps."

Rothesay hospital staff remember 'Absent Friends'



Staff nurses at Victoria Hospital in Rothesay have been raising money for Bute Palliative Care by marking 'To Absent Friends' which runs from November 1-7.

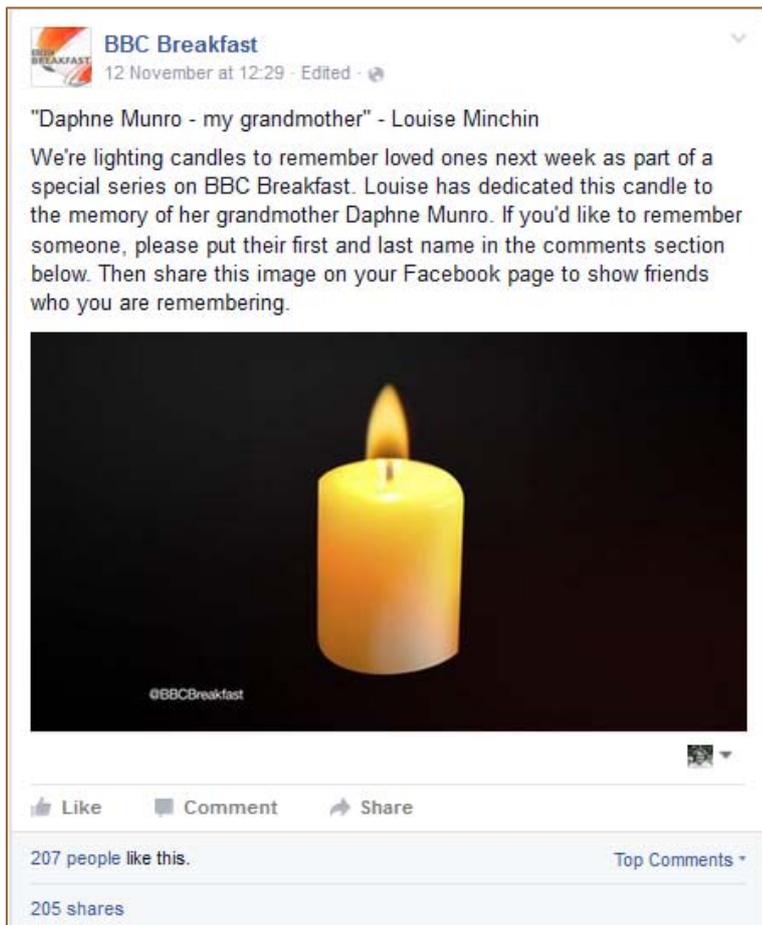
BBC

The RSNO launch concert was filmed by a BBC crew, and SPPC Chief Executive Mark Hazelwood was interviewed. The resulting segment was broadcast at 9am on Friday 4 December as part of a week-long series about death and bereavement.

The piece was backed by social media activity. On the BBC Breakfast page (liked by 282,000 people) posts encouraged people to share to show who they were remembering. The original post was published on 12 November and was well responded to, until the series was postponed because of the terrorist attacks in Paris.



A screenshot of a Facebook post from BBC Breakfast, dated 12 November at 12:29. The post text reads: "Daphne Munro - my grandmother" - Louise Minchin. Below the text is a photograph of a single lit yellow candle. The post has received 207 likes and 205 shares. The comments section is visible, showing several users sharing their memories of loved ones. Comments include: Kelly Crawford (Jan Goodwin - my much missed mum xxx), Colette Robinson (My daughter Caitlin Marie Robinson 2002-2006 & my sisters Natalie & Marie, both gone too soon x sending love to all who have lost a loved one, my candle is for all of you too x), Sarah Barklam (My beloved mum, Elizabeth (always known as Betty) Barklam, who died on 13th October 2009. Always in our hearts. Xx), Kaz Young (Frank chalder Beatrice chalder Annette chalder Dad mam sister miss them all so much xx), Carol Jenks (Bert and Dorothy Neale my Nan and Grandad, i miss them both so much xxxxx), Owen Proudfoot (Ann Burwood my sister. Died in 2009 aged 43. Much missed.), Deborah Harding (Irene and George Moore my mum and dad xx never forgotten), Deborah Gwilliam (I light a candle for Ralph Gwilliam, my father, gone too soon, sadly taken by dementia, the candle burns on for you Dad xxx), Sarah Stokes (John Wilks - much loved and sadly missed husband, father and grandfather. Always in our thoughts and hearts xxx), Michelle Lewis (My wonderful parents: Anne and Brian Davies. Died 35 years apart. Forever loved and missed.), and Tricia Morrison (My beautiful boy Craig Morrison 1992 -2008 age 15 - my beautiful boy who silently and suddenly passed x always in my thoughts forever in my heart x).



A screenshot of a Facebook post from BBC Breakfast, dated 12 November at 12:29. The post text reads: "Daphne Munro - my grandmother" - Louise Minchin. Below the text is a photograph of a single lit yellow candle. The post has received 207 likes and 205 shares. The engagement metrics are visible at the bottom of the post: 207 people like this, 205 shares, and a link to Top Comments.

A new post was shared on 30 November and was viewed 12,000 times, liked 516 times, shared 196 times and attracted 305 comments.

Evaluation

This section reflects on some of the indicators, data and feedback collected in order to inform evaluation of the festival and enable learning to be drawn for future years. This includes information from:

- website metrics
- social media activity
- reach
- activity reports
- an online survey
- qualitative feedback from reports, survey and other sources.

Website metrics

More people visited the website from 1-7 November 2015 than 1-7 November 2014:

www.toabsentfriends.org.uk	1 – 7 Nov 2015	1- 7 Nov 2014	Increase
Page views	5,176	4,944	4.7%
Sessions	2,558	2,229	14.8%
Users	2,152	1,732	24.2%
% new users	79.3%	69.1%	10 percentage points

Web metrics for www.toabsentfriends.org.uk also show that there is a considerable increase in people visiting the website during TAF week in comparison to other weeks of the year. The following table takes a 'normal' week (21 - 27 March) and compares site activity to the activity during TAF week:

www.toabsentfriends.org.uk	1 – 7 Nov 2015	21- 27 March 2016⁶	Difference
Page views	5,176	115	4400%
Sessions	2,558	64	3897%
Users	2,152	61	3428%
% new users	79.3%	85.9	6.2 percentage points

⁶ Web and social media activity varies from week to week. Here, 21 -27 March is given as an example of a 'normal week' – it is the closest non-holiday week of figures available to the time of writing

Social media activity

Twitter

	1 – 7 Nov 2015		1 – 7 Nov 2014		Increase	
	@2Absent Friends	@Life Death Grief	@2Absent Friends	@Life Death Grief	@2Absent Friends	@Life Death Grief
Impressions ⁷	19.6k	26.2K	3.6k	22.2K	444%	18%
Engagement rate ⁸	2.2%	2.5%	1.6%	1.8%	38%	39%
Link clicks	104	192	28	140	271%	37%
Retweets	103	111	0	0	N/A	N/A
Likes	74	107	0	0	N/A	N/A

More staff time was spent on social media engagement via Twitter this year, and this had a clear impact on Twitter activity, which increased greatly in 2015 compared with 2014. Twitter activity from 1-7 November was much higher than usual. To compare to a more 'normal' week's activity: from 21-27 March 2016 @LifeDeathGrief got 364 impressions; 0.8 % engagement rate; 0 link clicks; 1 retweet and 1 like.

Facebook

	1 – 8 Nov 2015	1 – 8 Nov 2014	Increase	21 -27 March ('ordinary week')
New page likes	37	10	270%	1
Total reach	38814	10794	260%	7529

Similarly, Facebook activity was greater from 1-7 November 2015 than 1-7 November 2014, and noticeably greater than in an ordinary week.

Reach

As will have become clear from the earlier sections of this report, it is difficult to put an exact figure on the number of people taking part in *To Absent Friends*: many events did not require tickets; many took place behind closed doors, and much of the activity was online. Nevertheless, it is helpful to try and get a feel for the kind of reach that *To Absent Friends* had, and with this in mind, we consider numbers in terms of three potential levels of involvement:

- **Participation** – those who actively undertook a remembrance activity,

⁷ Twitter impressions are the total number of times tweets were displayed on followers' Twitter feeds

⁸ Engagement rate is the number of interactions to a tweet (replies, retweets etc.) divided by impressions

eg event organisers and performers, people holding their own private remembrances, people writing tributes online

- **Observation** – those who were involved in attending events organised by others, for example in the audience of a concert, or sharing a link on social media.
- **Exposure** – those who had exposure to information about *To Absent Friends*, e.g. reading an article, seeing a video clip.

This creates a spectrum of engagement with *To Absent Friends*, from deep participatory involvement, often by people whose lives are very affected by grief or who have a particular professional interest, to broader, but shallower engagement, often from those whose current lives are untouched by recent bereavement, but who are nevertheless important in changing wider society's perception of death and bereavement. Although this framework helps to structure this section of the report, we acknowledge that in practice the situation is likely to be more complex with different levels of individual response likely within each of the three levels of involvement. Our evaluation faces the challenge of eliciting feedback and/or quantifying the personal, the private, the sensitive and the unquantifiable.

It is also important to consider not just numbers of people reached, but *who* and *where* these people are. For example this year's festival set out to support groups that are frequently socially excluded to engage in meaningful remembrance activities. This section therefore also considers:

- **Demographics** – whether TAF engaged people from different demographic groups
- **Geography** – whether TAF was truly a Scotland-wide activity, or whether activity was concentrated in certain areas.

Assessing the reach of *To Absent Friends* is challenging, resources to do this are very limited and no method is perfect. Appendix D sets out the assumptions and methods we have used to arrive at our conclusions.

Participation

Some events were designed for active involvement, with specific activities for people to undertake themselves. These were often small scale events aimed at particular sections of the community, such as the Honouring Memories creative writing workshop for staff at St Columba's Hospice, or the Penicuik YMCA-YWCA event aimed at young people who were recently bereaved. Feedback gathered suggests that these types of events had a profound impact on people but were resource intensive and required commitment from participants. The table below gives an estimate of the number of people who may have actively participated in a remembrance activity of some sort.

Activity		
'Participatory' events	26 events x 25 people (average)	650
RSNO concert performers		200
Brass Band concert performers		30
Other 'performance' events	8 events x 5 people (average)	40
Private events	estimated	150
TAF website		210
Profile picture changes	estimated	325
TOTAL		1,605 ⁹

Observation

Some events and activities required a lower level of engagement – such as attending an event or sharing/liking a post on social media.

Activity		
RSNO Concert attendees	estimated	250
Brass band attendees		134
Get Organised (Usher Hall)	estimated	150
Other 'performance' events	7 events x 40 people (estimate)	280
Website users		2152
Twitter interactions	2.2% x 19600	431
Facebook likes/comments and shares	1510 total divided by 4 (assuming the same people will engage more than once)	377
TOTAL		3,774 ¹⁰

Exposure

In terms of exposure, the potential reach of *To Absent Friends* was very large, for example due to its featuring on the BBC, in other media and on Twitter. While it is clear that not all those exposed to *To Absent Friends* can be considered to have 'engaged' with it, exposure figures are particularly meaningful in the context of work that is aiming to achieve cultural change. If the goal is to create a time of year where it is socially acceptable to talk about dead loved ones, then every small piece of exposure contributes to cultural change. Just having to glance past a tweet about bereavement in a Twitter newsfeed helps to change the cultural norms – it becomes more normal and ok to read about death or dying or bereavement on social media.

⁹ These figures are based on assumptions outlined in Appendix D

¹⁰ These figures are based on assumptions outlined in Appendix D

Estimates are given below for potential exposure to *To Absent Friends* messages and activities:

Source		
BBC Breakfast	Viewing figures	1,500,000
Print newspapers	Combined circulation	72,106
Online publications	12 x 250	3,000
Twitter impressions	<i>To Absent Friends</i> account	19,600
Facebook shares	Combined following	250,000+
TOTAL		1,750,000 ¹¹

Demographics

Inequalities are pervasive in Scottish society, and consciousness of this helped to inform thinking about *To Absent Friends*. It seemed inappropriate to ask people who attended events about their income, background, race, religion or employment, however useful insights can be gleaned by reflecting on the events that took place.

Age

People of all ages were actively engaged in the festival, with events held which engaged pre-schoolers (Dog Stone) to primary school children (RSNO Concert) to teenagers (Penicuik YMCA-YWCA) to young adults (Blind Poetics) to the middle aged (RSNO audience, MSP dinner) to the very elderly (care home events).

Socioeconomic background

Efforts were made to encourage events that would attract interest from people with various interests and from a wide variety of backgrounds. The case studies provided earlier give some good examples of this. For instance, though finding acceptable social interventions for lonely and isolated groups of disadvantaged older working class men has been identified as a challenge¹², *We Remember Them Well* at Leith Dockers Club brought *To Absent Friends* to the ex-Docker community in a way that was appropriate and appreciated. The *Essence of a Memory* photo exhibition was displayed at Govan Health Centre throughout the week, bringing the issues to the attention of one of the most socio-economically deprived communities in Scotland. Some events held as part of *To Absent Friends* might be expected and appeared to attract attendance from a more affluent audience, for example events at the Usher Hall and the International Storytelling Festival.

¹¹ These figures are based on assumptions outlined in Appendix D.

¹² *Men's Sheds and other gendered interventions for older men: improving health and wellbeing through social activity*. A systematic review and scoping of the evidence base A report for the Liverpool-Lancaster Collaborative (LiLaC) and Age UK by Christine Milligan¹, Chris Dowrick², Sheila Payne¹, Barbara Hanratty³, Pamela Irwin¹, David Neary², David Richardson⁴ April 2013
<http://sphr.nihr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/SPHR-LIL-PH1-MIS-Age-UK-brief-report-FINAL.pdf>

Black and Minority Ethnic communities

The Cultural Liaison Officer at Prince and Princess of Wales Hospice was involved in organising an event which targeted BME communities, and felt that this had had some success. Other than this, without asking people specific questions how they would describe their ethnicity and cultural identity, it is difficult to get a feel for how well *To Absent Friends* engaged with individuals from different ethnic backgrounds. By holding a range of events in a range of places, the festival engaged various groups, and photos indicate that a mix of races was represented at various events.

Marginalised groups

One of the aims of this year's festival was to support groups that are frequently socially excluded to engage in meaningful remembrance activities. Several events were organised specifically for marginalised groups, for example:

- *Here's To You* at the Serenity Cafe was held for friends and families of people who had died after struggling with drug or alcohol addiction.
- Waverley Care provide support to people living with HIV or Hepatitis C, and held two *To Absent Friends* events for staff, volunteers and service users.
- Dementia Friendly Midlothian held an event which was attended by many from local dementia friendly groups.
- *Loved and Gone Before* was a project to reach out to individuals in an isolated rural community in the far north of Scotland.
- Edinburgh Brass Band and St John's Church in Edinburgh put on a free concert, which they publicised through various channels, including the Grassmarket Community Project, a local project aiming to provide support to some of Edinburgh's most vulnerable citizens.

Geography

To Absent Friends events took place right across Scotland, from Portskerra on the far north coast, to the Isle of Lewis in the west, down to Penicuik and out to Dunbar in the east. Inevitably, the biggest concentration of events was to be found in the central belt, although pleasingly not just the big cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, but also smaller central belt towns like Livingston and Shotts. This year 48% of events took place outside the two big cities, compared to 41% last year. Whilst new areas were added and there was growth overall, some areas which saw activity in 2014 did not take part in 2015 (eg Dumfries and Galloway).

To Absent Friends relies heavily on the interest and enthusiasm of local individuals and organisations to organise events. Efforts are made to engage with individuals and organisations across Scotland, however the location of the SPPC office does make it quicker and easier to build networks and activities in the central belt, and Edinburgh in particular. Though the hope is that interest will grow organically in other areas, it is likely that putting time and resource into encouraging and supporting local activity will help the festival to grow in areas where there is currently little or no participation.

Activity Reports

All organisations who had received financial support from the SPPC returned activity reports of their event. (Template attached at Appendix B). Twenty were returned.

The activity reports were designed to get feedback directly from event organisers relating to their own thoughts on the event and any feedback they could collect from participants. Event organisers were asked about their activity's intended audience and impact, to reflect on what they had learned from the experience, what they might do differently next time, and whether they would be likely to participate in *To Absent Friends* again next year. As well as some specific questions, there was space for more general written feedback (see Appendix B).

Do you think your activity has played a positive role in:	Yes	To some extent	Not sure	Probably not	No
Helping people to find ways of dealing with their own experiences of death, dying and bereavement?	74%	21%	5%	-	-
Helping individuals and/or communities to support those who are experiencing difficult times associated with death, dying and bereavement?	63%	26%	11%	-	-
Supporting NHS and/or social care staff and/or volunteers to work compassionately and constructively with those who are dying or have been recently bereaved.	32%	26%	16%	-	26%
Helping people to make practical preparations for their death, for example Will, Power of Attorney and Advance Care Planning.	21%	-	16%	16%	47%
Promoting openness/discussion of death, dying and bereavement. ¹³	94%	6%	-	-	-

	Extremely likely	Quite likely	Don't know	Quite unlikely	Extremely unlikely
Likelihood of taking part again	74%	21%	5%	-	-

¹³ One respondent left this question blank

To summarise:

- All respondents felt their activity promoted openness about death, dying and bereavement.
- A large majority of event organisers felt they were helping people to find ways of dealing with their own experience of death, dying and bereavement and helping individuals or communities to support people through difficult times.
- Fewer events were seen as helping NHS/social care/volunteers or helping people to make practical preparations although there were some events. This is not surprising - these were included in the questionnaire because they are two of the wider aims of Good Life, Good Death, Good Grief, but were not main drivers behind the creation of To Absent Friends.
- Event organisers would be very keen to hold events in future.

Survey

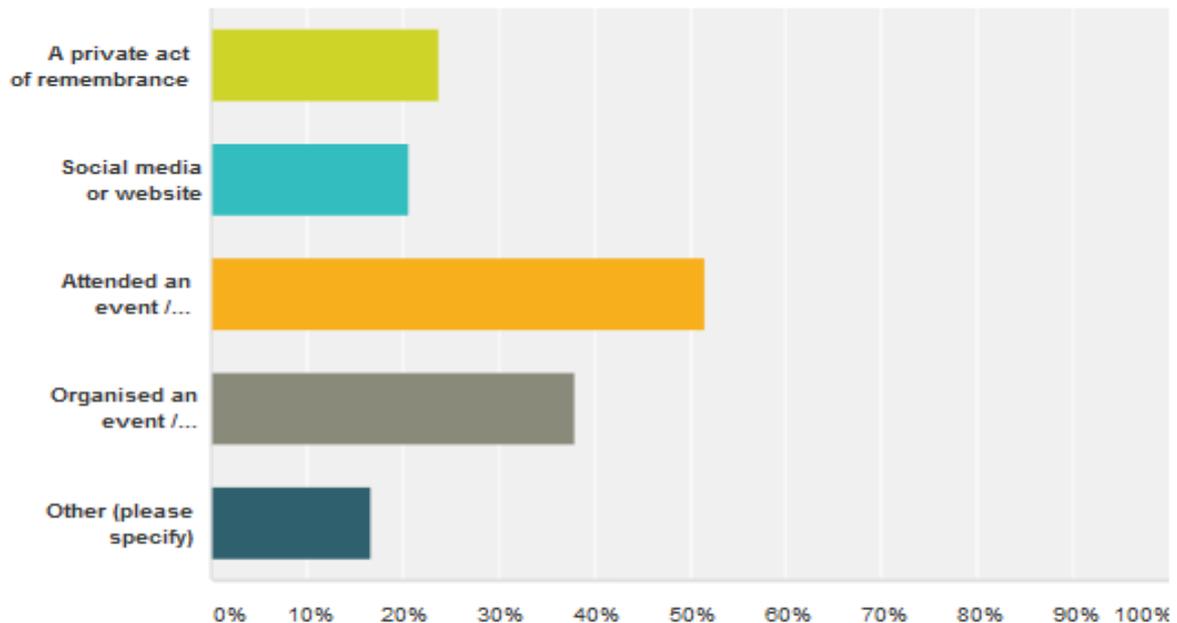
A short online survey was created on Survey Monkey and distributed to event attendees and other parties through event organisers, SPPC member organisations and social media. (The questions asked are attached at Appendix C) 127 respondents replied to the survey. The results are collated in the tables below. As well as multiple choice questions, there was space for general comments.

Nearly a quarter of respondents held their own private act of remembrance, showing a high level of independent, non-centrally co-ordinated activity taking place.

	Yes	No
Was taking part in <i>To Absent Friends</i> a positive experience?	98.36%	1.64%
Do you think that it is helpful for people to have more opportunities to remember and tell stories about people who have died?	97.54%	2.46%
Did you take part in <i>To Absent Friends</i> last year?	52.07%	47.93%
Do you think you will take part next year?	96.67%	3.33%

In what ways did you take part in To Absent Friends 2015? Please choose all that apply

Answered: 126 Skipped: 1



Answer Choices	Responses
▼ A private act of remembrance	23.81% 30
▼ Social media or website	20.63% 26
▼ Attended an event / activity	51.59% 65
▼ Organised an event / activity	38.10% 48
▼ Other (please specify)	16.67% 21
Responses	
Total Respondents: 126	

Qualitative Feedback

A substantial amount of qualitative feedback was gathered through the aforementioned survey and activity reports, and also through emails spontaneously sent to SPPC. This qualitative feedback suggests three key findings:

- Feedback on experiences of *To Absent Friends* was overwhelmingly positive.
- A huge range of different kinds of organisations are ready and willing to participate in *To Absent Friends*.
- Organisations and individuals feel *To Absent Friends* should be more widely promoted.

Specific feedback is quoted below to illustrate the key findings.

Feedback on their experience of To Absent Friends was overwhelmingly positive

98% of survey respondents said they found *To Absent Friends* a positive experience, and this is backed up by anecdotal feedback and collated comments. Among the 73 written comments to the Survey Monkey questionnaire were:

- *'Please keep doing this - a lot of work for you I am sure but it makes a big difference to people's lives and their quality of life'*
- *'I have found the To Absent Friends to be a very constructive and positive project, and a helpful part of my own grieving process. I have also made friends with other people who have participated in the activities'*
- *'We need to do more to help people remember loved ones who have died. Positive memories and reflections can help make life more fulfilling'*
- *'I think it has been a really good initiative and has brought a lot of imagination to a difficult topic'*
- *'It's a lovely event and should be repeated more widely'*
- *'The whole project seems very well organised and promoted and seems to be spreading a feeling that these matters are important.'*

A much smaller amount of mixed or negative feedback was received, and while keeping this in perspective, it is important to give it consideration to ensure that future work is undertaken in a responsive and sensitive manner:

- *'A bit pointless. Do we really need a group-emote of this kind?' (Survey Monkey respondent)*
- *'Some staff said it was morbid and walked past us very quickly!' (Feedback from Glasgow Royal Infirmary event)*
- *'Some of the photos in the exhibition shown in Stornoway caused offence to some. Some people really really didn't like the Day of the Dead photos - I loved them.'* (Survey Monkey respondent)
- *'Need to consider more robust independent evaluation and scaling up positive approaches to date.'*

A huge range of different kinds of organisations are ready and willing to participate in To Absent Friends

Organisations that hold *To Absent Friends* events find them extremely valuable and are very keen to hold future ones. 94% of organisers would be quite likely or extremely likely to hold events at future festivals. The festival has also begun to engage partners who due to time constraints were unable to participate in this year's festival, but are keen to be involved in the future. With repeat participants and new partners, there is much scope for *To Absent Friends* to keep growing.

- *'We cannot thank you enough for your support which allowed us to engage with an audience comprised of our members and the public on the theme of death and dying, which has been a new experience for the Scottish Writers'*

Centre and one we would certainly consider doing again.' (Ruby McCann, Scottish Writers' Centre)

- *'The band is extremely committed to the festival and this is now an eagerly anticipated event in our calendar.'* (Edinburgh Brass Band)
- *'We have decided to develop it as an annual event, so that we can ensure people who are bereaved during each year are specially remembered. All the participants felt it was an important evening to have in the community's calendar. All those attending said they knew of other people who would have benefited from attending.'* (Comas)

Organisations and individuals feel *To Absent Friends* should be more widely promoted

Survey responses expressed regret that more people didn't know about *To Absent Friends* and highlighted a need and desire to see the festival publicised more widely. In addition, many event organisers in their written feedback wished they had done more to publicise their events or had more time to do so.

- *'Excellent concept. It needs to be advertised/ highlighted more.'* (Survey Monkey respondent)
- *'I feel this event should grow into a bigger and better experience. We should give more time to plan this event and be more creative.'* (Survey Monkey respondent)
- *'Still many NHS colleagues didn't know about it. Not sure how that could be addressed. Was there anything on the Intranet for NHS Lothian? Many staff don't have time to help with events but would have loved to.'* (Survey Monkey respondent)
- *'Needs more serious mainstream publicity. Somehow a 'tipping point' must be reached.'* (Survey Monkey respondent)
- *'We did advertise throughout Midlothian, but next year we have a better idea for making it more available to others and letting others know about it.'* (Dementia Friendly Midlothian)

DISCUSSION: Did *To Absent Friends* meet its aim?

It is clear that a huge amount of activity took place as part of *To Absent Friends* 2015, and it is important to reflect methodically to see whether the festival met its defined aims.

Aim 1 - Model openness about remembering, celebrating, reminiscing and sharing stories of dead loved ones

Several high profile events were held that illustrated that remembering, celebrating, reminiscing and sharing stories of dead loved ones is socially acceptable. These included the RSNO concert and launch, a dinner in the Scottish Parliament, an event in the Scottish Storytelling Centre and many others, as well as activity online and on social media.

Aim 2 - Create a focal point which encourages participation from existing GLGDGG members

Numerous existing *GLGDGG* members participated in the festival, including: ACCORD Hospice, Ardgowan Hospice, NHS Fife, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, NHS Lothian, St Columba's Hospice, Marie Curie, Macmillan, Parkinson's UK, Cambuslang Bereavement Support Group, University of Dundee, Edinburgh Brass Band, Faith in Older People, Isle of Lewis Over 60s groups, Peacock Nursing Home, Penicuik YMCA-YWCA, the organisers of Portskerra Storytelling Festival, and Waverley Care.

Aim 3 - Encouraging people and organisations outwith the health and social care socials traditionally associated with the Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care to engage in remembrance activities

Many people and organisations that are not in any way associated with palliative or end of life care got involved in the festival, including: the Scottish International Storytelling Festival, organist John Kitchen, St John's Church, Blind Poetics, Bridgeton Community Learning Centre, Citadel Arts, Comas, Dog Stone, Falkland Estate, South Queensferry and Dalmeny Churches, Alice Mary Cooper, Limekilns Parish Church, RSNO, Scottish Writer's Centre, Scottish PEN.

Aim 4 - Increasing the number of events held in TAF 2015 compared to TAF 2014

To Absent Friends 2015 saw:

- an increased number of events, up 66%, from 27 in 2014 to 45 in 2015
- a greater variety of events, including street theatre and spoken word events for the first time
- a 24% increase in website users from last year during the week of *To Absent Friends*
- increased social media activity, including a fivefold increase in Twitter

- impressions¹⁴ and a 37.5% increase in engagement rate
- a wider geographical spread of activity, with 48% of events taking place outside Edinburgh and Glasgow compared to 41% in 2014.

Aim 5 - Supporting groups that are frequently socially excluded to engage in meaningful remembrance activities

Several events were organised specifically for marginalised groups, including families of people who had died after struggling with drug or alcohol addiction; people living with HIV or Hepatitis C; people with dementia; people living in an isolated rural community; people living in Care Homes. Other events made efforts to be socially inclusive, for example Edinburgh Brass Band and St John's Church invited members of the local homeless community to their concert, and the Essence of a Memory photo exhibition was displayed at Govan Health Centre.

Aim 6 - Creating opportunities for media coverage

With coverage ranging from the Stornoway Gazette (circulation 9549) to BBC Breakfast (1.5 million viewers), media coverage exceeded expectations.

Aim 7 - Learning more about what makes a culturally-acceptable opportunity to remember dead loved ones in Scotland

The general enthusiasm of those participating in the festival, and feedback gained, indicates that *To Absent Friends* provided a welcome and culturally-acceptable opportunity to remember dead loved ones. Despite the breadth and range of activity, negative feedback and complaints about the festival were almost non-existent, suggesting that whilst the festival may not be for everyone, it is generally acceptable. Many people gained something positive from participating in *To Absent Friends*, and online activities such as the *To Absent Friends* tribute wall, and the Remembrance Playlist were well received. Samhain Suppers worked well this year, and might be something that people wish to hold more widely in future years. When given the opportunity, individuals and communities can be hugely imaginative and creative about how they want to remember lost loved ones, and the best way of ensuring an activity is culturally acceptable is to empower communities to organise their own events. The SPPC can support this through providing ideas, resources, access to networks, support with publicity and small seed corn grants.

(Learning gained from this year's festival is discussed in further detail in the next chapter.)

¹⁴ Twitter impressions are the total number of times tweets were displayed on followers' Twitter feeds

CONCLUSIONS: What have we learned?

This section considers the festival as a whole, and reflects on how this year's activities can inform future work.

Local ownership is the key ingredient for success

Events that were best attended or particularly well-received were, in general, conceived and organised by one or two enthusiastic individuals, for a community of which they were part. Usually, these events had little or no input from SPPC staff, and often the ideas behind them were unique to the particular community in question. For example, through keen local champions, activities were held on Edinburgh's Spoken Word scene, among retired dockers in Leith, among people with learning disabilities in Dundee, among people bereaved by suicide, and many, many more.

In contrast, without local enthusiastic champions to engage football and rugby communities, SPPC efforts to work with these communities were largely unsuccessful. In 2014 beer mats were successfully distributed by a local Edinburgh brewer with the support of a local Edinburgh hospice. This year, more direct approaches to brewers without such local community support were unsuccessful.

This is a practical confirmation of one of the key principles upon which *GLGDGG* bases its approach:

'.. without community involvement in the development of initiatives, they are likely to lack local support, be misguided and therefore be unsustainable. Any approach taken to this issue should therefore include both 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' elements. There should be a clear focus on engaging, encouraging and assisting communities to find ways of developing constructive and healthy approaches to death, dying and loss.'

SLWG7 report

To Absent Friends enables local creativity

It is clear from the fantastic range of unique and original events that took place that a key strength of the festival is its ability to be adapted to meet the needs and passions of the individuals and communities involved. From concerts, to craft events, to storytelling, to poetry, to meals – *To Absent Friends* can be whatever people need it to be.

To Absent Friends has the potential to engage people from all walks of life

As this report illustrates, *To Absent Friends* prompted engagement from north and south, rural and urban, old and young, rich and poor, from people from various cultures and backgrounds and from people with varying circumstances and experiences of loss. Similarly, enthusiasm to create and organise events is not confined to those working in the fields of palliative and end of life care, but inspires involvement from people working in various other fields such as the Arts. Some people come to the festival in a professional capacity and for others engagement

is primarily in a personal capacity, and often these boundaries are blurred. Though clearly there is a desire to expand further and engage more people, this year's festival illustrates that participation in *To Absent Friends* does not have to be confined to a narrow section of the Scottish public, but has the potential to appeal to people from all walks of life.

Nevertheless, it is also important to remember that participation in *To Absent Friends* will not appeal to everyone – people have different ways of experiencing grief, and different life circumstances, and not all will wish to participate in *To Absent Friends*.

SPPC plays a valuable role growing the festival

People appreciate and use ideas and resources produced by the SPPC, and they acted as a catalyst for participation in *To Absent Friends*. The photo exhibition is an excellent example - it has not been difficult to find organisations that are willing to host the exhibition. The idea of the Remembrance Playlist was adapted for use by many, as was the idea of the '*To Absent Friends*' tribute wall. The *To Absent Friends* website provides information and publicity for involved organisations and a source of web-based activities that can be shared on social media. In some cases the SPPC was able to provide help through its networks, for example by linking up a local community group with a local hospice to provide practical support and information for their event.

The Samhain Supper should be explored and promoted further in future years

Four completely different types of Samhain supper were held – from the intimate and private to the public and formal. Feedback from participants indicate that each one was a unique and worthwhile event. This is an idea worthy of further exploration and promotion in future and has the potential to be adapted and personalised for different situations, or even used as a charity fundraising event.

Money helps

Though there is plenty of creativity and enthusiasm about participating in *To Absent Friends*, a barrier to participation can be money. In the current financial climate of extremely limited resources, providing just a small amount of money can provide the support an organisation needs to undertake something amazing within their local community. With the support of funding from the Scottish Government, *GLGDGG* funded organisations to put on 23 events, usually giving grants of around £250. In each case individuals and communities also contributed their own assets to the events whether this was time, energy, skills, knowledge, venues, networks and/or money. These individual and community assets were generally greater than the value of the grants.

Events funded in this way made up approximately 51% of the festival. Many organisations and individuals chose to organise their own separate unfunded events. Nearly a quarter of survey respondents had organised their own private acts of remembrance. The existence of a *To Absent Friends* festival therefore acted

as a stimulus and focal point for a range of remembrance activity, multiplying the effect of funding.

The expectation is that, with time, *To Absent Friends* will become an established part of the calendar, and communities will be able to plan events without the support of this kind of funding. However, in the meantime it is important to support organisations to explore and trial new ways of engaging with their communities, and financial support is part of this.

Time to plan helps

Good Life, Good Death, Good Grief work such as *To Absent Friends* is one part of a wider work programme undertaken by the SPPC, and has no dedicated staff or recurrent and predictable funding source. This poses challenges in committing staff time to this work, and in making mid-term and long-term work plans. Planning for events such as *To Absent Friends* is usually undertaken in amongst other activities, and starts 3 - 4 months in advance. Participants indicate in their feedback that their events, and the festival, would have benefited from more promotion, and this is only possible with more time to plan and this in turn requires greater capacity and more predictability of funding.

However, in December 2014 the SPPC learnt that its application to the Royal Bank of Scotland for a Community Engagement grant to fund work with the RSNO had been successful. This allowed planning of a more ambitious and complex project to begin 11 months in advance of the festival, with activity being supported by RSNO staff, networks and resources. The value of this longer planning time period can be seen by looking at the end product which creatively engaged with young and old people from across Scotland, and resulted in significant media coverage on the BBC (see page 18).

Supporting and growing *To Absent Friends* takes time, knowledge and skills and occasional disappointments

In the first two years of the festival SPPC has made use of existing networks and contacts, as a quick and relatively resource-light approach to getting things off the ground. Many of the individuals and organisations who are easiest to access through SPPC networks have already been contacted and engaged. Experience in 2015 suggests that many organisations and individuals outwith these networks are receptive to the idea of participating in the festival. However, identifying and engaging new individuals and networks is relatively time intensive. In addition, as has been illustrated by efforts to work with sporting communities, engaging new audiences isn't always successful. Engaging with new audiences, supporting and publicising local activity, producing resources and following through new ideas all takes the time of dedicated staff.

A little extra capacity can make a big difference

This year, thanks to Scottish Government funding, the SPPC was able to employ a temporary additional member of staff for 40 days in the run up to the festival. Without this member of staff it would not have been possible to: update the website

to a high quality; explore new ideas such as the Remembrance Playlist and Gallery of Greats; work with organisations on local press releases; increase social media reach; capitalise on the potential of events to generate publicity; produce this report; grow networks, for example to include many new arts organisations and Museums and Galleries Scotland.

We were fortunate to secure the services of a skilled and knowledgeable freelance to undertake this work, who brought with him new perspectives and networks, and built new relationships on the SPPC's behalf. Given that organisational knowledge¹⁵ is one of the SPPC's assets, a more ideal solution would be to find funding to support the employment of a more long-term member of staff, to ensure some consistency as relationships are built and learning accumulated.

Given the importance of the SPPC in supporting organisations and providing ideas and resources, SG funding had a hugely positive effect on the impact and reach of this year's festival. If a source of similar funding is not secured for next year it will pose a significant challenge to further development of the festival.

Media interest comes in all shapes and sizes

Publicity and media coverage is an important way of bringing issues relating to death, dying and bereavement to people's attention and illustrate that it is socially acceptable to discuss them in public.

Experience from previous *GLGDGG* media engagement work has shown that without dedicated PR staff, it is not effective use of the SPPC's limited resources to try to generate national media coverage by attempting to guess what the mass media will be interested in and sending out corresponding press releases. Rather, the SPPC has had most success in achieving media coverage when it has focused its resources on creating intrinsically meaningful activities that, through their innovative nature, spontaneously attract media interest. BBC coverage of the RSNO launch is a good example of this, as is coverage from the arts magazine *The List*. Sending contributions to specialist publications is an (almost) guaranteed way of publicising work, and tailoring local media press releases has also been effective, though time consuming.

There is great scope for future growth and positive impact

After two years the experience of *To Absent Friends* is that it is acceptable, readily understood, engages diverse organisations and individuals, is positively received, easily adaptable, of meaningful significance to participants and of near-universal relevance. It is therefore plausible to suggest that there is great scope for *To Absent Friends* to grow in future. Factors likely to determine growth include; the capacity of SPPC to both support existing participants whilst also identifying and engage new individuals and networks, media profile generated and the extent of any 'snowball effect' whereby existing participants and their activities generate wider participation.

¹⁵ An exploration of the meaning of 'organisational knowledge' is available here: <http://www.knowledge-management-tools.net/introducing-organizational-knowledge.html>

The value of *To Absent Friends* cannot be measured in numbers alone

Although *To Absent Friends* reached a wide number of people, its effectiveness also lies in the depth of engagement which some people have with the festival. It's clear from feedback from organisers, participants and audiences that remembrance has a deep and lasting effect on them.

- *'I was not able to be actively involved this year, but opted simply to change my profile picture on FB to photo of my parents. Found it very moving to see them every time I logged on, and I did a lot of remembering that week.'* (Survey Monkey respondent)
- *'I have found the festival really helpful in talking to my own family and friends about these issues and remembering people we have lost.'* (Survey Monkey respondent)
- *'It also brought a lighter side and humour towards discussing funerals. Some tenants heard from others about their own funeral plans and thought that this was a good idea and would look into it. One of the tenants made a joke about crematoriums recycling coffins, this started a hilarious conversation about them starting a funeral business, our tenants who are handymen could make coffins, our card making group could do orders of service and cards, our flower arranging group could do the flowers and lastly we could do funeral teas, we laughed so hard the tears were coming out of our eyes.'* (Letham Gardens attendee)
- *'I really enjoyed the evening, especially talking to the support team and people in the same situation. I went home very contented and so pleased to talk about my husband Brian. It was like another memory to remember and keep alive.'* (Marie Curie attendee)
- *'A bitter sweet experience full of laughter and tears.'* (Survey Monkey respondent)
- *'I thought it was a lovely event and my Mum enjoyed it too. I have sent some photos I took at the exhibition to family in Colombia and it has meant a lot to them. I know I was a wee bit teary at first, but actually, I found it a really nice thing to be involved with and a really helpful way for me to express some of my feelings - so again my heartfelt thanks.'* (photo competition winner)
- *'It was exceptionally moving - from the poetry and photographs to the superb music and interviews.'* Attendee at Launch event

Acknowledgements

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APPENDIX A: Events

Below are listed the events SPPC staff were aware of – it is likely that other events happened that are not listed here.

Date	Event (and organised by)	Venue	Description	Support by small grant?	Held in 2014?	Approx. attendance	Sample feedback
22 Oct	RSNO pre-concert performance	Aberdeen Music Hall	A concert created by professional musicians and schoolchildren from Aberdeen, inspired by personal losses and the stories of older people living in the community.	N	N	Not known	-
29 Oct	Music of Memories (RSNO)	Royal Concert Hall, Glasgow	Concert created by professional musicians and schoolchildren, inspired by 'absent friends' stories of local care home residents	N	Y	200	Brilliant concert this evening @RSNO @2AbsentFriends #Glasgow such a wonderful project to have been part of. Well done all #Cellist
31 Oct	Breakfast Club (Kirk members)	Cramond Kirk, Edinburgh	Cafe of reminiscence held after a short Kirk service	N	N	Not known	-
1 Nov	A Time Of Reflection (Fife Choose Life)	St Columba's Church, Glenrothes	Short talks, poetry readings and music, to remember those who have tragically lost their lives to suicide	Y	N	17	'I hope things continue to grow from the event. It was good to have the opportunity to be involved.'

Date	Event (and organised by)	Venue	Description	Support by small grant?	Held in 2014?	Approx. attendance	Sample feedback
1 Nov	A Hearth For Old Stories (Scottish Storytelling Centre and Margot Henderson)	Scottish Storytelling Centre, Edinburgh	Poet and storyteller Margot Henderson uses story, song and silence to help people remember loved ones who have died	Part	Y	10	-
1 Nov	Cambuslang Remembering (Cambuslang Bereavement Support Gp)	Flemington Hallside Parish Church, Cambuslang	Lighting of candles and balloon release with opportunity to meet the Bereavement Support Group	Y	Y	80	'I will never forget it' 'It was a beautiful moment'
1 and 7 Nov	Dog Stone (Creative Electric)	Public spaces across Edinburgh	Interactive storytelling adventure exploring how imagination can be used as a coping mechanism in the event of loss	Y	N	75	'Thank you so much for supporting Dog Stone. We've really enjoyed working with <i>To Absent Friends</i> and would be keen to do so again in the future.'
1 – 7 Nov	Loved And Gone Before (Alex Patience and North Coast Community Enterprise Ltd)	Community settings in the far north of Scotland.	One-to-one sessions with people from hard to reach groups, allowing them to record their memories of someone they have lost	Y	N	5	'This kind of work is a key element of what I feel our contemporary society needs to live well and in health.'

Date	Event (and organised by)	Venue	Description	Support by small grant?	Held in 2014?	Approx. attendance	Sample feedback
1 – 7 Nov	Week of Remembrance (Ardgowan Hospice)	Ardgowan Hospice	Working with secondary school pupils from Inverclyde, creating bucket lists and an Absent Friends wall	Y	N	100	'Ideas worked well and the participants enjoyed the experience. Hopefully next year we will get all the schools involved. I think the learning is that we left it too late for everyone to be fully engaged.'
1 Nov	Samhain Supper (a private family event)	Family home, Edinburgh	A couple shared food and memories of their grandparents	N	N	2	'I did wonder when I decided to do a Samhain Supper whether it'd feel awkward trying to pay tribute to our grandparents over dinner. 'So...tell me about your Grandad...' In the end, chat just followed from the music and the food. Once the first story happens, 'My Grandad used to say...' others follow. Sadly, neither Jo or I will meet each other's grandparents, so getting to hear about hers is not only interesting in itself, but also helps me understand where she's coming from.'

Date	Event (and organised by)	Venue	Description	Support by small grant?	Held in 2014?	Approx. attendance	Sample feedback
2 Nov	Get Organised (John Kitchen)	Usher Hall, Edinburgh	A programme of organ music in memory of absent friends by organist John Kitchen	N	Y	120	-
2 Nov	Courage In The Name of Freedom of Expression (Scottish Writer's Centre and Scottish PEN)	Mitchell Library, Glasgow	Scottish Writers' Centre and Scottish PEN remember writers, poets and journalists who have given their life for freedom of expression	Y	N	30	'We feel we achieved a great deal as a result of funding support and being able to address a specific issue relating to death as a means to get people talking about death. Stories and poems shared were inspiring. This is an event we would do again.'
2 Nov	Gone But Not Forgotten (Max Scratchman and Blind Poetics)	The Blind Poet, Edinburgh	A night of storytelling celebrating the lives of inspirational people with professional storytellers and open mike slots	Y	N	30	Words like 'impressive', 'heart-warming' and 'emotionally satisfying' were used and we felt that the audience were engaged... there was a very low drift-off rate.'
2 Nov	<i>To Absent Friends</i> (Waverly Care)	Waverley Care, Edinburgh	Staff and service users of this HIV and Hepatitis C charity gathered to remember those who have died with music, poems, candles and a remembrance wall	Y	Y	25	'Service users have been multiply bereaved and reported that they felt they had been able to honour and respect their loved ones.'

Date	Event (and organised by)	Venue	Description	Support by small grant?	Held in 2014?	Approx. attendance	Sample feedback
2 – 6 Nov	Week of Reminiscence (Rosepark and Rosehill Care Homes)	Rosepark and Rosehill Care Homes, Lanarkshire	Activities at both centres, including balloon release and an afternoon tea for remembrance	N	N	Not known	'We had a great week. Look forward to next year'
3 Nov	Macmillan Study Day (Macmillan)	Edinburgh	Part of the study day was dedicated to reflecting on <i>To Absent Friends</i> , including a screening of the <i>To Absent Friends</i> film, and a chance for delegates to contribute their own personal tributes.	N	N	Not known	-
3 Nov	Cafe of Reminiscence (NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde)	Glasgow Royal Infirmary	Event in staff canteen, encouraging staff to have conversations about death and dying using 'conversation menus'. Information and guidance was provided and a memory book created	Y	Y	45	'One nurse said that she thought what we were doing 'was a lovely thing'. Some staff said it was morbid and walked past us very quickly! Another staff member said 'we should be holding events like this every month'
3 Nov	Don't Mention The Coal Scuttle! (Faith in Older People)	St John's Episcopal Church, Perth	Discussion about bereavement based on the book of the same name, which features real experiences and anecdotes about the loss of a partner	N	N	Not known	-

Date	Event (and organised by)	Venue	Description	Support by small grant?	Held in 2014?	Approx. attendance	Sample feedback
3 Nov	Wall of Remembrance (ACCORD Hospice)	ACCORD Hospice, Paisley	Musical memories and stories shared, with written memories displayed on a wall of remembrance	N	N	Not known	<i>'It's nice to have time and space to specifically reflect on those who we miss and love'</i>
4 Nov	Honouring Memories (St Columba's Hospice)	St Columba's Hospice, Edinburgh	Creative writing workshop with staff to reflect on patients who have died	Y	Y	5	'The workshop provided a safe place to express thoughts and ideas with colleagues around our own 'absent friend'.'
4 Nov	Telling Stories To Keep Memories Alive (Marie Curie)	Marie Curie, Edinburgh	Opportunity for recently bereaved relatives of Marie Curie patients to meet the Bereavement Support Team and share, with live music and refreshments	Y	N	27	'Informal, inviting, pleasant, informative, relaxed. I felt able to unwind and unload.'
4-10 Nov	Essence of a Memory Exhibition (Govan GP and practice team)	Govan Health Centre, Glasgow	Public exhibition of winning entries from photo competition	N	N	Not known	-
5 Nov	Cafe of Reminiscence (NHS Lothian staff)	Macmillan Centre, St John's Hospital, Livingston	Conversation over tea, coffee and cake with visitors encouraged to bring a photo or memento of the person they wished to celebrate	N	N	Not known	-

Date	Event (and organised by)	Venue	Description	Support by small grant?	Held in 2014?	Approx. attendance	Sample feedback
6 Nov	RSNO pre-Concert performance	Usher Hall, Edinburgh	A concert created by professional musicians and schoolchildren from Portobello, inspired by personal losses and the stories of older people living in the community.	N	N	Not known	-
6 Nov	Here's To You (COMAS)	Serenity Cafe, Edinburgh	Memorial supper to those who have been lost to drug and alcohol use.	Y	N	8	'Such a lovely reading. Actually brought a tear to my eye. About all the lost loved ones.'
6 and 13 Nov	Festival of Light (Penicuik YMCA-YWCA)	Penicuik YMCA-YWCA, Midlothian	Community artist worked with young people recently bereaved to create paper lanterns to be lit and dedicated at a simple ceremony at a local pond	Y	Y	6	'Barriers of age, class and experience have been broken down allowing us all to participate in a rich remembering of our lost loved ones'
7 Nov	RSNO pre-Concert performance	Glasgow Royal Concert Hall	A concert created by professional musicians and schoolchildren from Glasgow, inspired by personal losses and the stories of older people living in the community.	N	N	Not known	-
7 Nov	Bridgeton Community Celebration (Bridgeton Community)	Bridgeton Community Learning Centre, Glasgow	Celebrating the lives of lost loved ones over soup, tea and coffee and a balloon release	N	N	Not known	-

Date	Event (and organised by)	Venue	Description	Support by small grant?	Held in 2014?	Approx. attendance	Sample feedback
	Learning Centre)						
7 Nov	<i>To Absent Friends</i> Concert (Edinburgh Brass Band)	St John's Church, Edinburgh	Honouring absent friends with a candlelit concert of the melancholy and the magnificent	Y	Y	134	'What a fantastic evening great music, great company, brill. Well attended concert with great comments from people as they were leaving'
8 Nov	Remembering Nannie (Private family event)	Family home, Dundee	A family Samhain supper.	N	Y	5	
10 Nov	Music Makes My Memories Magical (Peacock Nursing Home)	Peacock Nursing Home, Livingston	Relatives of ex-residents return to hear their loved ones favourite songs performed by professional musicians	Y	Y	26	'I was reluctant to return to the home, but so glad I came to the event'
10 Nov	Willow Workshop (Cabraich Community Arts Group)	Ionad na Seann Sgoil, Shawbost, Isle of Lewis	Workshop, led by local craftsperson Dawn Susan, for participants to create objects to remember loved ones by	Y	Y	35	'It is good to be able to talk about loved ones' 'He loved to share his skills and today we see the fruit of that'

Date	Event (and organised by)	Venue	Description	Support by small grant?	Held in 2014?	Approx. attendance	Sample feedback
11 Nov	Parliamentary Dinner (Michael McMahon MSP, SPPC)	Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh	MSPs from across the political spectrum met to share memories, acknowledge loss and celebrate inspirational people who have died	Y	N	12	'I thought it was a wonderful occasion and I enjoyed every contribution. Meal was lovely, thank you so much for inviting me. You are creating something very special in Scotland and I'll do all I can to spread the message.'
11 Nov	Dementia Friendly Midlothian Event (Volunteer Midlothian)	Welfare Hall, Dalkeith	Storytelling and poetry to set the scene, followed by a minute's silence, candle lighting, a remembrance tree and a non-religious blessing	N	N	24	'As a first event of this kind we agreed as a group of participants that overall it was a very successful event and although there were 24 people in attendance there was certainly space for others to have joined us.'
12 Nov	RSNO pre-Concert performance	Caird Hall, Dundee	A concert created by professional musicians and schoolchildren from Dundee, inspired by personal losses and the stories of older people living in the community.	N	N	Not known	-

Date	Event (and organised by)	Venue	Description	Support by small grant?	Held in 2014?	Approx. attendance	Sample feedback
12 Nov	We Remember Them Well (Citadel Arts)	Leith Dockers Club, Edinburgh	Musicians and writers share memories of departed friends, with professional actors performing pieces of remembrance	Y	N	50	'It was, by turns, amusing and often touching - and always evocative both of Leith and times past. Thank you all.'
12 Nov	Public Awareness Day (Prince and Princess of Wales Hospice)	New Victoria Hospital, Glasgow	The Prince and Princess of Wales Hospice set up a stall in the hospital's main thoroughfare, with leaflets and a banner promoting access services in the hospice. Passers-by were encouraged to participate in the conversation, to share experiences and wisdom.	Y	N	20	'Some participants clearly found the experience moving and cathartic; some said they were surprised by their views and their ability to discuss such a difficult topic.'
16 Nov	Remembering The Light (Falkland Centre for Stewardship)	Falkland Estate, Fife	A simple, creative candlelight ceremony led by poet Jayne Wilding for the bereaved	Y	N	13	'Many thanks for hosting us last night; it was a positive experience for me and a rare opportunity to talk openly about bereavement in a safe, comfortable environment.'
22 Nov	Remembrance and Film Screening (Limekilns Parish Church, Fife)	Limekilns Parish Church, Fife	A service themed around remembrance, including a film screening of <i>To Absent Friends</i> .	N	N	Not known	-

Date	Event (and organised by)	Venue	Description	Support by small grant?	Held in 2014?	Approx. attendance	Sample feedback
24 Nov	Remembering You (Letham Gardens sheltered housing, Castle Rock Edinvar Housing Association)	Dunbar	Guests wrote memories on paper and shared them while an entertainer played music	Y	N	19	'The general feedback was very positive tenants felt that they really enjoyed getting together socially, it allowed them to discuss a subject that can sometimes be ignored as it can upset people who are getting older and are aware of time running out.'
Various	Stepping Stones (South Queensferry and Dalmeny Churches)	South Queensferry and Dalmeny Churches	Six-week course for those journeying through bereavement, with speakers including GPs and others who have been bereaved	Y	N	52	'The training day was a great success and positive feedback was received by all who attended.'
Various	Alice Mary Cooper: The Box (Alice Mary Cooper)	Touring Scotland	Theatre piece inspired by stories of those who have died found in a Dundee time capsule	N	N	Not known	-
Not dated	Virtual Remembrance Wall (University of Dundee School of Nursing and Health Sciences)	University of Dundee School of Nursing and Health Sciences	Session on loss and remembrance as part of nursing students' palliative care lecture in which students created a virtual wall of remembrance	N	N	Not known	-

Date	Event (and organised by)	Venue	Description	Support by small grant?	Held in 2014?	Approx. attendance	Sample feedback
Not dated	<i>To Absent Friends</i> (PAMIS, Tayberry Storytellers, University of Dundee)	University of Dundee	A ceremony and storytelling for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities to remember dead loved ones.	N	N	Not known.	'I set up a space in the chaplaincy at university of Dundee and the result was amazing... He also loved it so much that he attended his dad's memorial celebration for the first time ever. He's also going to help me do a bigger event next year for others.'
Various	Essence of a Memory Photo Exhibition Tour (Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care)	18 venues	An exhibition made up from the winning entries of the Essence of a Memory Competition, which ran as part of Luminate 2014 toured 18 venues across Scotland in the months running up to the festival.	N	N	35	'It was a lovely exhibition, I had a walk along the corridor and was joined by a few people who stopped to read the words. It would be good to have this again, a changing display helps to engage the public and staff'

APPENDIX B: Event feedback form

Organisation name:	
Project name:	
Date(s) activity took place:	
Location(s) activity took place:	
Name of key contact:	
Telephone no:	
Email:	
Amount of funding provided:	
Number of people who took part:	

- 1) Who was your intended audience for this activity, and how successful do you think you were in reaching that audience? Is there anything you'd do differently to extend the reach if you were undertaking a similar activity again?

- 2) What impact do you think the activity has had? (Please include here any indications of impact you collected, for example feedback or quotes from participants.)

3) Please provide a short report describing the activity undertaken. (Attach as a separate sheet if you prefer.) This might include information about what you did, what went well, and what could have been improved.

4) The space below is for any additional information you feel would be useful. (Please also provide us with any photos you feel would be of interest.)

5) Do you think your activity has played a positive role in: (please underline)

a. Helping people to find ways of dealing with their own experiences of death, dying and bereavement?

Yes / To some extent / Not Sure / Probably not / No

b. Helping individuals and/or communities to support those who are experiencing difficult times associated with death, dying and bereavement?

Yes / To some extent / Not Sure / Probably not / No

c. Supporting NHS and/or social care staff and/or volunteers to work compassionately and constructively with those who are dying or have been recently bereaved.

Yes / To some extent / Not Sure / Probably not / No

d. Helping people to make practical preparations for their death, for example Will, Power of Attorney and Advance Care Planning.

Yes / To some extent / Not Sure / Probably not / No

e. Promoting openness/discussion of death, dying and bereavement.

Yes / To some extent / Not Sure / Probably not / No

6) How likely is it that you will participate in the *To Absent Friends* festival again in the future? (underline)

Extremely likely/ Quite likely/ Don't know/ Quite unlikely/ Extremely unlikely

Any additional comments:

Signed Date

APPENDIX C: Online survey questions

To Absent Friends is an annual festival of storytelling and remembrance which takes place in the 1st week of November each year.

It is very helpful to us to hear the views of people who took part in *To Absent Friends* in 2015.

This survey has only 5 questions and is quick to complete!

1. In what ways did you take part in *To Absent Friends* 2015? Please choose all that apply
 - a. A private act of remembrance
 - b. Social media or website
 - c. Attended an event/activity
 - d. Organised an event/activity
 - e. Other (please specify)
2. Was taking part in *To Absent Friends* a positive experience? (Yes/ No)
3. Do you think that it is helpful for people to have more opportunities to remember and tell stories about people who have died? (Yes/ No)
4. Did you take part in *To Absent Friends* last year (i.e. 2014)?
5. Do you think you will take part next year (i.e. 2016)?

APPENDIX D: Calculating engagement figures

Participation

An estimate of the number of people involved in active participation in *To Absent Friends* is given on page 54. This is based on the following assumptions:

- Of the *To Absent Friends* events listed in Appendix A, we estimate 26 involved a large degree of guest participation, ranging in size from the one-to-one sessions that took place at Portskerra Storytelling Festival to the 100 who took part in Ardgowan Hospice's activities. The median number of participants in these events was 25.
- The remaining events were predominantly performance based, ranging in size from solo performance (e.g. Margot Henderson at the Scottish Storytelling Centre) to the 200 schoolchildren involved as part of the RSNO concert. Apart from these and the other concert (Brass Band, c. 30 performers) a conservative estimate of the average number of participants/performers in the remaining events was 5.
- It is not known how many people organised private acts of remembrances, but 30 survey respondents took part in private events (see section below). For the purposes of the table below, it is assumed that each of these was a separate event, with an average of 5 participants.
- The online activities that can be directly tracked include submissions to the *To Absent Friends* website. These break down into 4 stories, 159 tributes, 7 sporting reminiscences and 40 songs, a total of 210 interactions.
- It is also known that many people changed their profile pictures on Twitter and Facebook, but it is not possible to know how many. For the purposes of calculation here, the estimated figures from the social media section have been used.

Observation

An estimate of the number of people who observed *To Absent Friends* in some way is presented on page 54. This is based on the following assumptions:

- There were thirteen 'performance' events, including three concerts (Four RSNO concerts, John Kitchen and Edinburgh Brass Band). Of the remaining seven, reported attendance varied from 30 (Scottish Writers' Centre event at the Mitchell Library) to 75 (Dogstone). A conservatively estimated average of 40 has been used in the table.
- Twitter interaction is included here, calculated as engagement rate (number of retweets, likes etc.) multiplied by impressions (number of times TAF tweets appeared on someone's feed).

Exposure

An estimate of the number of people who were exposed to *To Absent Friends* in some way is presented on page 55. This is based on the following assumptions:

- Circulation figures are not readily available for the online publications in which *To Absent Friends* featured. An estimate of 250 views per article has been used.
- Exposure based on Facebook shares is estimated from the total following of organisations that shared posts (this includes 200,000 for the Lost Glasgow and Lost Edinburgh accounts and 40,000 for Parkinson's UK as mentioned above).

APPENDIX E: Resources

GLGDGG is one part of a wider work programme undertaken by the SPPC, and has no dedicated staff¹⁶. *GLGDGG* has been developed using existing SPPC staffing (4.6 WTE staff) and resources, with intermittent additional non-recurring funding from Scottish Government (averaging £8k per year). SPPC is funded by contributions from its 50+ member organisations (c 40%) a grant for core costs from Scottish Government (c40%) charitable fundraising and a small surplus on educational events.

The budget for *To Absent Friends* 2015 was bolstered by:

- a grant received from the Royal Bank of Scotland to fund work with the RSNO
- sponsorship of the launch event refreshments by Solicitors for Older People Scotland
- gifts in kind were also received from Cooperative Funeralcare
- £26,550 from the Scottish Government to support the work of *GLGDGG*.

This additional money from the Scottish Government was confirmed in July 2015 and enabled the SPPC to supply *GLGDGG* members with printed resources, run a *GLGDGG* networking event and further develop websites. In addition, with this money the SPPC undertook the following activity relating more specifically to *To Absent Friends*, including:

- the provision of small grants to support organisations to run events
- printing TAF coasters/beer mats
- employing a photographer to provide engaging images of key events
- employing a temporary extra staff member
- developing and testing new ideas
- holding a launch reception
- producing this report.

¹⁶ Information about the Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care is available here: www.palliativecarescotland.org.uk

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