

Families & Friends of Missing Persons Unit e-News – May 2009



New South Wales Government
Attorney General's Department
Families and Friends of Missing Persons Unit

Information sheet

May 2009

Welcome to the May 2009 edition of the Families and Friends of Missing Persons Unit (FFMPU) e-News bulletin. At Christmas, our service sent out a message of support to over 100 families about the ways in which they might cope with the loss of a loved one during the holiday season. Thank you to all those families that wrote back and shared the ways in which they felt they could survive the season. The only way we can move forward is to always be open to learning more about life and loss.

In 2009 the FFMPU's counselling service marked its fifth year of operation. In that time we have supported over 200 families on an ongoing basis and responded to almost 800 enquiries about the complexity of missing within our community. FFMPU is hoping this year gives us the capacity to expand our knowledge about what support for families really means and also move forward in finding new ways to reach those impacted upon by the loss of a missing person.

Coinciding with *National Missing Persons Week*, the August edition of e-News will be dedicated entirely to families and friends of missing people. We would like to hear from people about what information they think would be beneficial. We are also starting a space within our newsletter for families to share their thoughts and feelings about what it means personally to have someone missing. All thoughts and contributions can be sent to ffmpu@agd.nsw.gov.au

Introduction to our new permanent counsellor

Stephanie Dartnell started with FFMPU as our new permanent counsellor in February 2009. Stephanie's enthusiasm and passion for working with people experiencing life-altering events will undoubtedly value add to our unit.

Stephanie is a registered psychologist, having completed both a Bachelor of Psychology and Master of (Forensic) Psychology over a seven-year period at the University of New South Wales. She spent three years post-study working in a clinical psychologist position providing counselling and support to individuals within a residential drug and alcohol treatment centre. Within this role she providing counselling to people who, in addition to drug and alcohol abuse, suffered other life challenges including mental illness, multiple traumas, grief and loss, fractured relationships, and homelessness.

Stephanie hopes to provide a supportive and compassionate counselling environment and to work with people in achieving their expressed needs. Most of all, she aims to listen to the people she meets, to learn from them, and to respect what they feel they need from a counsellor in dealing with a loved one who is missing.

Stephanie can be contacted on **1800 227 772** or via email on ffmpu@agd.nsw.gov.au

UNSW social work student

The Unit has also welcomed another great addition to our team. Alisa Wicks is a third year Social Work student from the University of New South Wales and is half way through a 65-day placement with FFMPU.

Alisa was drawn to the Unit as she had not anticipated the huge impact missing has on our community. During her placement Alisa has been researching relevant group work models that FFMPU can use as further methods to support families. The project will look at other community-based models that provide group support to people experiencing life-altering traumas. In the past, groups have been attempted within the missing persons sector but have failed to achieve their goals. Alisa's aim will be to research what has and hasn't worked in other sectors as well as talking to families and professionals within the missing persons sector about some ideas for moving this project forward.

Many thanks to those families who completed the survey disseminated at the family forum and electronically during April 2009.

If you have questions or suggestions about this project please contact Alisa Wicks on **(02) 8688 5413** or at alisa_wicks@agd.nsw.gov.au

Family Forum

The FFMPU hosted a forum on 4 April 2009 in Parramatta.

Outcomes from the day have been posted on the FFMPU website with two information sheets exploring the idea of resilience as presented by two family members at the forum.

Overall the families that attended felt empowered by their participation and the majority provided their contact details to the Unit to ensure they were kept up to date with issues within the missing persons sector and upcoming events.

FFMPU received encouraging support from families who expressed their gratitude for the organisation of the day, who felt stronger by attending and who felt that the day made them feel 'connected'.

FFMPU have made a commitment to host forums on a yearly basis – we are already planning for the March 2010 forum!

Coronial investigations

A number of FFMPU families have coronial inquests scheduled for 2009. The NSW State Coroners Office has a revised [factsheet](#) to assist in navigating coronial procedures, including the added complexity of a missing persons investigation.

FFMPU provides support to families faced with the possibility of an inquest into the disappearance of a loved one. In working with families the Unit has recognised the importance of taking time to process what an inquest might mean for families, the need to have a clear understanding of the role and function of the State Coroners Office and the benefit from having access to the brief of evidence prior to the inquest date. Empowering families through access to relevant information can allow them to feel both supported and in control.

If you have any queries about an upcoming inquest please contact **Stephanie Dartnall** on **1800 227 772**.

Emerging international research

[Missing People UK](#) recently launched research into the experiences of families of missing people. *Living in Limbo: the experiences of, and impact on, the families of missing people* provides a first account of the devastating impact that going missing can have on the family members left behind, including emotional, social, financial, legal and practical difficulties.

The [report](#) references the work of the Australian Missing Persons Sector and in particular the understanding of the ongoing impact of unresolved loss.

Closed for winter

In April 2009, FFMPU were approached by Megan Spencer, on behalf of goalpost pictures. *Closed for Winter* is a new feature film starring Natalie Imbruglia. The film is about a young woman, Elise, trying to come

to terms with the disappearance of her sister, and the emotional aftermath of such a tragic event on her family.

As part of the promotions for the film the producers have established an [online forum](#) which aims to tell the story of a 'missing person' and what happens to those left behind. The forum includes video clips of the cast and crew talking about this subject and whether a 'missing person' might have touched their own lives. Megan shared with FFMPU that the answers were very honest and quite surprising. The public is invited to view the clips, make comments and contribute to the discussion at hand and perhaps share their own stories.

FFMPU have also offered to provide emotional support to any people accessing the forum who may be struggling with the loss of a missing person. We are constantly reminded that in a person's efforts to reach out for support the appropriate referrals should always be available to them.

Upcoming dates

May 25: International Missing Children's Day

Arncliffe Uniting Church are hosting a service of remembrance to coincide with international missing children's day. The service will be held on Sunday 24 May from 1:30pm at Arncliffe Uniting Church, 29 Hannam Street, Bardwell Valley NSW.

All families and friends of missing people are encouraged to attend; FFMPU counsellor Stephanie Dartnall will also be in attendance. Please RSVP to Mable Mordue at Arncliffe Uniting Church on (02) 8084 6306

August 3-8: National Missing Persons Week

The focus of this year is people with dementia-related illnesses who are missing, or at risk of wandering. FFMPU, in partnership with Alzheimer's Australia NSW, will be developing an awareness campaign to both prevent people from going missing and support this population within our community.

FFMPU is happy to hear from people about the ways in which we deliver our services, issues you believe we should be addressing and topics that might be relevant for those living with an unresolved loss.

We look forward to hearing from families about the next edition.

Contact the Unit on **1800 227 772** or via email: ffmpu@agd.nsw.gov.au

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This document has been prepared by Families and Friends of Missing Persons Unit for general information purposes.

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CONTACT DETAILS

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

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www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/missingpersons