



Welcome to our Courageous Conversations series, where we delve into meaningful dialogues with leaders, organisations, and members of the community, aiming to address the multifaceted impacts of grief and loss.

Today's conversation is with Kerry Evitts, artist, designer, psychotherapist and mother.

Kerry shares with us the importance of art therapy as a tool for coping with grief, loss and loneliness. We learn how powerful and healing it is to 'just be' in the moment with motion and colour.

**Salomie**

Hi Kerry. Welcome to Griefline's courageous conversations.

**Kerry**

Hello. Thanks for having me.

**Salomie**

It's a pleasure. In your vision, you believe art serves as a conduit for community cohesion, combating loneliness and fostering wellbeing. Can you explain how powerful art is for our wellbeing?

**Kerry**

Yes, certainly. Art has a profound ability to allow us the time and the days to just be in the moment. I think with our, you know, particularly with art therapy itself, it's about the process more than what you're actually creating. It's about being mindful. You know, we've all heard about mindfulness. There's lots of different mindfulness techniques, but creating art is not only a mindfulness activity but it allows you to connect your brain and your body without any thought. And I think often we, you know, that has a profound healing effect because you don't have to engage thought, you don't have to engage words, you can just be and just enjoy the process. So, whether creating art, you know, alone or whether as part of a group and they both have different healing effects on our wellbeing.

**Salomie**

Yeah. And that's certainly something I can attest to. Personally. I use art as well for self-care. And I think when you're struggling with really heavy emotions, when you're experiencing grief, it's you know sometimes really relaxing. I've found just to

be able to lay that grief aside and do something, and get almost, get lost in something else.

### **Kerry**

It was a huge distraction, I think, you know, especially with grief. Um, it gives you that ability to kind of escapism almost. You know you can just be, and you don't. It helps you, you know, for the briefest of seconds. Because as we know, grief comes in waves. It ebbs and flows and can be crippling, and on and off. But just those moments where you get to escape just for those brief seconds, just, yeah, it can be really, really good for the soul and also you know gives us a break from the pain just for those brief moments, which I think is an amazing tool to have.

### **Salomie**

Yeah. And that leads me right into you know, my next question which is that we believe it's so important for people who need support with their wellbeing and mental health to really look at a range of therapies and practises. So how does art complement things that a person is doing, like journaling or meditation or talking to a counsellor?

### **Kerry**

Well, I think, you know, I've worked in mental health for many years as a psychotherapist and counsellor and I think all therapies have a wonderful place to help in different ways. Um, so you know, you mentioned journaling, for instance. Journaling is a wonderful way to kind of get words and feelings and emotions out in the moment. And it also provides us with a perfect reflection later on that we can go back to re-read over and kind of go wow, you know, look how far I've come or look how I felt in that moment. So, it gives us a really good reflection and talking therapies, psychotherapy and counselling can provide us with, um, the ability to feel heard and to get things off our chest and to feel connected to somebody else and listened to, which I think is powerful.

Obviously, that's something that I do myself. But art, art gives us something different and what I touched on before is that almost escapism with art.

So, it's about, you know, you get lots of different things with art and we'll touch on that in a moment, but the moments that you get with art are escapism. So, there is no need for thought, there's no need for words, there's no need to talk to other people. You know, you can just be there on your own in the moment and allow yourself that time to just be and get lost, get lost in the moment, get lost in what you're doing. And the motion and the use of colours is also very healing as well, colours, the very profound healing effect. So yeah, it can really help with grief, you know, just that ability to escape and just be without having to try and think of

words. Because often you know, when you're in the depths of grief, words can be far too painful, memories can be too painful, thoughts can be too painful. So, I think art gives us something extra where we don't have to talk, we don't have to think. We can just be and we can just immerse ourselves in the process of making marks on paper or canvas at school, you know, whatever kind of art we're using, whether it's clay or whatever, we can just be, we can move, we can move with our hands, we can connect to our brain without any thought process. So yeah, I think I did that answer the question.

### **Salomie**

Yeah. No, it really did.

And that that it's so important, often people will just think that, you know, maybe they might need to speak to someone. And there, now there is increasing awareness about journaling, about meditation.

But I think art is still something that tends to intimidate. A lot of people have found it will feel like, you know, oh, I can't do that. I can't draw, I can't draw like a, you know, straight line or I've never lifted a paintbrush in my life other than school. But also I think you know thinking to things like the rise of adult colouring books for example, like I've seen people in in GP waiting rooms on public transport even. And I think yeah there's something very primitive you know real about art and I think everyone can create. So yeah I think there's as you've said there certainly is a place for art and it gives you something very different to what writing and talking to a therapist can.

### **Kerry**

OK, absolutely. And it is. It is the process as well. Like I said, it's people do get intimidated. I know I run a lot of workshops, aren't workshops and the first thing people say when they walk in is I'm, I'm not very good at art. I can't do art, you know, and this whole lack of confidence around art and it's really vitally important for people to know that it isn't about the outcome. It's the process. So we say to people, you know, regardless of your need for art, whether it's, you know, mental health or grief and loss, whatever it may be, it's about just enjoying the process, just picking up those coloured pencils and just moving them on the paper. You know, it's just about watching what's happening, allowing your hands to be free and not thinking. I mean, that's the whole point, right? You know, and it when we're not telling people to be amazing artists. I mean, you never know, people might be, but it's not the point. The point is the process, and having that confidence to pick up a pencil and paper or mindfulness book or whatever it may be, I hugely encourage that, not only as a psychotherapist but also as an artist.

### **Salomie**

Yeah, that's wonderful. So then in your work, you know you're really giving people that creative outlet to support their mental health and to just as you, as you said, be a part of that process. Can you share examples of where this is really, really made a difference?

### **Kerry**

Yeah, I mean, it's, well, there's so many different ways that I could go with this. I mean, probably the best way to go would be to tell you about myself, really. Because, you know, I've got an artist standpoint and I've got a psychotherapist standpoint and I've worked in hospitals with patients and I've worked one on one. I've worked in groups. But probably the best way to describe it would be for myself as a child. I suffered terrible trauma as a child.

I was very isolated and alone and I accidentally discovered creativity and art and just used to sit sketching and drawing off and copying, copying out of box, sketching animals. And I remember the fear that I was in at those times could be crippling, absolutely crippling at times. And I just used to sit and sketch, and it brought to me a sense of calm and kind of a release through the art and an escapism like I talked about, mentioned before, and gradually as I kind of got used to it. It gave me something to lean back on and rely on and know that was there. It was a kind of stability and through the process I gained confidence.

So, creating art you know the process was amazing, but it also gave me this great sense of confidence that I could do something and I, you know, this is for me, this is mine. The process itself was magical and the confidence that grew from that was exceptional. Like I can't begin to tell you in those kinds of feelings of fear and isolation started to become a thing of the past. And I kept that tool and I've always kept that tool, as you can see. I mean I work in mental health but I also am an artist. I exhibit artwork. I continuously create artwork and I still use it to this day. If I feel overwhelmed if I feel you know like I need a break. I get the paints out you know and still use it to this day. It's an incredible tool. So, I yeah, I do encourage everybody to use it. I see amazing outcomes with it, not only for other people but with myself.

### **Salomie**

Yeah. And you know once again we're just flowing into my next question which I was going to talk about how grief and loss can be so incredibly isolating for people, and it contributes to the real risk of them choosing to be lonely and then remain lonely. And you know at Griefline we try our best to support people through these tough times and we get by empowering individuals we're empowering their communities. And you, as you've just said, you know for you personally the struggles that you have overcome. And now that you've turned into the work

that you that you do as an adult, you help people you know overcome these very, real, very crippling challenges.

How does that now contribute to your sense of purpose and, you know, keep you going?

**Kerry**

It's incredible. Like it really is incredible.

A huge sense of gratitude first of all to be able to give and to do what I do. I think, you know it's I've got a sense of purpose. So, I wake up in the morning I've got something to do. I'm on a mission at the moment actually to bring people together through art. So, I do community groups and bring people together to reduce a lot like you there at Griefline. You know you're bringing communities together you supporting, you're offering so people that you know they're not lighted in a line and it's the same kind of thing. I'm bringing people in the communities targeted groups to reduce isolation and loneliness and use art as a conduit to bring people together and you know bring them an overall sense of belonging because I think being part of the community yeah that's what it's about right. You know, you, you want to have that sense of belonging. You belong to something. When communities come together it does something really amazing. So, you know, whether you're supporting people like you do it at Griefline from a sense of loss and grief and isolation, or whether you are, you know, a carer for somebody and you're lonely at home and whatever, whatever situation you may.

**Salomie**

I think it's vitally important that we come together, and we use art to bring the communities together and bring a sense of belonging that's wonderful and it's been absolutely inspiring listening to you. And I'm so grateful and thankful for you not just talking about the work that you do but also sharing your story and how you overcame it. I'm sure that's going to be inspiring to people that will listen to this. Thank you for joining us and thank you, thank you for being part of this courageous conversation.

**Kerry**

Absolutely my pleasure. Lovely to meet you. Thank you.