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## Keeping in touch with our Life Force Family

Greetings to all our Life Force friends, patients, survivors, carers and all those working with and supporting people living with cancer in the community. We are moving into 2021 with hope, courage and enthusiasm, and a strong resolve to continue advancing our valuable supportive care programs here in Sydney and across regional NSW. We'll keep you posted through the year on all events and programs.

### Finding Meaning Join a Life Force group now

A support group can be a lifeline for people, an opportunity to reflect as they share with others in a safe and understanding space.

*It's about finding meaning, transforming loss and pain into vitality and hope. Not struggling alone, but healing together with others who understand, as only those on a similar path can do. The Life Force programs provide regular support with a holistic approach that embraces the whole human being, with many different elements supporting and reinforcing that healing process.*

Inclusive support groups and workshops open to all cancers at all stages and all genders, led by a professional counselling team. Currently being conducted online via Zoom and hoping to resume face to face sessions in conjunction with Zoom in the future.

To find out more call Caro on: 0425 296 698 or Jane on: 0412 643 751

### **Wounded Healers**

Lift your spirits, renew your confidence and courage.  
The value of groupwork as a powerful tool for healing.

Being part of a group can be a powerful source of healing and comfort.



Some members of the Life Force Inner West Support Group, Sydney

### **Lee's Story**

“It was only after he had left hospital that Lee Anderson Brown realised his cancer treatment was not really over.

The medical side was. He had survived surgery, radiation and months of chemotherapy, and doctors agreed he was in remission. For this he was grateful.

But emotionally, he still felt like a man afflicted. The cancer experience had so saturated his life that he found it impossible to pick up where he had left off. Yet that was the expectation. Others urged him back to work and back to having a good time. He tried, but internally he felt crippled.

Brown, now 37, managed to resume work as a machinist and struggled along for more than a decade until something quite unexpected happened. He saw a pamphlet for a cancer support group and, although it was not the sort of thing he would normally respond to, he decided to enquire.

With considerable reservations, he went to the support group...”

*Excerpt from ...*

*Share the pain, shed the tears and let the good times roll again*

*Jill Margo*

*Man Trouble*

*Sydney Morning Herald, Thursday, March 9th, 1995*

Lee came to one of our Life Force support groups in the Inner West. He discovered that ‘in the group he finally found people who could understand the feelings he had kept hidden for so long.’

Cancer Council NSW research has shown that people who take part in support groups have lower levels of anxiety and depression than those who don't.

In the 25 years since Life Force first began running its support groups, much has changed in what is now known about the cancers that 150 000 Australians will be diagnosed with in 2020, and many advances have been made in treatments.

But the human experience of fear remains, and the desperate feelings that keep us awake at night and overwhelmed with worry and anxiety continue. This emotional roller coaster doesn't need to be endured alone.

As wounded healers, we are all such gifts to each other. By attending a support group, much of the power of these distressing emotions can be reduced, and skills can be learned to manage distressing emotions. Each Life Force group meeting includes a guided imagery session. “They are ‘the healing balm’ to end each session”, as one of the group members puts it so beautifully.

Lee's story expresses it so well: "I found that to share another's tears was finally to express the tears I repressed so long ago; to share another's fear was to feel the strength of a common bond, and to be touched by another's pain was to feel my own pain lessen because it no longer seemed so absolutely mine." You can read more of Lee's story on the [Life Force website](#).

*'Compassion is not a relationship between the healer and the wounded. It's a relationship between equals. Compassion becomes real when we recognise our shared humanity.'* Pema Chodron

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## COSA Conference - Cancer Survivorship 2021

Life Force attended the recent COSA (Clinical Oncology Society of Australia) conference in March this year.

Particularly interesting were discussions around...

- Supporting survivors to address long term biopsychosocial consequences of cancer and treatment to optimise living well.
- Equality and equity in cancer care.
- Stigma and discrimination resulting in poorer access to healthcare for minority groups.
- Some of the barriers to First Nations peoples engaging in healthcare.

### **Survivorship brings with it many challenges**

In 2001, Life Force Cancer Foundation in conjunction with TAFE NSW, conducted what was one of the first programs to address survivorship issues, called "Life Skills for Cancer Survivors", a nine week course for people struggling to deal with the many challenges that arise in the aftermath of cancer. The course addressed personal, relationship and work issues, and taught skills to help cancer survivors recover their sense of self and re-engage with life – a kind of survival kit.

The end of treatment does not mean the end of cancer's effect on your life. In fact, it can be just the beginning, as the enormity of the experience really hits. Life Force is hoping to deliver this course again in the near future.

### **Going back to "Normal"**

Many people find themselves floundering once they leave the caring arms of their treatment team, when active treatment has been completed. This is a critical stage of recovery, as patients are thrust back into the world and expected to get on with life. They might feel lost, alone and unsupported. All these feelings are normal. Facing these feelings and learning how to deal with them is important.

### **Learning to live with uncertainty**

Fear of recurrence is a natural response, and fears, worries and anxiety can plague people causing sleeplessness, difficulty relating to partners and close family and friends. Finding support is important. Being able to express your feelings of fear or uncertainty with a support group can be liberating. Being open and dealing with emotions helps many people feel less worried. Putting the lid on these emotions doesn't make them go away. Learning skills to manage disturbing thoughts and feelings is important. Relaxation techniques and guided imagery are wonderful ways of coping with distressing emotions.

### **Finding support to enhance resilience**

loneliness. You can also learn life skills to support your immune system and optimise healthy living. Support in any form allows you to express your feelings and develop coping skills. Studies have found that people who take part in support groups have an improved quality of life, including better sleep, appetite and general outlook. Group members can share tears and laughter as they find their way forward together. Life Force Support groups can help survivors rebuild their lives after cancer.

Call Caro: 0425 296 698 or Jane: 0412 643 751 or for NSW regional programs call Jilly on 0408 610 362



Cancer patients on retreat at a Life Force Foundation regional supportive care program

