

Enhancing Community Death Literacy through a Death Cafe

Project Team:

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Volunteer small group facilitators from Hillingdon Hospital Palliative Care and Brunel Health Sciences Department – academic staff, nurses, OT's, physios and the Director of BPACHS.

Target audience: Multi-professional health and social care staff from hospitals, the community, Brunel staff, students and the general public.



What is a Death Café?

- An opportunity to share views in a safe, respectful, and comfortable context about: the real or imagined experience of dying and honouring the dead; philosophies about death; the aftermath of dying for those who are bereaved; or any other matter relating to death and dying.
- An opportunity to encourage people to engage with the idea of death and dying through a structured, mediated group discussion in an informal rather than a clinical environment. As well as supporting psychological wellbeing, these conversations provide opportunities for participants to think about their own priorities and needs, for example, in the context of end-of-life care.
- Delivered in a face-to-face small group setting with tea, coffee, and cake. Refreshments form a part of a typical death café model and help to create a comfortable atmosphere.

Our Project

Project Aim:

The aim of our project was to deliver the second annual death café at Brunel University London through the creation a supportive and therapeutic environment where individuals may courageously confront fear of death and integrate it into the space of their lives through participation in open, facilitated small group conversations.

This was accomplished through hosting a death café event for Brunel University London directed toward the wider community including the general public, students, and healthcare professionals, many of whom work for the NHS.

Besides assessing immediate reactions and learning from the event, ethical approval was given for a follow-up questionnaire. This was sent out to learn more about how this project had made a difference for the participants and whether this experience had led to any changes for them.



COVID Pandemic and event feedback

The second annual Death Café at Brunel University London was held virtually on Zoom in November 2020 and the context of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic lent an immediacy to the discussions.

Originally designed as an in person event and, with refreshments playing a key role to help participants feel comfortable and relaxed, hosting a virtual Death Café was a unique concept.

Through skilled facilitators with significant experience, attendees at the event were put at ease and comfortably discussed death and dying from multiple perspectives.

Participants commented:

- *I learnt a lot about the fears other people have around the discussions of death, and how the fear of even discussing it impacts some people.*
- *I felt connected to the group and recognise this work is important.*
- *Normalised death and helped me to think about it just a little bit further*

The event was attended by 46 people and post event feedback indicated that attendees felt the event was 'excellent' (54%) and 'very good' (37%).