

making funerals affordable

Five months ago, a column I wrote on funeral practices struck a chord with many readers. Nearly 50 people came to our subsequent meeting to share ideas on practices and possibilities.

From that came further meetings and a plan to set up a non-profit social enterprise with a mission of "providing guidance on family-led, affordable and eco-friendly funerals in the Eastern Bay".

One reason for taking this path is a concern at the rising costs of funerals. The costs run into many thousands of dollars and families under financial stress may take years to pay

these off. The two local funeral directors provide excellent and cost-effective traditional services for those who can afford them, and are left with much unpaid debt from those who can't.

They are to be commended for trying to keep costs down. However their high business overheads, their premises and full-time staff do not enable them to provide low-cost solutions.

Cost is one reason why some people opt for a straight cremation, without even a service. The funeral directors and funeral celebrant Rosemary Sloman are concerned that this

fails to honour the lives of people in our community.

Rosemary notes that we celebrate births, marriages, and other stages of life. In these ways communities come together to show respect to their members. Our final passing should not be ignored, our contributions to families and communities celebrated.

The group setting up the new social enterprise also wish to support people to rediscover former rites and find new ways to commemorate the lives of whanau.

In the Eastern Bay there is already much work being done in this area. Maori are weaving whariki to use instead of coffins, the Whakatane Menzshed and Kawerau Coffin Club are making coffins. A Whakatane group is lobbying our district council to provide an ecofriendly burial cemetery where, instead of permanent memorials, trees are planted on the graves. The new social enterprise plans to work alongside these groups, focusing on family-led funerals and alternatives to embalming.

A wealth of information is now available on both old and new practices and possibilities. Foremost is the work of Gail McJorow of



grey matters by Ruth Gerzon

A fortnightly series for seniors by Ruth Gerzon from Eastern Bay Villages

Ruth can be contacted by phoning 027 4308149 or email easternbayvillages@gmail.com



Wellington (www.bettersendoff.co.nz) who recently came to Whakatane to share ideas.

Yet whanau need more than just information at a time of grief and sorrow, so the group plans to have funeral guides. A guide assists people on an unfamiliar journey, so that term fits better with their plans than the traditional funeral director.

Guides need to be good listeners and able to assist families in practical ways, ensuring compliance with medical and legal obligations, talking them through options and working behind the scenes to make things run smoothly. We are hoping some former social workers and counsellors might come forward to support this new venture.

Gail, who has an overview of new and emerging practices around the country, notes that our proposed social enterprise will be a first. We will chart a new path, one that she is sure other communities will follow.

Setting up a social enterprise will take people with skills, energy and time and some funding. If you can support us in this venture, or just want to be part of our network then do get in touch.



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