



gentle dusk

For immediate release: The death of a pet hurts as much as the death of a relative

The value of owning a pet can be enormous – from lowering your stress levels to helping you meet people. So no wonder that the loss of a pet can be totally devastating. To many it's not "just a cat" or "just a dog" but someone to share life, joy, sadness and love with. The bond between a pet and its owner is the same bond as between human beings. The same hormones and chemicals are released in our brains. Those that make us feel loved and connected. Accordingly, it's not unusual to feel overwhelming grief and struggle with painful emotions when they die. And sometimes it's even harder because there is less support available, less rituals, no bereavement leave.

David Cunningham, who lives in Tufnell Park, has owned 10 dogs and 5 cats in his lifetime. He recalls the death of his first pet as a painful experience "I was only 14, and my cat, Tiny, was very old and unwell and had to be put to sleep. She'd been part of my life since I was 6 years old and was my only pet, so I gave her lots of attention." Mr Cunningham feels there is a lack of openness around death, dying and bereavement of any kind, "whether it's animals or people, no-one talks about death and dying". He now openly talks about all issues relating to death including his own and has been attending Islington Death Cafes run by Age UK Islington and Gentle Dusk. "I really enjoy death cafes. It's a terrible name and puts people off but it's totally uplifting. People in their 20's, 40's, 60's get together, eat cake, drink tea and talk about death, any kind of issue around death, dying and bereavement. People leave feeling light hearted because they could talk about something they can never talk about anywhere else"

Age UK Islington and Gentle Dusk are organising a number of events across Islington during Dying Matters week (13th-19th May) from photography competitions to open air cafes, all with a view to getting more people talking openly about death, dying and bereavement. "Whether you have lost a pet, a friend, a family member, or whether you want to get information about how best to put in place plans surrounding your own end of life, our team of staff and volunteers will be on hand to help", says Andy Murphy, Chief Executive of AgeUK Islington. Visit <http://www.gentledusk.org.uk/events.html> for information on all the events. Or contact Age UK Islington to arrange a free consultation.

"Grief is a strong and painful emotion which comes from the loss of someone we are attached to" says Mireille Hayden, from Gentle Dusk, an organisation supporting open discussion about death, dying and bereavement in Islington. "People need the opportunity to open up about their experience. Death is such a taboo. We need to start talking about it to avoid people feeling isolated, sad and worried"

- ENDS -

Notes to editors

1. For all **media enquiries** please contact Mireille Hayden email mireille@gentledusk.org.uk or phone 07801 543 712.

2. **Age UK Islington** is dedicated to helping any adult in Islington make the most of their life. Whatever your age or issue being faced, we want to help people make positive steps towards a brighter future. For more information call Katie Skea, Communications Manager, 0207 281 6018 or visit www.ageuk.org.uk/islington/

3. Gentle Dusk is a socially minded partnership providing training in End of life care in Islington. For further information regarding **Gentle Dusk**, please call **Mireille Hayden** on **07801 543 712** or e-mail at: info@gentledusk.org.uk, or visit www.gentledusk.org.uk

4. For further information on the Dying Matters Awareness Week, please call freephone 0800 214466 or email info@dyingmatters.org, or visit the website at www.dyingmatters.org

5. Death Café is a charity founded by Jon Underwood. It has for objective 'to increase awareness of death with a view to helping people make the most of their (finite) lives'. Find out more at: www.deathcafe.com.