

Make your wishes known

NERALIE BAILEY

WHYALLA - Leanne Herd said she believes everyone should have a will and an Advanced Care Directive (ACD), and have a conversation with their family about what their wishes are for the end of their lives.

Whyalla will host a special event during Palliative Care Week on Thursday, May 23, for people to get a better understanding of what an ACD covers and how to have those difficult conversations. A new study conducted by the University of Adelaide started in 2023, is working with several South Australian communities to develop resources about how to live as well as possible when someone is approaching the end of their life.

Under-served communities in South Australia, including rural, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and those living with a reduced income, will be included in the study, which aims to increase community awareness and familiarity with the language, knowledge and practical skills needed to make active choices about care at the end of life.

Ms Herd said that she felt fortunate to be



Pat Stephens and daughter Leanne Herd in December 2017. Ms Stephens passed away in February 2018. Picture: SUPPLIED

able to speak to her mother about her wishes and choices.

"It can be very confrontational, very hard and I was lucky to be able to have those conversations with her," she said.

"Having the ACD meant that there was no uncertainty, I knew what my Mum wanted."

Ms Herd said that it also gave her mother a sense of relief, knowing that somebody would take on the role of advocate when she was not well enough herself to speak on her own behalf.

"My Mum only wanted to have pain relief at

the end of her life and it did end up that I had an argument with a doctor who wanted to put an IV in and keep her going," she said.

"I knew what Mum wanted and he did give in but I knew I had to fight for what Mum wanted otherwise her wishes would not have been counted."

The research project will run over five years and touch on lived experiences like Ms Herd's to identify and develop resources to best support access to end of life care for both patients and carers. This will include looking at ways to provide training opportunities to upskill local leaders and determine how best to improve awareness and resources within these communities according to their priorities and preferences.

"None of us want our parents to die, and as much as I didn't want it to happen, I didn't want my mum to suffer," Ms Herd said.

She added that she and her husband have had conversations with their children around their end of life wishes so that they understand what they want.

"Not everyone can do it, I understand that,

sometimes the grief is too much; but I'd like everyone to do a will and think about an ACD," she said.

"We think it won't happen to me.

"Care directives and medical directives help people at the end of their lives and relieve one worry from them."

In a world first, the University of Adelaide study will also work with families, following in real-time, patients and their families in the last year of life.

Through regular interviews, the study hopes to capture behaviours, experiences and key moments that shape how and why patients and families make end-of-life decisions.

National Palliative Care Week runs from May 19 to 25 and a free community event will be held in Whyalla, details to follow soon, with plenty of information around end of life decision making as well as an opportunity to hear from people like Ms Herd with a lived experience.

"My Mum said that the minute we finished the ACD she felt a weight off her mind, it meant she had her wishes known and that I would stand up for them," she said.

Funding opportunity for cultural wellbeing

NEW grants to support the South Australian Aboriginal community controlled sector are now open for application to strengthen cultural wellbeing. The Strengthening Our Culture Community Grants Program has \$250,000 on offer for initiatives which improves health and wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community groups.

Preventive Health South Australia interim chief executive Marina Bowshall said

the Strengthening Our Culture Community Grants allows communities to design projects that meet their needs and strengthen Aboriginal culture at the local level.

"If you, or your community group are involved in an initiative that works to strengthen the wellbeing of Aboriginal people in your local area, go to our website, and see if you are eligible to apply," Ms Bowshall said.

Coordinated through Preventive Health

South Australia, the grants program empowers recipients to develop new skills and make improvements to their local area by sharing knowledge, language and healing.

The grants previously helped establish The Healing by Art program, delivered by Kornar Winmil Yunti Aboriginal Corporation (KWY) and elders.

Women participating in the program were identified as being potentially at risk of do-

mestic violence, relationship issues or traumatic events, with art a therapeutic way to reconnect with community and themselves.

More information on the Strengthening Our Culture Community Grants Program can be found on the website for Strengthening Our Culture Community Grants: preventive-health.sa.gov.au/strengtheningourculture

Applications for the Grants close 9am Monday, June 3, 2024.

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