

The Reflection Room®: Creating Space for Pausing, Reflecting, and Storytelling at the End-of-Life

Dying, death, and grief are social experiences that impact not only people who are dying, their family, friends, and caregivers, but also larger networks of supportive relationships between people in the social realm at work, schools, clubs, faith communities, and so on. A challenge in Western society is that many people (e.g., healthcare providers, neighbours, caregivers, and people who are dying) are uncomfortable talking about the end of life. There is a social need to develop better responses to dying, death, and grief incorporating policy, language, symbols, ritual, and space. The Reflection Room project uses quiet reflection and storytelling to generate open dialogue about dying, death, and grief in a way that is accessible, anonymous, and adaptable to community needs.



The Reflection Room engages people to pause, reflect, and share about dying, death, and grief. The Reflection Room has shown that a space for storytelling can be used as part of a grieving process for people, increase comfort thinking and talking about dying and death, and also make people more likely to prepare for their own death.

Project Overview

The Reflection Room project provides an adaptable evidence-based, unfacilitated art installation that invites people to pause, reflect, and share stories about dying, death, and grief. The project was developed by researchers from the SE Research Centre and Memorial University in 2016. The Reflection Room is based on organizational best practices for spiritual care at the end-of-life with a focus on allowing spiritual questions and issues to emerge, allowing for acts of “witnessing”, cultivating sacred (i.e., special) places, and allocating time dedicated to marking transitions and processing experiences.¹ The project is also based on the anonymous unfacilitated message boards in

the work of artist Candy Chang² and the healing mechanisms of storytelling for the bereaved.³ Drawing on these three ideas, we hypothesized that creating a calming physical space for people to share stories on reflection cards would generate open reflection and support coping.

Over a seven-year period, the Reflection Room has evolved from a pilot,⁴ to an art gallery design, to being adapted to attend to pandemic-related grief in long-term care homes in Ontario. Overall, the project has been installed in over 100 settings across Canada including health care conferences, libraries, long-term care homes, art galleries, and hospices.

Over a thousand collected reflections show that storytelling serves as a way for people to disclose emotions and process thoughts. The focus of reflections is most often about feelings of love and grief related to the centrality of relationships and the pain that comes when important connections are forever altered.⁴ The reflections also point to the way grief can be a catalyst for personal growth as people shared the wisdom they gained from experiences with death and the gratitude that can be felt for people, experiences, and memories.⁵

Through evaluation, it has become clear that opportunities for quiet, peaceful, unfacilitated, storytelling can foster feelings of community connection and compassion. Some visitors also shared that they believe the Room supports well-being for individuals and communities, particularly during times of grieving.

How was the research funded?

The evaluation of the Reflection Room was funded by SE Health, one of Canada's largest social enterprises as well as Family Councils Ontario and Ontario Health.

What are we doing now?

The Saint Elizabeth Foundation is working with various organizations to distribute kits for the installation of the Reflection Room that may support grief work and well-being for Canadians, especially in a post-pandemic future. Email foundation@sehc.com to inquire about installing a Reflection Room.

What will be the (anticipated) impact?

The expectation is that installation of the Reflection Room in various space can support the community to share their experiences of dying, death, and grief in ways that are supportive of well-being. The Room may also increase peoples' understanding of grief and activities that can support their grieving through end-of-life journeys.

Visit TheReflectionRoom.ca to read reflections from our installations across Canada:



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