

Art opening young hearts

Generously supported by Australian Executor Trustees, the Foundation's "LifeCycles: The LEAF Project" is working to help young people in southern Adelaide explore and express their growing understanding of life's complete journey—and the impact is profound.

The LEAF (life, education, art and feelings) Project is an innovative program run over a series of five sessions (one per week), in conjunction with high schools' art departments. The program applies the principles and techniques of art therapy to help students in years 7-9 investigate the natural cycle of life, and represent their feelings about the full range of experience it can entail—including loss and grief—through the process of creating art.

"Students in this age bracket, particularly the year 9s, are at a very important developmental stage," says Southern Adelaide Palliative Services Art Therapist Jane Smeets, who leads the Project.

"They're no longer children, but neither are they adults. Navigating that transition can make it difficult for them to share in words with parents or peers their deepest thoughts about life and loss. But art provides a visual universal language."

The art-making process is also supported by the exploration of helpful and unhelpful behaviours, and different strategies for coping with grief.

Mercedes College program nearing completion

Springfield's Mercedes College has been running a *LEAF Project* program for its year 9 students during term one of 2017, with verbal feedback from the students so far indicating meaningful benefits are being achieved.

An exhibition of their artworks will be held in the school library in a showcase event on **Wednesday 5 April 2017**, with all participating students, their families and the broader school community invited to attend.

"We're hopeful this will be a catalyst for the normalisation of conversations relating to life and loss, both in the schoolyard and at home," says Jane.



Like to run *The LEAF Project* in your school?

If you think year 7-9 students in your local school would benefit from our *LEAF Project*, please contact the **Foundation office on 8275 1142** to register your interest.

There is no fee to run the program, but we do request the school conducts a fundraising activity of some description (e.g. a casual day), with proceeds going to the Foundation. This gesture of thanks will help us cover the program's operating costs, and enable us to continue offering it to other schools in the southern area.