



Rapper and producer  
GI of Workin' Class  
Records

‘For men around here,  
grief and loss are things  
you wouldn’t speak about’

A new initiative to help people open up about the loss in their lives, ‘Deadly Conversation’ offers workshops with the Irish

**D**eadly Conversation is a collaboration between the Irish Hospice Foundation and Axis Ballymun, with input from Lewis Magee, artistic director of Swords Youth Theatre and visual artist Abi Ighodaro. It is a place to talk and create, where emotions that are often difficult to express find an outlet, and an empathetic audience.

The idea came from work done by the Hospice Foundation between September 2021 and March 2022, developing a 'Compassionate Culture Network', in which artist-facilitators and support workers in seven venues invited local communities to explore loss.

The aim was to look at how creativity can help people to talk openly about grief.

Thanks to funding from the National Lottery scheme, Deadly Conversation was established at Axis Ballymun, to facilitate a safe space for open and creative weekly conversations about grief and loss.

### Focusing the conversation

"During the pandemic, we started an arts and creativity programme, and realised that this was a great way to talk about death," says Dominic Campbell of the Irish Hospice Foundation.

"Talking about a book you've read or a film you've watched can open up conversations about personal loss and grief. Talking while making something with your hands — painting or crafting — gives a freedom of expression, we found."

After the pandemic, he says, the question remained, "and was more urgent than ever — where do people take their grief?"

Deadly Conversation "started simply," he says. "We brought artists, someone from the Hospice Foundation, someone from Axis Ballymun, and members of the local community to sit together and talk about loss. We found if your hands are busy, it's easier to talk. And listen."

As Ighodaro says, "We approach creativity with the idea of making things. But actually, creativity starts with observing without

judgement."

Having the workshops take place in the cafe has worked out well. "It's not hidden away in a back room," Campbell says. "You can just walk into the cafe, and have a Deadly Conversation. Through the process of making something, listening to a piece of music, reading something or watching a film, putting your emotions into that and sharing it with a group, something happens."

As Magee says, "Everyone will experience grief in their life. It's a sensation we all share as humans yet are hesitant to talk about. Using creative means... can focus the conversation. Using that as an opening, you can gently move from the characters' experience to the participants' experience."

### Expressing sadness

The truth is, Campbell says, without dedicated spaces, these conversations aren't happening. "No one wants to talk about the experience we will all go through. People die all the time. But we find it challenging to talk about. How can we make that easier?"

The project is a dynamic one, he continues. "What we learn from this will inform what we do next. We're working with the Men's Sheds movement, and looking at setting up more of these programmes."

Each week, there tend to be "between 10 and 20 people. They drop in as they wish. Often, they think they'll pop in for half an hour, then they stay and find themselves doing things they might not have expected, and come back the next week."

There is, Campbell emphasises, "a huge amount of laughter. People arrive worried that it will be gloomy or difficult, but it's not. Talking about death provides a context for them to think about what brings them joy."

"For men, especially young men around here, grief and loss are things you wouldn't speak about normally," says GI, rapper and producer with Workin' Class Records. "And not speaking means it can build up until it gets the better of you, and then it can be expressed in the wrong ways." The 'wrong ways', he explains, include anger, aggression, alcohol and other addictions.

From Finglas, but very much involved

in community arts projects with Axis Ballymun since he was a teenager, GI knows the value of art in coming to terms with loss. "For me, performance is a way to express sadness. It's where I off-load the emotions that will otherwise get the better of me."

"Having a music community has been very helpful," he continues. "We've lost two of our mates and collaborators in the last while."

One of these, Danny Collins, known as Lunatic, passed away from a heart condition in 2009. He taught songwriting in working-class areas of Dublin, was a mentor to many, and became a pioneer for the Irish underground hip-hop movement.

Being able to express his sense of grief around Lunatic's death through music has been vital to GI. For those who don't work creatively as he does, he says "having a space like Axis — somewhere to encourage artistic forms of expression — and a project like Deadly Conversation, is great."

"It's a place where people can come, (and) meet others who they can be open with. It's a neutral spot, where people of all backgrounds and ethnicities can be. It gives an opportunity to meet people, and inspiration for how different people deal with things."

"I've lost people close to me, cousins I grew up with. I witnessed a murder on the street when I was 17. That stays with you. But you have to keep going. I wrote a song about my cousin, who was my best mate, someone I spent summer holidays with. I did the same when we lost Lunatic. I found that good for healing — to make something creative out of what happened. I feel sad but good talking about them, remembering the times we were together."

"When you're out and about in this area, you can't always be open," he continues. "I love the place, but it's not an easy place to grow up. Very early on, you learn a hard exterior, and to never let your guard down. And that can build up inside."

"Being able to talk in a safe space, where

there is a companionship of grief, where we can create, is the best way I know to remember the people we've lost and the good times we had with them."

---

**Join a free 'Deadly Conversation' every Wednesday from 1.30pm at Axis Ballymun. Call (01) 883 2100 to book, or just pop in**

*'No one wants to talk about the experience we will all go through. People die all the time but we find it challenging to talk about*



**Dominic Campbell**  
**of the Irish Hospice**  
**Foundation**