 **NHS Education for Scotland**

**Transcript of ‘Silenced Trauma, Unresolved Loss: Creative Health to Bear Witness to Families of the Missing’ Conference film clip recording**

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Hello, my name is Pascale Waschnig. I'm a doctoral researcher, psychotherapist in training

and lecturer in psychology at the University of West London.

12 years ago, my mother, who had Alzheimer went missing in France. She was never found. I thought my family was alone in this experience, but this was not the case.

Every year in the UK around 170,000 people go missing. That's more than the population of Oxford. Across the world, the number is even greater. Between 8 and 12 million people go missing every year. That's on the same scale as those diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and those who suffer stroke, but it's never just about one person. Each disappearance impacts around 12 people in their surrounding. And you may not realise it yet, but in your career or personal life, you are very likely to meet someone who has been missing or whose loved one are missing. That's because missing is often a coping mechanism linked to mental distress, relationship breakdown, anxiety, depression, dementia, and the numbers are striking, 320,000 incidents per year. Each year in the UK, around 200,000 children are reported missing. Most are teenagers. Children in care are especially vulnerable. 1 in 10 are reported missing compared to just 1 in 200 in a general population. For adults, the risks are just as severe. Up to 18% of those reported missing are from hospital. 4 in 10 people who go missing are suicidal. 3 in 4 come to harm while they're missing, and more people die while missing, than are killed by homicide each year in the UK.

But behind those numbers are the families, families left in an unbearable limbo. Psychologists call this anticipatory, disenfranchised grief and ambiguous loss when someone is physically absent but always present in the mind of those who love them. Unlike bereavement, it's a loss without rituals, without closure, and too often without understanding from the wider community. Families often feel socially isolated, stigmatised, and misunderstood, silence, and sometimes they even feel let down or harmed by the very services they turn to for help. This can lead to profound psychological consequences, prolonged grief, depression, post-traumatic stress, moral injury and feelings of guilt or betrayal. Parents, siblings and children are left questioning themself, each other, and the system meant to support them. They often lose trust in society itself.

But there are things we can do. By raising awareness through creative health, using paintings, and with words of relatives of missing people, short films, I am hoping to shed light on their experience, with medical students from Aston Medical School and mental health nursing student at the University of West London. Helping students by sharing the lived experience of families I interviewed, combining art making, body mapping with role play and narrative exercises aimed at building observational and empathetic skills.

As professionals and as members of society, we can make a difference simply by listening, validating and being an empathetic witness to those affected. Families benefit when we acknowledge their experience, offer practical and emotional support and resist the urge to push for closure. Hope in all its form remains vital.

We can also work to prevent people from going missing by noticing early warning signs, by strengthening family support, by working together across health, social care, education, and the police. Missing is not inevitable or an isolated event. It's a public health and social justice issue. One that affects thousands of lives every year. By offering compassionate support, we can help ensure that families of the missing are no longer left to face this painful uncertainty alone. And I hope you will find the resources and presentation useful.

The film was produced in September 2025 and can be found at <https://www.sad.scot.nhs.uk/conference/> or <https://vimeo.com/1117150427>

For more information visit [www.sad.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.sad.scot.nhs.uk) or contact [supportarounddeath@nes.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:supportarounddeath@nes.scot.nhs.uk)

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