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Plenna launches Death Literacy Wheel

By David Sunderland, Chair, Plenna

I'm pleased to launch Plenna's Death Literacy Wheel as a free resource – and reflect on Plenna's journey.

The infographic provides a holistic overview and checklist of the main things to consider and put in order when preparing for death and dying. In many respects, it represents the culmination of the organization's work so far.

The Wheel distils key lessons and practical pointers from the information Plenna has brought together since its foundation in 2023. The issues it highlights are relevant to people wherever they live, although the practical steps will depend on their circumstances and local context.

Plenna's original questionnaire – ten questions to assess preparedness for death and dying, still available through our home page – is simpler than the Wheel. Those completing it have, on average, achieved high scores. This may suggest that it attracts people who are already relatively well prepared: we may be "preaching to the converted". Reaching those who have yet to engage with these questions is a significant challenge for initiatives promoting death literacy.

Like many organizations, Plenna has developed against a backdrop of rapid technological change. Its web pages bring together useful information, but static resources alone may no longer meet people's expectations. AI tools increasingly offer ways to explore questions and present tailored information through just a few prompts, although their responses still require careful checking.

There remains considerable value in practical aide-mémoires such as the Wheel. Acting on the issues it covers still requires effort: conversations with loved ones, organizing paperwork, obtaining signatures, and emotional and psychological reflection. In this area, a little planning can go a long way towards bringing peace of mind and reducing the burden on those close to us.

A conversation with someone knowledgeable about death literacy can also help people work through these issues, identify priorities and find relevant information and support – potentially saving time, money and distress. With the agreement of Plenna's Committee, I am beginning to offer professional consultations in this area to people around the world, online or in person where feasible. I use the Wheel to illustrate individual preparedness through colour coding, accompanied by a personalized note outlining priorities and suggested next steps.

As I establish myself as an independent "Transition Guide", I remain strongly committed to Plenna's non-profit vision. My paid consultations are separate from my role at Plenna, but I see the two as complementary. Plenna's original ambition was to use its questionnaire to build an international database comparing people's preparedness for death and dying, providing a basis for research and advocacy. I would welcome hearing from anyone – particularly those with technology or communications experience – interested in helping develop and automate Plenna's tools and approaches so that they reach a wider audience.

Death remains a subject many of us find difficult to discuss or prepare for, with consequences for our own wellbeing and that of others. Sex and sexuality education has also faced resistance, yet has become more widely recognized as an important part of preparation for life. Death literacy deserves similar attention: helping adults, and children in age-appropriate ways, develop the understanding and practical skills to face an inevitable part of life.

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