

Bears of Hope

Losing a child during pregnancy, birth or infancy is a very lonely path to walk for every parent. Toni Tattis knows what it is like after losing twin girls in 2003 on top of five previous miscarriages. She spoke to **Peter Reynolds** about a new group to offer support to parents going through this painful, yet quite common, experience.

FINDING out their baby has not survived during pregnancy, birth or infancy may be the most traumatic experience someone will ever go through.

It is a pain that Singleton's Toni Tattis knows only too well.

Mrs Tattis lost her twin girls in 2003. This came after five previous miscarriages.

Her identical twin daughters, Madelin and Jacinta, suffered from twin to twin transfusion syndrome, which is a life threatening condition in which blood from one twin is transfused into the other twin via blood vessels in their common placenta.

Mrs Tattis went into early labour, after just 24 weeks, and tragically neither daughter survived.

She has since given birth to Isabella, who is now four-years-old, with Mrs Tattis describing her as her 'miracle girl'.

She said after experiencing the heartbreak of losing a child herself, she felt the need to reach out and offer support to other parents who were going through similar emotions.

With this in mind, she helped found the Bears of Hope group, a not-for-profit organisation that offers support and guidance for parents who have experienced the loss of their baby, during pregnancy, birth or infancy.

"Each and every time I lost a baby, I drew on the support of my family and friends," Mrs Tattis said.

"But there were still



HOPE: Toni Tattis has founded the Bears for Hope group to offer support to parents who have lost children during pregnancy, birth or infancy. She is hoping to form a group in Singleton.

times of loneliness.

"What the Bears of Hope does is let parents who have lost a child know they are not alone.

"We provide early and ongoing support services, and connect grieving parents and allow them to express

the feelings they need to express and hopefully help them to heal."

Some of the services Bears of Hope offer are online support groups, face to face support groups, coffee and chat mornings, home visits, a quar-

terly newsletter, and supportive bereavement information.

"It is not uncommon. Around one in four parents loses a baby, which is an astounding figure," Mrs Tattis said.

"We encourage people to share their feel-

ings, their thoughts, their heartbreak, so they don't find themselves on their own and grieving in silence."

One of the features of the Bears of Hope group is the actual teddy bears.

Through the donation of traditional teddy bears, Bears of Hope provides parents with the comfort of knowing they are not alone from the very beginning.

"Not only are these bears comforting these families, but we are able to donate them in memory of another baby whose life was just so brief," Mrs Tattis said.

"They are invaluable lifelong keepsakes."

Mrs Tattis is looking at establishing regular support meetings and coffee and chat mornings in Singleton for residents of the Hunter to attend.

While the coffee and chat mornings will be out in the public, the support meetings will be held in private, and Mrs Tattis said she was hopeful of someone with adequate facilities being able to host the meetings.

Anyone interested in attending a coffee and chat morning or a support group session, or wanting more information on the Bears of Hope group, can contact Mrs Tattis on 0400 475 012 or toni@bearssofhope.org.au.

The Bears of Hope website can be found at www.bearssofhope.org.au.