

Samulack: The Karlssons' tragedy reminds us to support each other after pregnancy loss



Parents mourning the death of a child during or shortly after pregnancy are often given short shrift by the system. Lungth / Getty Images/iStockphoto

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With the tragic loss of Erik and Melinda Karlsson's son, there is a need to raise awareness about pregnancy and infant loss resources in Ottawa/Gatineau.

Pregnancy is supposed to be a time of excitement and anticipation of the future. Unfortunately, pregnancy and infant loss (also known as perinatal loss) affects one in four women and their partners and families. Perinatal loss is defined as the death of an infant during pregnancy or soon thereafter. These losses are devastating and it can be hard for others to understand the magnitude of grief that accompanies such losses.

When my husband and I experienced our first pregnancy loss at 10 weeks, our missed miscarriage was treated as if it were just another medical procedure. We received no information on counselling or support services; we were sent home to deal with the physical and emotional aspects of the loss alone.

Following that loss, I gave birth to a son in 2014. Fast forward to my subsequent pregnancy in February 2016. Our son Aaron was diagnosed with no kidneys at a routine 20-week ultrasound. We were shocked and devastated as the pregnancy had progressed normally to that point. My husband Rob and I decided to continue our pregnancy, knowing that Aaron's life would be brief if he survived birth. Only after we made this decision were we referred to the perinatal hospice program at Roger Neilson House.

The Perinatal Hospice program at Roger Neilson House is a nurturing and safe place for families/individuals who have received a heartbreaking fatal prenatal diagnosis that will result in the death of their baby prior to, or shortly after birth. We had access to specialized care including counselling and emotional support, assistance with making medical decisions about the pregnancy, delivery and Aaron's care after birth. The team also assisted with memory making (such as calling a volunteer photographer from Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep) and ongoing bereavement care.

We spent 100 precious minutes with Aaron after birth in June 2016. It was sad and hard, but it was beautiful. Roger Neilson House also offers a Perinatal Loss Bereavement Support Group for those who have experienced the loss of a pregnancy past 20 weeks or the loss of an infant.

With the help of friends, we organized the 2017 Butterfly Run Ottawa/Gatineau, which raised more than \$30,000 through the Ottawa Senators Foundation for pregnancy and infant loss programs at RNH. This run also increased community awareness and encouraging dialogue about pregnancy, infant loss and infertility. The thing is that once you have experienced pregnancy or infant loss, you find out that you are not alone. There are many other people out there who have also experienced it. However, it's still taboo in our culture to talk about death and especially the death of a baby.

In Ottawa/Gatineau, those experiencing pregnancy and infant loss can find local resources for bereavement support at www.butterflyrunottawa.ca/resources. Let's break the silence surrounding this topic and support those who have and will experience this type of loss.

Ontario has come a long way, with Oct. 15 declared Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Day, but we still have a long way to go. I hope to see you at the Butterfly Run Ottawa/Gatineau on Saturday, Oct. 13 2018 as we remember our butterfly babies gone too soon.

Rachel Samulack is a librarian, mother and outdoor adventurer. She is passionate about connecting people with information on local pregnancy and infant loss resources. Contacts: [@OttawaButterfly](https://twitter.com/OttawaButterfly) www.facebook.com/butterflyrunottawa www.butterflyrunottawa.ca butterflyrunottawa@gmail.com