THE ULTIMATE GIFT

This education resource introduces students to organ and tissue donation for transplantation, primarily through the story of Coen Ashton.

Until his lung transplant in 2012, Coen’s life was dominated by hospital admissions and a daily routine of about 30 medications and time-consuming treatments for cystic fibrosis. Coen’s story carries the significant message that organ and tissue donors save and transform lives. The activities in the learning sequence allow students to engage with the life-transforming benefits of organ and tissue donation through Coen’s story, conduct jigsaw research on cystic fibrosis, explore stories of other Australians who have become organ donors or received transplants and prepare a brochure listing activities suitable for sharing with friends.

In this resource, hyperlinks are indicated in two ways:

1. [ACELY1736] links to the Content Description section of ACARA’s Australian Curriculum website.
**Background**

The key message of this resource is that organ and tissue donation saves lives. However, teachers and students need to be aware that in most instances, organ transplants are only possible because a person has died and their family has agreed to proceed with organ donation.

The introductory activity in this resource explores this through a child’s role play available for download at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7l6aQPeioo4&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7l6aQPeioo4&feature=youtu.be).

The central text of this learning sequence is the story of Coen Ashton, who has cystic fibrosis — a chronic illness that was responsible for his lung function being so inadequate that he required a lung transplant in order to live. Further details of Coen’s life and his work as an advocate for organ donation can be found at [http://www.coenashton.com.au/site/home](http://www.coenashton.com.au/site/home). After being nominated in the 2011 Pride of Australia awards, Coen not only won Child of Courage Queensland, but also took out the National Child of Courage and the People’s Choice award. Coen’s story has touched many hearts!

It is not possible to fully explore the concept of organ and tissue donation without discussing the concept of death. This learning sequence will require sensitivity to students who have personal experience with serious health problems or death. While it is important to acknowledge their experience, it is also important to avoid putting these students in a position where they feel pressured to share personal experiences.

**References**

DonateLife website  

DonateLife Book of Life, Volumes 1, 8 and 15 (2011/12)  

FilmLife Film Project 2012  

Coen Ashton Foundation  

LiverKids Australia  
INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY: A FRIEND’S GIFT

A Friend’s Gift is a short three minute film clip produced on the topic of organ and tissue donation for transplantation, as part of the Groundswell Project’s innovative FilmLife Film Project. The film will provide an opportunity to ensure students are aware that in most instances, organ transplants are only possible because a person has died and their family have agreed to proceed with organ donation.

After viewing the film A Friend’s Gift, available for download at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7l6aQPeioo4&feature=youtu.be, use the questions opposite to guide your discussion with your students.

Questions

- The young boy was role playing a doctor. What was he doing in his game?
- What was it that happened that enabled him to give Ted the heart transplant?
- Why did Terence want Ted to have his heart? (This is an opportunity to discuss the fact that there needs to be agreement by the donor’s family for the transplant to proceed).
- Why did the doctor have to do the transplant quickly?

COEN’S STORY

My name is Coen. I was born with cystic fibrosis (CF) so I have spent most of my life fighting for my life. There’s no cure for CF so every day I took about 30 tablets and spent hours having physiotherapy and nebulisers. Every day! It was just another something that I had to do.

My parents were told that I’d need a transplant because my lungs were so bad. Then when I was eight I got so sick that the doctors thought it was the end for me. I was too sick to have transplant surgery.

It’s hard to describe just how little energy I had at that time. For me, walking was hard. Think about how you would feel if you ran around the oval five times.

Now imagine that when you’d finished running around the oval you put a thin straw in your mouth and you had to breathe through it. My breathing — all the time — was like breathing through that thin straw when you’re exhausted.

It took a few years, but the doctors cured the bug infecting my lungs and I was able to go on the list of people waiting for a transplant. My lungs were badly damaged from being so sick and the pills and treatments continued. We moved to Melbourne because that’s the only city that has a hospital that does lung transplants for kids. And we waited for over a year for the phone to ring to say that there were donor lungs available for me.

donatelifegov.au
Half of my time I was in hospital and not moving at all, and the other half I was sleeping 18-20 hours a day. I didn’t have enough energy to do anything else. I was too sick to go to school and I was on oxygen. I couldn’t walk far so I used my kick scooter to get around the house.

The transplant changed all that.

Before the transplant I just focused on staying alive. But now I focus on having the longest and happiest life possible. Now I can run. And I can hold my breath long enough to go spear fishing. I love driving things, particularly boats. I still get out of breath before everyone else does — but my lungs will get stronger now I’m more active.

Having CF will always influence the way I live my life. For example, I think it would be great to have my ears pierced but that’s not on because it would increase my risk of infection, which could lead to rejection of my new lungs. And it’s just not worth that. I’ve gained a pretty good understanding of the danger of infection after all those years in and out of hospitals.

The philosophy I live by is ‘go hard or go home’. I do everything like it’s my last day. Basically, when I make a decision I ask myself “If you thought you were going to die tomorrow, would you do this thing?” If the answer is ‘yes’ I do it, if it’s ‘no’ I don’t do it. That’s the way I live.
ACTIVITY 1: COEN’S STORY

Share Coen’s story with your students.

‘Coen’s Story’, the text at the core of this activity, can be shared with students in one of two ways:

- Coen’s story video file [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LeJtWTBabbA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LeJtWTBabbA)

In a class discussion, encourage the students to reflect on the changes in Coen’s life and to consider the constraints of life with a chronic illness. The focus of this discussion will be on the significance of Coen’s lung transplant. In a later activity students will complete research where they learn about cystic fibrosis.

Ask your students questions such as:

- What are some of the differences between Coen’s life and yours?
- In what ways has Coen’s life been similar to yours?
- Think about the changes in Coen’s life. What do you think the most significant change might have been?
- What does it mean to ‘have a transplant’?

Coen says… “we waited for over a year for the phone to ring to say that there were donor lungs available for me”. What does this mean? What is a donor?

What do you think might have been the most challenging aspect of Coen’s life when he was waiting for the transplant?

Coen says he can’t get his ears pierced because it would increase the risk of infection and possibly to the rejection of his new lungs. What does he mean by ‘rejection’?

At the conclusion of the discussion, invite your students to complete a creative expression activity where they reflect on the change in Coen’s life. Encourage your students to empathise with Coen and imagine how he might have felt leading up to the transplant and how he might feel now.

Ask your students to select words, phrases and colours that represent these two different times in Coen’s life. Students should decide on a format to present a visual display that portrays the difference in Coen’s life e.g. word clouds in landscapes for the two different times or a collage of words and colours for ‘before’ and ‘after’ the transplant.

Students can learn more about Coen Ashton, and his work as an advocate for organ and tissue donation, by visiting the following website [http://www.coenashton.com.au/site/home](http://www.coenashton.com.au/site/home).
ACTIVITY 2: JIGSAW RESEARCH

In this activity students will work in groups of three to find out more about cystic fibrosis.

It may be helpful if all students watch the two animations on cystic fibrosis, found at the end of the page at http://www.coenashton.com.au/fact-file/, before they begin their individual research.

Each student in the group will then be responsible for investigating one of the following three questions:

1. How does cystic fibrosis affect a person’s life?
2. What is the main function of the lung?
3. Why do some people with cystic fibrosis need a lung transplant?

Allow time for students to do research and prepare a written response for their allocated question. Encourage students to use diagrams where appropriate.

Students then form new groups – each student should meet with the other students who have been allocated the same question to explore e.g. all those responding to question one work together for this section of the activity. Within this new group, students take turns to share their response to the question and others in the group can make suggestions to prompt further exploration.

Allow time after this session for students to revise and/or finalise their response.

Students then return to their original group where each student has the opportunity to share their response with the other students.
ACTIVITY 3: STORIES FROM THE DONATELIFE BOOK OF LIFE

Lungs are just one of the organs that are donated for transplantation in Australia. Other organs that are transplanted to save lives are the liver, heart, pancreas, small bowel and kidneys. In addition, tissues such as the heart valve, skin, bone, corneas (from the eye) and blood vessels can be successfully transplanted.

In this activity your students will work in groups to read the stories of other Australians who have had their lives transformed by organ and/or tissue transplants, as well as young people who became organ donors. Allocate one of the following stories to each group:

- Sophie, Volume 1, When I grow up … I’d like to be well
- Ethan. Volume 13, Ethan. Gone too early but not in vain
- Zaidee. Volume 12, Zaidee’s Story and Zaidee’s Rainbow Shoelaces
- Angus, Volume 15, Angus’ story
- Ashleigh, Volume 8, Back on track thanks to Bone Bank

Students in each group should work together to complete the questions on Worksheet 1: DonateLife Book of Life when they have read their story. Each group should nominate one person to make a report to the class about their story.

Some students may want to explore further to find other health issues where people may need a transplant. For these students, the following webpage may be appropriate

Note:
DonateLife can organise for people to visit classrooms to share their stories about organ and tissue donation and to respond to students’ questions about their experience. If you would like to explore the possibility of such a visit, you can find contact details for DonateLife in your state/territory at
ACTIVITY 4: FRIENDSHIP – A GIFT WE CAN ALL GIVE

Before his transplant, Coen spent years on the waiting list for new lungs and during this time he was too sick to go to school for months at a time. Others are still on waiting lists for organ and tissue donation.

Many students suffer from illness or accidents that prevent them from attending school regularly. This can be disruptive to friendships as well as to learning.

Invite your students to think about how it would feel if they were unable to get to school for long periods at a time because of health problems. In a class discussion ask them questions such as:

- What would you miss most?
- What are some of the things you may not be able to do if you were sick or injured?
- What types of activities could you do on your own while you were in bed?
- What activities could you share with a friend if you were injured or sick?
- Why might you want to keep in contact with friends?

Ask your students to create a brochure that could be shared with other school students their age (in electronic or hard copy). The purpose of the brochure is to provide a list of activities that could be shared with a friend who is absent from school for long periods because they are very sick. Encourage your students to list a wide variety of activities. At least some of the activities should be appropriate for sharing during a home/hospital visit; some could be shared online.

Encourage your students to create at least one original activity and to provide a set of clear instructions for it.

Remind your students to:

- make the brochure visually appealing by using colours, images and/or different text types;
- think about using headings to provide structure;
- use language that is clear and age-appropriate; and
- think about how to distribute the brochure and/or where it could be made available.
REPRODUCIBLE WORKSHEET

Worksheet 1: DonateLife Book of Life

Names of students in your group:

1. What is the name of the story you read?

2. For stories about transplant recipients:
   a. What type of transplant does the story describe?
   b. Describe how the transplant affected the person’s life?

3. Whose perspective is the story told from?

4. What do you think that the expression ‘the gift of life’ means?
For teachers reference only

A FRIEND’S GIFT — DIALOGUE TRANSCRIPT

A little boy plays out an organ donation story with his toys while his mother sleeps, recovering from a recent heart transplant operation. Like ‘Doctor’ Grant’s mother, Mr McBear has been very sick and is given a new heart by his generous friend, Terence the Pterodactyl.

**Dr Grant**
00:12 I have some sad news Mr McBear.
00:15 Terence passed away last night in his sleep.
00:22 I can call you Ted?
00:26 Well Ted, there’s a cloud with silver around it, Daddy says; and Terence knows you’ve been very sick.
00:33 Since Terrance and you were the bestest of friends Terence wants you to have his heart.
00:39 Dad says you guys are very compatible.
00:43 Compatible.
00:46 But we’ve gotta move quick so it doesn’t go off. Are you ready Ted?
00:56 Okay, I’ll bring her in.
00:58 Mrs McBear.
01:01 I think Ted is a bit scared because he doesn’t know if the next heart will love you.
01:06 But I know it will, when it comes from someone with such a big heart that wants to share it.
01:15 I just know I guess, because I’m a doctor.
01:21 Nurse Doug, can you please prep the surgery room.
01:26 Tess, can you please wait in the waiting room?
02:06 It went really well Tess. The new heart is in and it loves you very much. You can go see him if you like?

**Grant’s mum**
02:12 So the surgery went well Doctor?

**Dr Grant**
02:14 Mum you’re awake.

**Grant’s mum**
02:20 Softly honey.

**Dr Grant**
02:22 Can I see it?

**Grant’s mum**
02:23 Yep.

**Dr Grant**
02:27 And you still love me? Don’t-cha?

**Grant’s mum**
02:30 Of course. More than ever baby.