

The process of developing our new bereavement support groups

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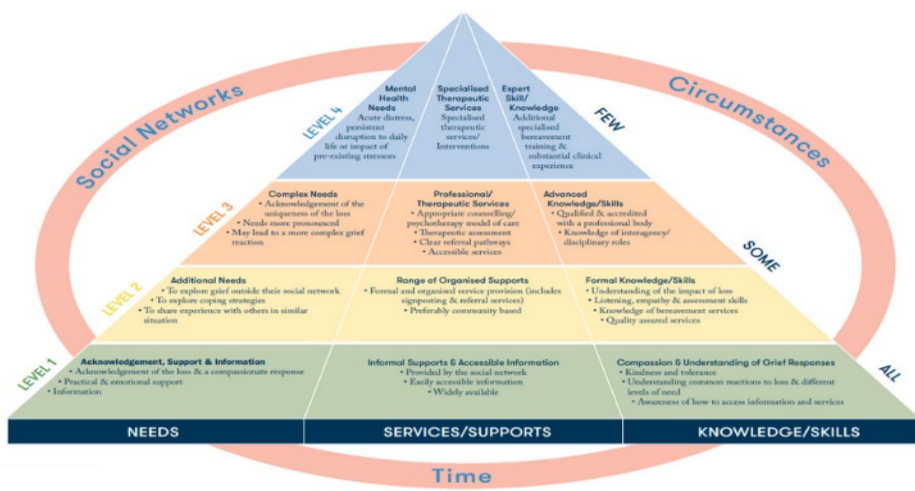
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Background

St. Francis Hospice provides specialist palliative care services to the people of north Dublin city and county, and its environs. The Social Work Team provides practical and emotional support to patients and their families during illness and to families after the death of their relative.

The Social Work team provides a range of bereavement support and counselling services, in line with the Irish Adult Bereavement Care Pyramid (IHF, 2020).



Social support can mitigate against the impact of bereavement and support more favourable bereavement outcomes (Sarper and Rodriguez, 2024). We identified a gap in the provision of ongoing social support for bereaved clients in our level 1 and 2 support services. We developed a Grief Café and a Walk and Talk bereavement group to address this gap. The groups aim include facilitating peer support and connections with other bereaved people to reduce isolation.



Grief café:

The aim is to provide a safe space for the family members of those who have died under our hospice services to come and chat over a cup of tea or coffee, with others who are grappling with similar feelings of loss and grief. The group is facilitated by a bereavement social worker with the support of trained bereavement volunteers on the first Friday of each month from 10am-11.30am in the Day Care room in St Francis Hospice, Blanchardstown, Dublin. The café offers an opportunity for peer-to-peer interaction in a secure, comfortable environment where individuals can discuss their experiences with grief without fear of judgment or scrutiny; regardless of how long it's been since the bereavement occurred.

At the time of writing this poster, we have hosted 3 grief cafés. A total of 26 people have attended. A number of people have attended all of the cafés and gently welcome new people into the café.

Feedback:

'it was lovely to chat and be supported by the staff and other bereaved people'

'A very welcoming and safe space to speak about our experiences. It was a lovely peaceful place with lots of support'

Walk and talk:

The group provides an opportunity for bereaved relatives to meet other bereaved people and simply walk in the fresh air while sharing advice and connecting with people who know what it is like living with grief. The group occurs on the last Tuesday of every month in a local park. The group is 2 hours. This time includes registration, the walk and a post walk tea/ coffee in the park café. The group is facilitated by a Social Worker and 2 trained bereavement volunteers. It is not only a place for people to express themselves, but to find comfort and maybe even friendship which can help to ease the loneliness and isolation that often comes with grief. The group utilises peer support by creating an informal space in nature where people can connect. To date, we have hosted 2 walk and talk events. A total of 13 people have attended to date. 3 people have attended both walk and talk events.

Feedback:

'I found that when I am with the group and went from one person to another in the group, I felt it was very relevant to my situation. They were going through the same things. Little things resonated with me, it helped me, and I hope I helped them'

Conclusion

It was our aim to close the gap in our bereavement services to meet the need of those who required social support. The client feedback has demonstrated the clear need and benefit of this support. We have extended the pilot into 2025. While doing so we will continue to welcome feedback from group members with the goal to continue to grow these groups to meet the needs of the bereaved families in our service.

References:

Irish Hospice Foundation (2020) Adult Bereavement Care Framework: A National Framework, Dublin.
Sarper and Rodriguez (2004). The Role of Perceived Social Support in the Grief Experiences of More Anxious and Self-Compassionate People.

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