

Connecting Communities Project Review



working in
partnership with:

Cruse
Bereavement
Support



**Cruse
Scotland**
Bereavement Support



It's what we do

cruse.org.uk

Contents

Background	3
Stage one – community mapping	4
Questions asked	5
Creating an insight led model	6
Stage two – trialling community grief support interventions	7
Community Grief Hubs	8
Grief libraries	9
Community engagement events	10
Community grief drop-in	11
Compassionate communities training	12
Insights and Key Performance Indicators	13
Project progress against KPI's	14
Compassionate communities training	17
Working with under-served communities	19
Insights from project outcomes	20
Pilot Community Reflections	21
Kilwinning	22
Splott	23
Manor Park	24
Belfast	25
Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Review	26
Tottenham	27
Barriers to accessing support	29
Challenges, Learnings and Conclusion	31
Challenges and barriers	32
Learnings and considerations	33

Background

In January 2022 Cruse Bereavement Support and Cruse Scotland joined with Co-op to launch a partnership aiming to explore ways in which we can better equip communities with services, resources and skills to independently support members of the community following a bereavement.

At the partnership launch Co-op completed research with YouGov which found that just under half of people (49%) who have not experienced a bereavement feel unprepared in helping a bereaved friend or relative, and one in eight (12%) have actively avoided someone who is grieving because they don't know what to say to them.

Therefore, funded by Co-op members through the Co-op's Community Partnership Fund, the Connecting Communities campaign launched in five pilot locations across the UK with the aim to get communities talking about grief, and understand how we could better prepare people to support themselves and others following a bereavement.

Throughout the past 18 months, on the ground across our pilot locations five community development officers have been working directly with bereaved members of the community and local community wellbeing services to co-create a community led bereavement support model.

To identify which pilot locations would benefit most from this new approach, we looked at the Co-op's Community Wellbeing Index (CWI). Using insight from the CWI, we created a shortlist of proposed communities for the pilot through the lens of vulnerability – focusing on locations with poor long term health status and a high number of one person households aged 50+ (which is used

as a proxy measure for loneliness). We also considered whether we already had a Co-op presence in the local area so that our Member Pioneers who work to connect communities could support the programme and we checked that the shortlisted locations were of a suitable size for this type of activity.

Community Pilot locations include:

- Splott, Cardiff
- Kilwinning, Ayreshire
- Belfast, Northern Ireland
- Tottenham, London
- Manor Park, London

Anticipated Outcomes

We started the project with four key outcomes we wished to achieve during phase one of the project. These outcomes were created to ensure benefit to both communities and those bereaved within them, aiming to create a sustainable model that could be replicated within communities across the UK. The four agreed outcomes were:

- Bereaved community members feel better supported by their communities following the death of someone close
- Bereaved community members reporting improved wellbeing following access to community led bereavement support
- Communities have greater understanding of the role they play in supporting bereaved community members
- Community members feeling equipped and empowered to support community members following a bereavement

Stage one

Community mapping

The first stage of the project was all about gaining a greater understanding of the communities we were engaging with. Our officers began to embed themselves into the communities by building relationships with existing services supporting community members with everyday services and collecting insight on their understanding and awareness of grief and bereavement.

Immediately it became noticeable that each community location had a variety of groups and organisations offering support across a host of topics, however very few or none related to bereavement. The groups and organisations existing were ones such as community mental health teams, community gardens, walking groups and knitting clubs – there were some common themes amongst each of the pilot communities:

- Although there were lots of groups and organisations looking to support the community through services, there wasn't a huge amount of connection amongst them and often one group may not know another existed. In turn this impacted the services from effectively socially prescribing and signposting community members to the most appropriate services available.
- Not having a central hub for resource and signposting, meant many community members were not aware of service offerings within the area. This created barriers for community members accessing the support they need from the most appropriate group or service.



- Many of the groups and organisations identified their core service users as those most vulnerable in the community, and admitted not always knowing where to signpost them to appropriate help.

We saw this as an opportunity to explore the option of upskilling existing community groups and organisations to build bereavement support and resource into their service provision, rather than setting out to launch new bereavement groups which would struggle to sustain following project completion.

As part of the mapping phase we conducted 134 interviews to gain a greater understanding of the community member's knowledge around grief and bereavement. The interviews were conducted with members of the community, staff and volunteers from local groups and organisations delivering community services.

Questions asked

Do you personally know of any bereavement support for community members in your area?

66%

reported not knowing of any bereavement support

If there had been an opportunity to access community bereavement support would you have been interested in attending?

79%

had said they would be interested in community bereavement support

If you have experienced a bereavement, did you access bereavement support?

53%

reported to have experienced a bereavement

Would you be interested in attending training to enable you to better support bereaved members of your community?

79%

said they would be interested in attending training

11%

reported seeking formal bereavement support



Creating an insight led model

Insights collected through the mapping phase, both through informal conversations with communities and more formal collection through surveys helped us to identify four key areas of focus to take into stage two of the project.



Grief Visibility

66% of those surveyed reported not knowing of any bereavement support within their community, this highlighted the importance for better signposting and visibility of what support is available for bereaved members of the community.



Community led bereavement support

Over half of those interviewed reported to have experienced a bereavement, with only 11% reporting to have sought formal bereavement support. However an overwhelming 79% of those surveyed reported they would be interested in community bereavement support, therefore exploring options for community bereavement services was a key area we needed to think about in stage two.



Community Connection

We heard many reports of groups and organisations not knowing about other services available within their communities. If other services weren't aware of what was on offer, how many community members didn't know either? We needed to design a way of bringing these groups and organisations together to create more collaborative ways of supporting community members.



Bereavement education

79% reported they would be interested in attending training. Through many of the interviews we heard reports that groups and organisations feel unprepared to discuss grief with community members using their services. This highlighted the importance of us including education and upskilling to stage two of the project.

Stage two

Trialling community grief support interventions

Throughout conversations with bereaved members of the community it was clear that there was no one answer to the 'best way to access bereavement support'. For some community members they believed meeting peers with shared experiences of bereavement would help, for others having a resource they can take away and process in their own time was desirable, and alternatively some reported that practical guidance and education would be helpful.

Therefore we designed a number of community grief support interventions to trial during stage two of the project. Each of these interventions offered different tiers of support to both those who have suffered a bereavement, and those who are supporting bereaved members of the community.



Although there was no clear answer to the 'best way to access support', there was a clear indication, through mapping insights, that a centralised community base for residents to access resource and support, and service providers to signpost to, would be really helpful as a first step.

Community Grief Hubs

Therefore, we began to build a model for Community Grief Hubs which would be established within existing community buildings where we could host:



Community grief libraries

A branded bookcase stocked with books and grief resources for all ages and for different types of bereavement. This resource was aimed at those attending the grief hubs who perhaps didn't want to attend the drop-in sessions. These books supported community members to better understand their own personal bereavements, but also how to support others through their grief too.



Monthly Compassionate Communities Training

Across the past 8 months we have delivered monthly online and in-person 'Compassionate Communities Training' to local residents, professionals and volunteers delivering local community services. This training has been designed with the aim to equip communities with tools and knowledge to better support themselves and others following a bereavement.



Printed Community Support resources

Leaflets, posters and booklets provided by a host of local services providing wellbeing support for community members. These resources helped signpost to many different services and increased the visibility for services available locally.



Weekly drop-in sessions for bereaved community members

These sessions offer informal opportunity for bereaved members of the community to connect. Our Community Development Officers would offer some light touch facilitation, but largely it would be an opportunity for people with shared experiences to connect and share their personal stories of bereavement.



Community Engagement Events

Throughout the project we hosted a number of community engagement events from each of the community grief hubs aimed to engage members of the community with informal light touch bereavement support. These events invited community wellbeing services to have a stall to engage with members of the community, supporting better collaboration and connection of services across the community.





Grief libraries

During the mapping phase of the project we mapped which resources currently existed within our pilot communities to support community members following a bereavement. Resources available were limited in each location largely to a single printed flyer about grief, primarily accessible through GP signposting and not advertised in public spaces. Or if bereaved community members were 'lucky' they may be signposted by friends or family to an online resource or support to help.

This highlighted immediate barriers for community members, and raised the need for us to be building a model which encouraged and promoted cross-community service collaboration offering bereaved members of the community the best possible opportunity to find the resource and support they need.

Therefore, we decided to launch 'Community Grief Libraries' in our Community Grief Hubs to provide a centralised location for grief resources.

The Grief Libraries are branded bookcases equipped with books about grief and bereavement for all ages which can be loaned out by community members. The libraries also hosted a number of printed



flyers and posters that people could take away to read in their own time, both bereavement resources created through the Cruse and Co-op partnership and other location specific bereavement resources created by local services and support.

Additional to the physical grief libraries our Community Development Officers were equipped with huge signposting resources for grief podcasts, films, TV programmes and online support forums which they could use to signpost bereaved community members during drop-in sessions.





Community engagement events

Throughout the project our Community Development Officers worked with local authorities and local community wellbeing services to come together and host a series of Community Engagement Events. These events brought together services from across each pilot location for 'family wellbeing days', hosting free activities such as face-painting and crafting for children whilst parents had the ability to access advice, support and signposting from services attending.

These events proved to be a huge opportunity for cross-community engagement with over 2000 community members engaging with the project across our five locations. Each of the events had a minimum of 2 members of Cruse staff in attendance, one who would be based on the stall engaging in light conversation and signposting, and one who would be available to provide one-to-one light-touch support for bereaved community members looking for immediate support.

A huge benefit of this engagement was to be able to provide light touch support, education and signposting to members of the community who would have not



otherwise sought advice and support. Following each of the events we saw a rise in engagement at our drop-in sessions, and increased sign-ups for our Compassionate Communities training.

These events also provided vital relationship building and networking amongst local community services, allowing for staff and volunteers from local services to get a better understanding of support available locally and encourage them to signpost their service users to the most appropriate support available.



Community grief drop-in

In each of our pilot locations where we launched a grief hub we launched a weekly Community Grief drop-in session. These drop-ins acted as a consistent form of weekly peer-support and signposting for locally bereaved members of the community. In each location these drop-ins took slightly different forms and evolved into different levels of support for communities.

Each of the drop-ins were lightly facilitated by our Community Development Officer who guided and supported conversations between bereaved community members. Offering, where appropriate, one-to-one support for attendees, and addressing safeguarding concerns where necessary. However, the drop-ins were largely used as a space where bereaved members of the community could come together and share their personal experiences of bereavement over light refreshments.

In total we welcomed 188 bereaved members of the community into 4 community grief hubs across our sites in England, Scotland and Wales. Of those 188 who attended a drop in we completed 160 surveys to collect insight on a number of different factors.

Data gathered during interviews with people who had attended drop-in/peer support groups across sites indicated that there were improvements in personal wellbeing. Interviewees provided examples of how the support had helped them to engage more with others, leave their house more, try new



and different activities, and reduce their feelings of loneliness and isolation. People also described being better able to cope, and in some cases specifically stated that attending the group had improved their wellbeing.

A number of interviewees raised the fact that they had tried other forms of support such as counselling, been prescribed medication for mental health conditions or been referred to mental health services. However, they had found that our support was more easily accessible, and more appropriate for them as it was specifically tailored to their experience of grief and bereavement. In particular, the informal nature of the support and the opportunity to meet other community members with similar experiences was seen as particularly valuable.



Compassionate communities training

During mapping a common theme that continuously arose was that people wanted to do more to support others following a bereavement, but they didn't know what to do or say. Therefore, we felt it was really important to co-create training aimed at supporting community members and community service professionals and volunteers.

The training has been open to all members of the public to attend. However, we have targeted marketing for sign-ups to local services and organisations in order to create a local network of trained professionals and volunteers. The training has been delivered monthly both in person and online and consists of a half day workshop, followed by an optional peer-reflection session.



The content of the training included:

- Understanding grief and loss
- The different impacts of grief
- How grief may or may not present
- Tools to support grieving people, including active listening
- Self care when supporting others

The workshops received very positive reviews and reflections from attendees, and participants reported that they felt they had the knowledge and confidence to better support bereaved people following training completion. This is evident in data reflecting change in knowledge before vs after attendance of Compassionate Communities Training.



Insights and Key Performance Indicators

Project progress against KPI's

188
bereaved
community members
visiting Community
Grief Hubs

2,800+
community
members attending
Community
Wellbeing Events

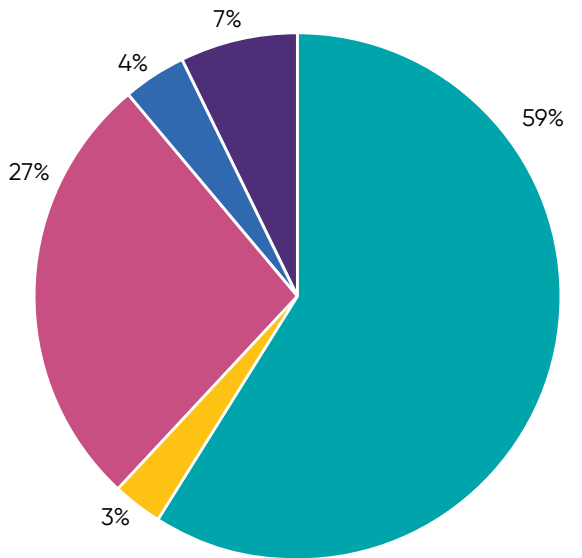
517
individuals
signed up for
Compassionate
Communities
training

120,000
Grief Resources
distributed to
Co-op funeral
homes across
the UK

Grief resources

Throughout the partnership a number of resources have been developed to support communities in having a better understanding of Grief and Bereavement. The resources include a guide on how to support yourself and others when grieving. A poster has also been made available, that features guidance on the what to look out for concerning the physical effects of grief, and how to have a conversation with someone who is struggling following a bereavement.

Do you feel your mental wellbeing has improved following your visit to the grief hub?



* Data updated on 31/08/2023 from 160 attendees visiting Community Grief Hubs across UK



The chart to the left shows data collected by the project team, based on 160 surveys completed with participants that attended the grief hub. The chart shows that of those who responded, the majority of people stated that their visit had improved their wellbeing.

Interviewees provided examples of how the support had helped them to engage more with others, leave their house more, try new and different activities, and reduce their feelings of loneliness and isolation.

People also described being better able to cope, and in some cases specifically stated that attending the group had improved their wellbeing. A number of interviewees raised the fact that they had tried other forms of support such as counselling, been prescribed medication for mental health conditions or been referred to mental health services.

However, they had found that our support was more easily accessible, and more appropriate for them as it was specifically tailored to their experience of grief and bereavement. In particular, the informal nature of the support and the opportunity to meet other community members with similar experiences was seen as particularly valuable.

86%
of community members
visiting Community
Grief Hub Drop-Ins are
reporting improved
wellbeing following
their visit

We asked our Grief Hub attendees to elaborate on their experiences at our Community Grief Drop-in's

“ Found out about the group through word of mouth. Tried for over a year to find a bereavement group, with no success. This group has been amazing, sitting with people listening to their stories has given me a better understanding of my own and my families experience of grief and I've learned that I am not alone. The participants are all struggling with their grief, we are all struggling with the same feelings – heartbreak, guilt, no purpose etc. I would have benefitted from this group following the death of my wife as at that time I was mentally ill with grief. I have watched the group go from strength to strength and really help everyone who attends. ”

“ Since finding this group, It has been beneficial to my mental health. Having people to speak to who are going through the same thing, however sad, definitely helps you to know you are not alone. I'm glad I found this group. We have all become more than members, we are friends. ”

“ It's the first time I've really been able to talk about my husbands death but also the first time that I feel I can start to move on with my life. ”

“ After visiting the hub I feel uplifted, eager to share my experience and support recently bereaved members of the local community. ”

“ My grief was so raw it was nice to talk to others who had had similar experiences but also to talk to someone about how I could cope going forward. ”

“ I lost my husband in tragic circumstances and it was nice to talk to someone about this who did not know him and would not judge. ”

“ My son and grandson got killed in Jamaica. I wasn't able to attend their funeral as I wasn't going to be allowed back in the UK. This affected me in so many ways and my mental health isn't so good now. But I love being in the community and attending these sessions because it helps me forget my worries for a minute and helps me feel connected. ”

“ Part of my grieving meant I no longer fitted in to the world I belonged to. I was introduced to the group by a friend who attends, and it has been a life saver and a god send. Being with people who understand has been beneficial for my mental health and wellbeing. ”

“ It was hard when my Mum died but even harder trying to help my children and talking about it has helped me a lot. ”

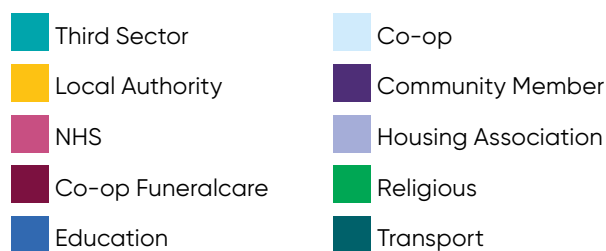
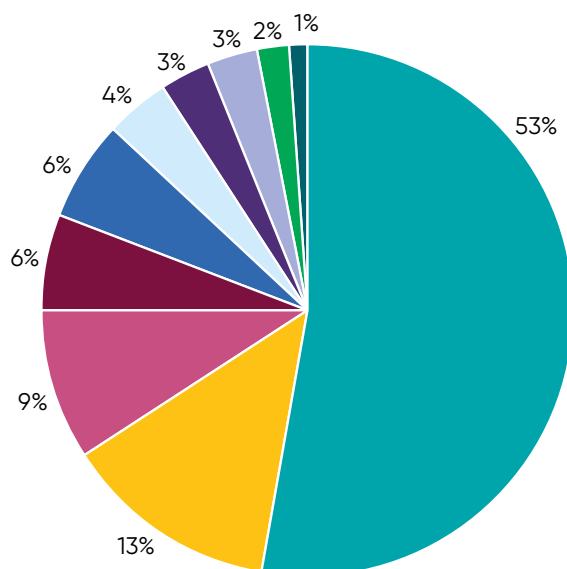
Compassionate communities training

Over the course of the project 517 people have signed up to attend the free one-day training and 314 have attended to date, with a further 6 training sessions to be delivered between August 2023–November 2023.

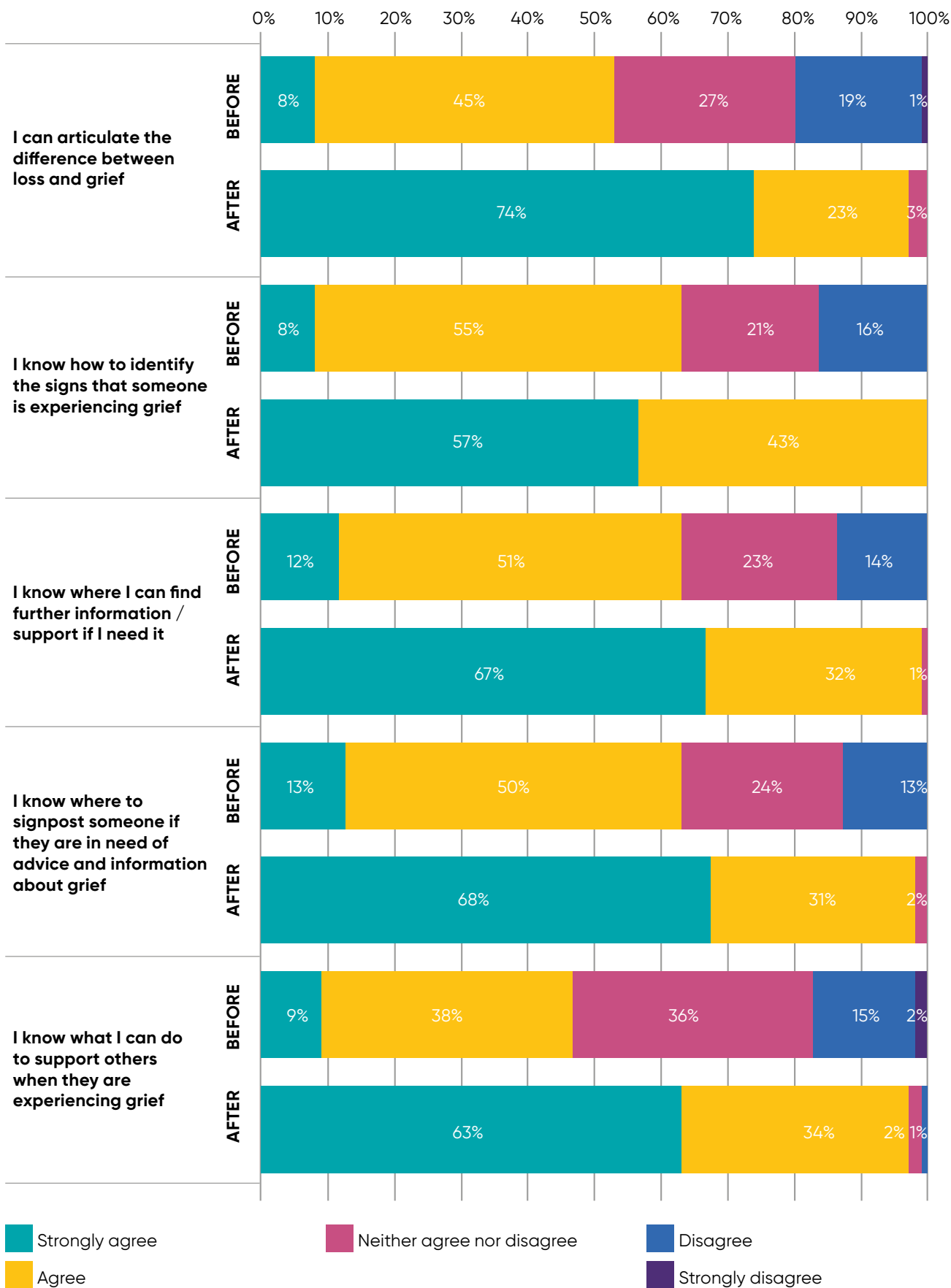
Participants were asked to complete pre and post surveys to measure changes in knowledge, as well as capture information about their personal background.

The data shows that more than three quarters of attendees were staff and the majority of attendees worked for third sector organisations, as shown in the chart to the right.

Substantial improvements in knowledge were evident once people had attended training. The chart shows that the number of people who strongly agreed with the five statements asked in both surveys increased substantially between pre and post surveys. Participants following the training also reported that they felt they had the knowledge and confidence to better support bereaved people in their communities and networks.



Compassionate Communities Training – changes in knowledge before vs after training



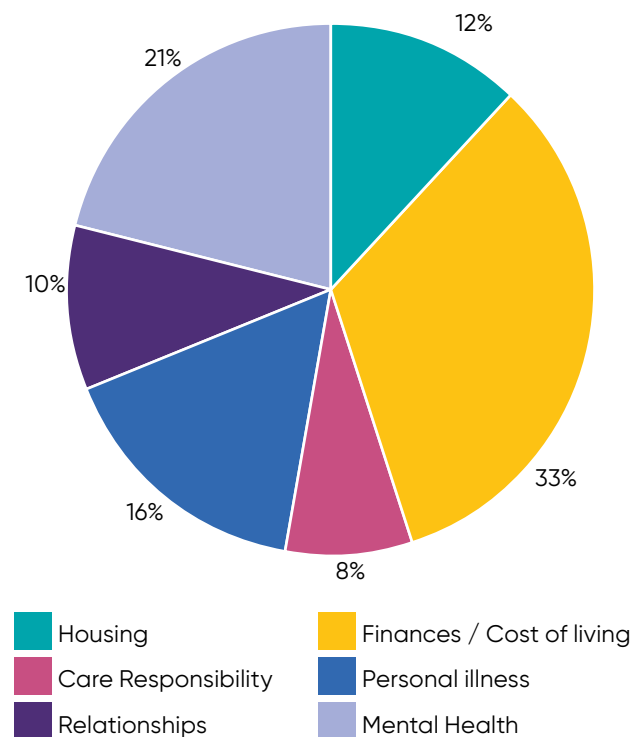
Working with under-served communities

Throughout the project we have been engaging with bereaved community members from underserved communities, to greater understand the challenges and barriers for them in seeking support following a bereavement, these conversations highlighted:

- Support is most accessible when offered in a safe and familiar location – eg. Community centre, library, community café
- Support is easier to access through trusted members of the community – eg. Turning to organiser or leader of an existing community service for support, or in some cases to a faith leader
- Grief resources need to include advice and guidance on practical support for factors that could be impacted following the death of someone close – funeral poverty, housing support and advice, financial support
- Having the opportunity to connect with others in the community who have shared experiences of bereavement could help tackle the stigma surrounding grief, and decrease the feeling of loneliness through creating new relationships and routine after the death of someone close

Many community members also reported external stressors impacting on their wellbeing which makes processing grief incredibly difficult. The chart to the right indicates some of the factors impacting on community members wellbeing. As you can see the largest stressors impacting bereaved community members are finances and personal mental health struggles. To support addressing these throughout the project we have ensured each hub has resource and signposting information relating

to local financial support available. We have also built strong relations with the local community mental health teams, often we are seeing referrals of their patients onto the grief hubs with 28% of our grief hub attendees reporting being signposted to the hub via a health professional or link worker. We have also ensured each of our community engagement events host mental health stalls in collaboration with local services and organisations, raising awareness and visibility for mental health services available locally.



It is really important to be aware of the challenges and external stressors that can impact on a bereaved persons ability to process and manage grief. Throughout the project we heard many stories of people in survival mode with no capacity to process grief, the hubs and light touch support available at community events offered bereaved community members the opportunity to have their feelings heard and engage in a capacity that suited them.

Insights from project outcomes

Residents feeling better supported by their community following a bereavement

We have trained 314 individuals through the Compassionate Communities Workshops from a range of professional, volunteering and community backgrounds. The uptake in training has been extremely positive and we have received positive feedback from attendees about how they would use the training to support bereaved members of the community:

“ I plan to think about what supports we can implement in to our organisation to reach and support carers who are struggling with loss. ”

“ I plan to organise a bereavement cafe in my neighbourhood. ”

“ Listen more and see what I can do in my community to help bereaved people. ”

Improved mental wellbeing of those who have experienced a bereavement following access to community led support

We have had an immensely positive response from attendees of the grief hubs when asked if attending the drop-in has helped improve their wellbeing. With 59% of attendees responding yes, and 27% responding somewhat. 3% responded no, however this came with the explanation that they felt the groups would help in time following repeat visits.

We have seen increasing numbers of community members returning to drop-in sessions, with 188 bereaved community members visiting over the past 12 months. Attendees report feeling they have grown

in confidence each week and feel better prepared to manage their own grief, but also support their family, friends and community too. A big impact on many attendee's wellbeing has been relationships with family following the death. Attending the group and understanding different perspectives on grief has supported community members to better understand the grief responses from those around them.

“ Since finding this group, it has been beneficial to my mental health. Having people to speak to who are going through the same thing, however sad, definitely helps you to know you are not alone. I'm glad I found this group. We have all become more than members, we are friends. ”

Community members feeling they can better support their networks following a bereavement & Increased understanding of how the communities can better support bereaved residents

The Compassionate Communities training has been very well received by all who have attended so far with all attendees reporting an increase in understanding of knowing how to support someone following a bereavement, and many reporting that they will take the learnings to offer informal bereavement support to friends, family and service users. The training has largely been delivered to local service providers which is supporting us in reaching more members of the community who may not engage with traditional bereavement support services.

“ The content of the training has helped me think about how we can shape our public content to be more user friendly for those who have experienced a bereavement. ”

Pilot Community Reflections

Kilwinning

In Kilwinning we have seen incredible engagement and involvement throughout the project from both bereaved community members, local services and groups looking to build more bereavement provision and resource into their offerings.

The community grief hub drop-in has been running since December 2022 and has welcomed 44 bereaved members of the community during this time, with many returning weekly to access peer-support.

The drop-in's have been so successful the regular attendees have decided to form their own constituted group to continue delivering this bereavement support following project completion. They have been working closely with the local member pioneer and another local charity to write a constitution, taking ownership and sustaining the grief peer-support offered.

They recognised the need for this support elsewhere and have recently launched a second group in Irvine which has been well attended by 12 new members of the community. Attendees have shared how life changing the grief group has been and we have seen great growth from bereaved community members reintegrating into society and finding new routines following their visit to the hub.



Community development officer with regular members of grief drop in



Left: Two grief group participants visiting a new venue to launch second grief group



Right: Grief group participant volunteering at event

The Community Development Officer for Kilwinning has also formed strong relations across the third sector network throughout the project engaging with over 95 groups and organisations throughout the past 18 months.

Two community engagement events have been hosted at the hub, each event invited local health and wellbeing organisations to come and engage with members of the community. Each event had 12 community services and organisations attending with stalls for local resource and support. The events also saw over 120 members of the community attend to find out more about local service offerings.

To support connecting organisations working with bereaved communities across North Ayrshire, the community development officer recently launched a bereavement forum. Bringing together different services supporting bereaved families, children and adults to collaborate and share resource and provision.

The forum will remain following project completion with each organisation taking turns to host the quarterly meetings. They will also provide support and connection to the peer-support group established through this project, encouraging and supporting long term sustainable peer-led community support.

Splott

In Splott we have seen great success in engaging with professional bodies such as Cardiff Council and Cardiff University Health Board, whilst also making great progress engaging with underserved communities raising visibility of grief in the community. We have seen over 100 community members attend the drop-in for light touch support, often an informal chat with our Community Development Officer. A large number of these ad-hoc visitors leave with grief books and resources for them to understand in their own time.

There has been some regular attendees to the drop-ins who have connected strongly with the project and have supported in promoting and developing the community bereavement support on offer. One attendee has strong affiliation with the deaf community locally and is supporting to co-develop an adapted version of our Compassionate Communities Training to deliver to deaf members of the community in partnership with the British Death Association.



Cruse team set up with community grief resources at community engagement event



Cruse CYP officer working with family to plant memory seeds

In Splott we have seen brilliant attendance at our community engagement events, bringing together local wellbeing services and fun activities to offer families accessible support. The strong relations with local council and health board has supported us in promoting these events to bereaved community members across Cardiff. The council has also expressed interest in supporting to fund future events as they have seen such positive impact and value, especially when engaging with harder to reach members of the community who might not otherwise access community wellbeing support.

Recently our Community Development Officer has launched a local forum made up of professionals, volunteers and community members to continue raising the profile of grief in the community following the end of the project.

Manor Park

In Manor Park we have built really strong relations with the local Co-op funeral care team. They have supported not only engaging with bereaved community members but have worked with the Community Development Officer, to create their own monthly Grief Café running from the centre. This café model has now been adapted to run across both Manor Park and Tottenham Co-op Funeralcare.

The relationship with the Manor Park Library has been extremely significant throughout the project as they have acted as a key source of signposting and visibility for grief in the community. Thanks to this we have seen regular attendance and really positive feedback from bereaved community members.



Summer wellbeing event – Manor Park 2023



Cruse staff working with children to create memory hearts

Attendees to the drop-in's have come from a host of different cultures and backgrounds which has helped us review our ways of working, and take a closer look at how we can evolve our resources to reflect lived experience of bereavement through different cultural lenses.

The relations built with community members attending the drop-ins have been invaluable and we have seen some incredible growth in bereaved community members attending, reporting feeling better prepared to manage their grief but also better prepared to support their families too.

Belfast

The focus for the pilot was to engage and up-skill harder to reach communities in Northern Belfast with grief resources and knowledge, with a specific focus on engaging with youth groups and youth organisations. Our Community Development Officer made great progress in building relations within communities that previously have had very little or no engagement with Cruse and has worked closely with the Cruse Northern Ireland Team to deliver support directly to these communities following sudden bereavements.



Memory leaves written by bereaved members of the community



Community Development Officer at Community Engagement Event

Throughout the summer we hosted a series of community engagement events to get communities talking about grief. We engaged with over 200 members of the public and supported many conversations to enable community members to share their experiences of bereavement.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Review

Tottenham

In Tottenham we have been working to understand grief and bereavement in Black communities, specifically working with Black Caribbean Communities. Our Community Development Officer, has been running weekly drop-in's from The Chestnut Centre, which delivers a range of services and supports for the Black community across Tottenham.

We have seen good engagement from bereaved community members who have been sharing that they feel they have grown in confidence, are able to talk more openly about their experiences of grief and have established positive new friendships with each other following visits to the drop-in sessions.

Reflections from Black bereaved community members accessing the Community Grief Hub:

When trying to access bereavement support in the past, support offered has often been largely from services delivered by White, English speaking service providers. Many people reported feeling that they couldn't relate to this kind of support as it wasn't possible for the person delivering the service to be culturally aware of the impact of that bereavement on the individual or the surrounding family. Or indeed, wouldn't be able to provide the support due to a language barrier. Bereaved community members reported that being able to speak to someone who shared cultural heritage, or had a good understanding of different cultural traditions and practices would be better for accessing support.

Another reflection was that bereaved community members were more likely to go to a familiar member of the community for support following a bereavement – eg. A faith leader, or a community group organiser. As they feel more trusted and safe to disclose feelings associated with their grief in a familiar setting.

Reflections shared around available resources to support grief highlight many resources that are widely available do not reflect the lived experiences of grief from different cultural perspectives. Community members reported the need for resources that informed about grief practices and traditions from a range of cultural backgrounds. They also shared it is important for the resources to reflect people that looked and sounded like them, through images, videos and personal stories of grief experiences.

Grief education – there has been a mix of responses around whether grief is talked about or discussed within families and friendship groups, and a lot is based on whether the elders of the family are comfortable discussing. However, there is a sense that there is not enough grief education to support promoting healthy conversation and peer-support for families and friends following a bereavement. Community members suggested that more educational resource about what grief is, the impact and how to manage grief would help create better support within families.

Additional to our engagement with the Black community through our Community Grief Hub and Community Engagement events we have also undertaken interviews with 27 bereaved members of the Black community. These interviews explore the physical, emotional, social, spiritual, religious, and practical impacts of grief.

Recognising that grief extends beyond an emotional response, we have delved into its various manifestations. This work has aimed to uncover the intricate web of challenges that Black individuals and communities encounter when seeking and receiving grief support.

While grief is a deeply personal journey, it is not isolated from societal structures and cultural norms. By honing in on the experiences of Black communities and individuals, we seek to identify how systemic barriers, cultural perceptions, and historical contexts influence the access and quality of grief support available to them.

Summary of recommendations:

- **Awareness & visibility of services** – Increased visibility of support available

- **Culturally appropriate services** – Culturally competent therapists, Specific services for Black people
- **Variety of support** – Holistic support, Opportunities for connection, Promoting joy
- **Cultural education** – Connecting with traditional practices, Challenging stigmas, Cultural education for professionals, Education on diverse needs
- **Workplace policies** – Formally recognise the needs of Black staff members, Amend compassionate leave policies
- **Services** – Financial support, Administrative assistance, Practical guidance, Support for providers

By addressing these diverse needs, the aim is to create a comprehensive and inclusive support system that acknowledges the complex and multifaceted nature of grief, and provides individuals with the tools, resources, and environments they need to navigate their grief journey more effectively.



Barriers to accessing support

Throughout the interviews we asked bereaved community members what challenges and barriers they experienced following a bereavement, either related to personally processing their grief or in relation to accessing support from a professional bereavement service. Some of the themes include:

- **Lack of culturally aware therapists** – Many therapists and counsellors are not well versed in the cultural backgrounds and experiences of their clients.
- **Culturally inappropriate services** – Grief support services might not be tailored to the specific cultural norms, beliefs, and practices of individuals seeking assistance
- **Lack of awareness & poor visibility of services** – A significant hurdle to accessing resources is the poor visibility of the resources that are available, leading to limited awareness of the available support
- **Financial constraints** – While there might be a strong desire to discuss bereavement experiences, the financial aspect can pose a significant barrier
- **Long waiting lists** – Access to professional support usually involves being on a waiting list, often for an extended period of time
- **Funeral costing** – The financial burden of funeral and other expenses can place added stress on grieving individuals and families
- **Limited diversity in support groups** – Grief support groups that lack diversity may not create an inclusive space where individuals from various backgrounds feel understood and represented
- **Fear of upsetting others** – Societal pressures and expectations to maintain a façade of strength can prevent individuals from discussing their feelings about bereavement
- **People saying the wrong thing**
- **Expectations of Black Men** – Stereotypes about the emotional resilience of Black men may discourage them from openly expressing their grief
- **Misunderstanding Grief** – Some individuals might not recognize their experiences as a form of grief, particularly if they don't fit conventional expectations of what grief looks like
- **Uncomfortable Conversations** – Grief is a sensitive topic, and many people find it uncomfortable to discuss.



Quote from interview with bereaved Black community member

"I'd like people to understand that it can be highly emotive from a Black cultural perspective. This culture is a bright, happy vivacious one but it has another flip-side and deeper dimension. There is potential because of the cultural backdrop that grief for us can be elaborate, loud, demonstrative, angry, full of frustration and potentially something with a judgemental edge to it.

That can be unhelpful and whoever is to create resources or support needs to understand this, they need to know how to navigate and break down these barriers. They need to be comfortable with this, they need to know lots of food is involved and everyone has to be fed. The ceremonies in grief can go on all day. The ceremonies can be multiple locations due to repatriation which means there are two passages of grief to go through.



Community Engagement Officer supporting children to create memory stones



Worry monster and memory stone activity at Community Engagement Event

Both of these experiences can happen very differently, it's a celebration of life and for some people rejoicing. Beyond this the grieving process is hard because while you are taught to celebrate death and release you are hurting in your humanness. Your faith is challenged and your grief shifts according to the timeline but there is not much opportunity to talk openly about it. Resources need to reflect the complexity of this cultural grief. There is a real struggle between cultural expectations to celebrate death but also that your heart is breaking at the same time."

Challenges, Learnings and Conclusion

Challenges and barriers

Capacity of Community Services

In each of the pilot locations the project has been warmly received and strongly welcomed during a time of need. Insights at the mapping phase of the project showed a real desire to do more to support bereaved community members, but a real lack of knowledge in how to do so. There is significant pressure on the services working in under-served communities as the demand for support is so high, which makes it difficult to find the time to attend training or community events. Having a tiered approach for upskilling these services with a host of different resources and support would offer more services the opportunity to engage with educating themselves with better knowledge of how to support their service users who might be experiencing grief.

Social stigma surrounding grief

The pilot locations we are working in are all identified as under-served communities where there is a high level of deprivation. Throughout the pilot we have seen a lot of challenges in engaging with people about death, dying and bereavement due to the social stigma that surrounds the topic. Often we hear community members expressing that this is something people should deal with alone, within their homes or families. The big challenge being that for many bereaved community members needing support and a listening ear outside of their existing networks, and hugely benefit from meeting other bereaved members of the community.

Accessible support for bereaved community members

One big lesson for us from phase one has been that many of the bereaved community members in pilots we are working in have many external stressors that are impacting their ability to access bereavement support. Some examples of external stressors include – financial insecurity, housing insecurity, existing physical or mental health challenges, care of dependents ect. These stressors make accessing support incredibly challenging, whether that's because the hubs are run at a certain time or date that doesn't fit around their commitments, or whether that's because there is no capacity to think about bereavement support whilst they are fighting so many fires elsewhere in life.

What does 'community' look like

It is important to reflect that the progress in our London pilots has been much slower and had less community ownership throughout the project. There are a few reflections on why this might be the case, one of which being the sense of 'community' in London borough's differing greatly from the communities we find in our other pilots. There is much less 'social responsibility' we find in our bereaved community members meaning the sustainable change is harder to activate. We are also seeing that real stretch on services across London, there are a huge number of services who offer a variety of health and wellbeing services to communities, however very little cross-network collaboration.

Learnings and considerations

Requirement for different tiers of information and support

We have seen really positive engagement from communities across the UK with hundreds of professionals, volunteers and community members looking to do more to support bereaved members of the community. One of the biggest barriers has been capacity to attend half day training, or limited restrictions to attending events and drop-in's due to other commitments. Creating tiers of resource and information for community networks would offer everyone to have a base level understanding and education on grief, and increase opportunity for bereaved people to come into contact with and be supported by someone who is confident having conversations about grief, or signposting to relevant support.

Importance of grief visibility and how it directly impacts bereaved community members ability to access support

In each of the pilots we have seen the huge impact of grief visibility in the community, both in creating a space where bereaved people feel they can safely access support and hosting Community Engagement events that encourage the community to recognise and become more comfortable with grief and grief understanding. This visibility helps to ensure the opportunity for bereaved community members to access support that feels most appropriate for them, when they need it.

Connection is key

Community connection allows for bereaved members of the community who would not access professional bereavement support the opportunity to process their grief with peers who have shared experiences. Whether this is online or in person, community members report feeling more able to share and be vulnerable with their experiences when in a space where others are sharing and being vulnerable too. This connection also goes a long way to supporting to break down the social stigma surrounding grief within many of these communities.

Requirement for holistic resource and support around families

Throughout the project we have had significant engagement from parents, carers and professionals working with children looking for advice and support on how to effectively support children and young people through grief and loss. Currently across the UK there are long waiting lists and limited provision for children and young people's support across bereavement services, and insights suggest that one-to-one clinical bereavement support is not always the most effective and desired way for CYP to access support. More investment is needed to offer better education, resource and support services to children and young people, and their networks to feel better equipped to manage grief.

You don't have to grieve alone...

Website: cruse.org.uk

National freephone helpline: **0808 808 1677**

Email: helpline@cruse.org.uk

Find out what is happening in your local community
coop.co.uk/griefandbereavement

You're not alone

working in
partnership:

Cruse
Bereavement
Support



**Cruse
Scotland**
Bereavement Support



It's what we do

Cruse Bereavement Support – registered charity no. 208078. A company limited by guarantee 00638709
Registered office: Unit 0.1, One Victoria Villas, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 2GW

Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland – (Cruse Scotland) is a registered Scottish Charity (SC031600) and a
Scottish Company limited by guarantee (SC218026).