

# Bereavement in prison

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In November 2017, funding was provided from Good Life, Good Death, Good Grief to host an event in HMP Kilmarnock which provided the prison population, including members of staff, with the opportunity to remember loved ones who had died. The event was called 'To Absent Friends'. The event was delivered by means of a coffee morning and was organised in partnership with NHS and Serco management teams and included input from Serco's chaplaincy services, catering and education departments. Approximately 40 people attended.



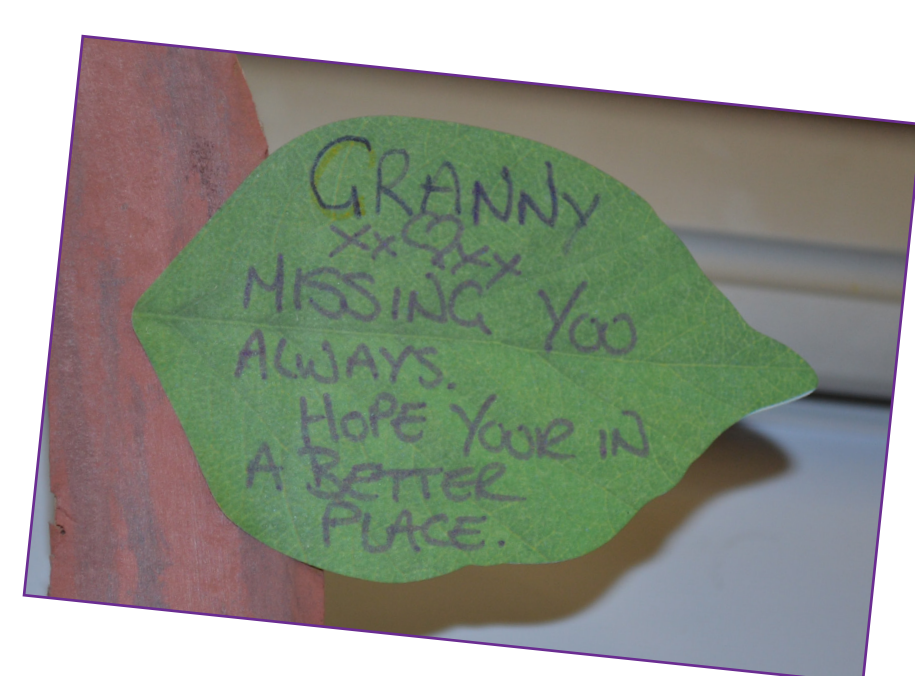
External organisations were invited into HMP Kilmarnock to encourage people to talk openly about death, dying and bereavement. Speakers from Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs, Seasons for Growth and the McMillan Palliative Care coordinator for prisons all spoke briefly to the audience. Each speaker posed conversation starter questions to the audience.

## Q1 – What does loss mean to you?

## Q2 – How do you relate the seasons to loss?

## Q3 – How do you cope with loss?

Conversations were facilitated at small round tables which provided a safe environment for prisoners to have open and honest conversations about significant losses that have affected them and allowed for prisoners to reflect on the way that made them feel while being in prison.



## What went well?

Everyone that attended the coffee morning felt that the morning was of great benefit to them and engaged positively and passionately in discussions surrounding loss. Prisoners were able to speak openly and honestly about the impact of loss on them whilst being in prison, in an environment that was safe where they wouldn't be judged. Prisoners hoped that this will be a regular occurrence in HMP Kilmarnock and not just a once off event. Staff also felt that this was an opportunity to come together with prisoners and saw them as peers rather than prisoners or patients. The day also provided staff with the confidence to talk about death and dying with prisoners.

## Quotes

"It was a great morning, I just hope that it's not a once off event." (Prisoner)

"I thought I was weird after the way I reacted when my Gran died, but after hearing other people talking about their reaction to grief, I know that I'm not." (Prisoner)

"It was nice just sitting amongst the prisoners, having conversations with them, not as prisoner, not as patients, we are all just the same." (Nurse)

"Thought provoking." (Addiction worker)

"The best thing I've ever been part of in the prison." (Chaplin)

## What next?

The 'To Absent Friends' coffee morning highlighted there is no provision in HMP Kilmarnock to support prisoners who have suffered significant loss. Prisoners have highlighted that there is not enough support for the prison population when a loss has been suffered. Prisoners feel very isolated and do not feel able to seek support from peers or family members; this ultimately impacts on mood and deterioration in health. Grief suffered whilst in prison may be due to any number of experiences: Prison sentence, bereavement, relationship breakdown, loss of accommodation and loss of their liberty. The loss may be recent or something that happened a long time ago.

In February 2018, funding was applied for from The Ayrshire and Arran Health Board Charity Fund (also known as the endowment funds), for monies to pay for training staff in HMP Kilmarnock to be able to deliver the Seasons for Growth Programme to prisoners. The Seasons for Growth programme aims to build resilience and bring hope and confidence to adults who have experienced significant change or loss. The programme imparts knowledge, skills and attitudes to enable participants to understand and manage their grief experience appropriately and aims to improve health outcomes of the prison population.

The Seasons for Growth facilitators training (Adult Programme) was delivered to 11 members of staff in HMP Kilmarnock in August 2018 and it is hoped that within the next 12 months this can be made available to the prison population.

