

Confidence is Key: Neighbours Supporting Each Other Through Grief

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Abbreviated abstract: Communities have the skills and ability to support each other through bereavement but might lack confidence. To increase this confidence, a half day training course was offered people who volunteer in their own community. Feedback suggests training helped to consolidate their natural responses to being alongside others who have been bereaved and increased their confidence in their ability to do this well. It is suggested that this support should be a focus of hospice mission.

Related publications:

- J.L. McKnight, John Deere and the Bereavement Counselor (1984), accessed 21.09.22, www.centerforneweconomics.org/publications/john-deere-and-the-bereavement-counselor
- C. Russell, S. High et al., Putting Community at the Heart of the Hospice Movement, Strathcarron Hospice (2022), accessed 21.09.22, www.strathcarronhospice.net/putting-community-at-the-heart-of-the-hospice-movement

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Previous work, challenge and approach

Strathcarron Hospice's Community Development Department have been working to put community at the heart of palliative care for the last ten years. Using an Asset Based Community Development approach, we believe that communities are best placed to fulfil many functions that institutions have professionalised. Services, in many cases, cannot authentically or effectively take the place of friendships and connection with others in our local community and networks. Supporting each other through bereavement is one area of life that has been professionalised, and communities report that they feel less able to support each other through grief and that expertise is required for this.

"Finally, one day the aged father of a Prairie du Sac woman will die. And next-door neighbours will not drop by because they don't want to interrupt the bereavement counsellor. The woman's kin will stay home because they will have learned that only the bereavement counsellor knows how to process grief in the proper way. The local clergy will seek technical assistance from the bereavement counsellor to learn the correct form of service to deal with guilt and grief. And the grieving daughter will know that it is the bereavement counsellor who *really* cares for her because only the bereavement counselor comes when death visits this family on the prairie."

J.L. McKnight (1984)



Techniques and Methods

Strathcarron Hospice recruited participants for a bereavement training course, conducted by Cruse Scotland, with the aim of increasing understanding of grief, increasing confidence in talking to someone who has been bereaved and gaining an understanding of the impact of an individual's grief on others.

Training was open to anyone who volunteered their time to serve other people in their community. This could be a formal volunteering role (e.g. local community group or charity), or an informal volunteering of time (e.g. visiting a neighbour who is housebound).

Eight half day, online training sessions were held, with 140 participants attending in total. Each volunteer attended one session each.

Feedback was collected following the training sessions using a questionnaire. Participants were asked to what extent they agreed with the statements, and asked for additional comments:

- “My understanding of grief has grown as a result of attending”
- “I feel more confident about communicating with someone who is grieving as result of attendance”
- “I have a better awareness of how I can be affected by the grief of others”



Results and Conclusions

Feedback from participants suggests the training helped to consolidate their natural responses to being alongside others who have been bereaved. Many reported that they did not learn a lot of new information but reported an increased in their confidence. This highlights that communities have the skills and ability to support each other through bereavement but might lack confidence.

Hospice mission should include shining a light on the skills of community members to support each other through grief and boosting confidence, rather than professionalising the grieving process and making bereavement a problem to be solved by services.

“I realise that I've been doing a lot of the right things”

“This course has highlighted skills I can take forward in my volunteering and helped reinforce those skills I feel I already share. Thank you.”

“Many of the things that were covered I did already... The course gave me more confidence to implement those actions”

