

REPORT TO THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD
Refreshing Barnsley's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to share the valuable experiences and insights from those bereaved by suicide but also highlight some of the key issues those bereaved by suicide experience. These key issues highlight where there may be gaps in provision or reinforce where efforts must be concentrated.

2. Background

SoBS (Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide) is a national charity providing peer to peer, face to face support groups every month for those who have been impacted by suicide. The Barnsley group was set up in September 2021 after training a number of local people who had been bereaved by suicide themselves. On average there are 10 people in attendance each month with new people coming to the group on a regular basis as well as others moving on to access other support or simply them feeling equipped to deal better deal with the grief and getting on with their lives. The group has not been advertised and promoted much yet and is purely people attending and getting in touch by word of mouth. That said Information is sent out to all families who have lost loved ones by South Yorkshire Police Via the South Yorkshire Real Time Surveillance System (RTS). We do plan to do some promotion of the group within primary care, funeral directors, social media soon. Prior to the Barnsley group being set up the nearest group we had was in Sheffield. In our Barnsley group we people attending from Sheffield, Wakefield, Doncaster and Bradford (we are the nearest group to Bradford).

3. Key Issues Raised.

- Families are anxious about inquests and needing further support. This is currently coming from SoBS members who have been through the experience themselves. AMPARO (South Yorkshire Suicide Bereavement Service) also offer additional support as well attending inquests with families where appropriate.
- Lots of nervousness around press attending inquests and press releasing insensitive and inappropriate information. E.g., details of the death include method, locations etc. There have been several incidents regarding this with local and national media which BMBC and partners have worked hard to mitigate and educate media organisations on the impact of this on families. As a result, Barnsley Chronicle have agreed to stop publishing these online but have not reframed from putting articles in the paper, but we have opened up a line of communication through the Chronicle and the Barnsley SOBS groups when families know media have attended

the inquest. We are currently working with OHID to look at a Yorkshire & Humber approach to challenging media organisation through the national Samaritans teams which will be funded but the Y&H Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH) network.

- There has been lots of discussion around supporting children who have lost parents. SoBS identify local and national services and signpost accordingly but waiting lists are exceptionally long and early intervention for children with trauma and PTSD is crucial. The current CYP & Families Bereavement service is currently funded until 31st July 2023 and already has significant waiting lists due to demand around all types of bereavement.
- Lots of people that attend the group have voiced how they have felt let down by mental health services. That is not to say this is always the case, but this is how families are feeling. This could be due to a lack of understanding of what services actually deliver or could be due to gaps in services and even people on waiting lists awaiting treatment.
- The group has seen an increase in people attending group whose loved ones have taken their own lives with Long Term Conditions and chronic pain being a contributing factor. This also coincides with our RTS data.

3. Recommendations

3.1 Health and Wellbeing Board members are asked to:-

- Continue to challenge irresponsible and insensitive reporting and support the role of a Y&H post based with the national Samaritans.
- Support the bereavement health needs assessment which Public Health are undertaking and start to think where bereavement could strategically sit and be funded. This issue is currently much broader than suicide and children however does highlight some of the current gaps and pressures on the system.
- Think about how we better promote better MH services, manage expectations, and educate residents on the different levels of support and empower people to take positive steps to manage their mental health.
- Consider how current pain management services are fit for purpose. Do current pathways enable fair access? How can services also screen for suicidal ideation and how do they interlink with mental health services as well as community initiatives e.g. Andy's Man Club, Recovery college, Creative Recovery

Appendix 1 – SOBS Case Study

Losing mum and dad -life will never be the same

In December 2021 my dad took his own life aged 71. He was struggling tremendously following the sudden death of my mum in August 2021 from Covid Pneumonia.

Losing both my parents in sudden and traumatic circumstances has been so difficult to deal with practically and emotionally.

I had barely had the chance to process mum's death when dad died. Dad taking his own life brought so many different emotions. I still go over everything in my head most days almost a year later.

Regret and guilt - What could, or should I have done or said differently?

Sadness and disappointment- Why didn't he call me back? Was he in pain?

So many unanswered questions

This last year I've been on a conveyor belt just getting through each day - looking after my family and young children and dealing with the huge number of practical things that need to happen when someone dies. Two funerals to plan, companies to notify, finances to sort, a house to empty of almost 50 years of memories.

After my parents died I was initially flooded with messages of support and flowers but just a couple of months later everyone was back living their normal lives. I have my sister and her children but no other close family. I felt lost and alone and exhausted from putting on a brave face.

It was then I found SOBS - Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide. I found the group initially on Facebook and then contacted one of the facilitators by telephone. I arranged to attend the monthly face to face group in February.

It's a group of local people who have all lost someone by suicide - a parent, a partner, a child, a friend. At the first meeting I must admit I felt heartbroken listening to some of the tragic stories of others in the group. But I recognised the feelings and emotions they are going through in myself and that helped.

I've attended 6 meetings now and the support really helps. In the early stages the group shared really important information that helped me prepare for the inquest - tips like requesting hard copies of the paperwork in advance to prepare. As the months go by I find that SOBS is now the only place I have to share my feelings - they all understand. They listen. They share their own experiences. It's not a professional counselling group - its normal people supporting each other.

Sometimes we laugh in group. It seems crazy to write that given the nature of what we are there to discuss. But we are all human - loved ones left behind trying to pick up the pieces of our lives. Lives that will never be the same again.

If you are going through a bereavement- a natural death or a suicide, I think the best advice is to be kind to yourself. There are models of grief that professionals refer to, but we are all different - our families are unique, our circumstances are unique - you have to find a way forward that works for you.

Do reach out for help outside your family. There is a lot out there. It can be very confusing trying to identify where to start. Services through the GP can have long waiting lists but do get yourself on the list for help. There are lots of charitable organisations like SOBS, Samaritans, Mind that have free helplines. It really does help to talk. Sometimes I don't realise how I really have been feeling until I say it out loud.

It's a long and difficult journey. Your life will never be the same. But a bit like Covid, you have to find your own "new normal," a way to live with the tremendous emptiness and loss when your loved one is no longer with you.

Appendix 2 – Barnsley SoBS details

<https://uksobs.org/>

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