



Cruse Bereavement Care Group Work Peer Support Pilot

December 2015 - November 2016



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Cruse Bereavement Care - Group Work Peer Support Pilot

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December 2015 – November 2016 – Bristol Ageing Better (BAB) is a partnership of organisations working to reduce social isolation and loneliness among older people and help them to live fulfilling lives. In Autumn 2015, BAB began to commission sixteen pilot projects as part of the Group Work Peer Support Service. These pilots tested different methods of group work and peer support in tackling loneliness and isolation.

Group work and peer support use peers to help people focus on their assets, abilities and potential routes to recovery and general wellbeing. It mobilises the insights and empathy of people who share similar problems or experiences to support their peers, in this case regarding loneliness and social isolation.

This report provides an overview of the pilot project delivered by Cruse Bereavement Care, including their outcomes for participants, their successes and challenges. In line with BAB's 'test and learn' approach, this report will highlight key points of learning and advice which may be useful for other projects within Bristol Ageing Better or the other thirteen Ageing Better areas funded by the Big Lottery Fund through the Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better Programme.

Project overview

Cruse Bereavement Care delivered a peer support friendship group for those affected by bereavement. This group met weekly for 2 hours for a period of 9 months. Four volunteers were recruited and trained to deliver the sessions alongside the project worker.

Social and leisure activities were provided for the friendship group (for example a craft session or a local walk). These were chosen by the group members and the volunteers. Group members were also encouraged to take a lead in these activities.

The friendship group had a drop-in format, with approximately 8 people attending sessions regularly, plus others who came occasionally.

Participants

10 participants provided demographic information. Of these, 7 were female (70%) while 3 were male (30%). Ages ranged from 54 to 76 years old, with an average age of 64. All reported their ethnic background to be English, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish or British.

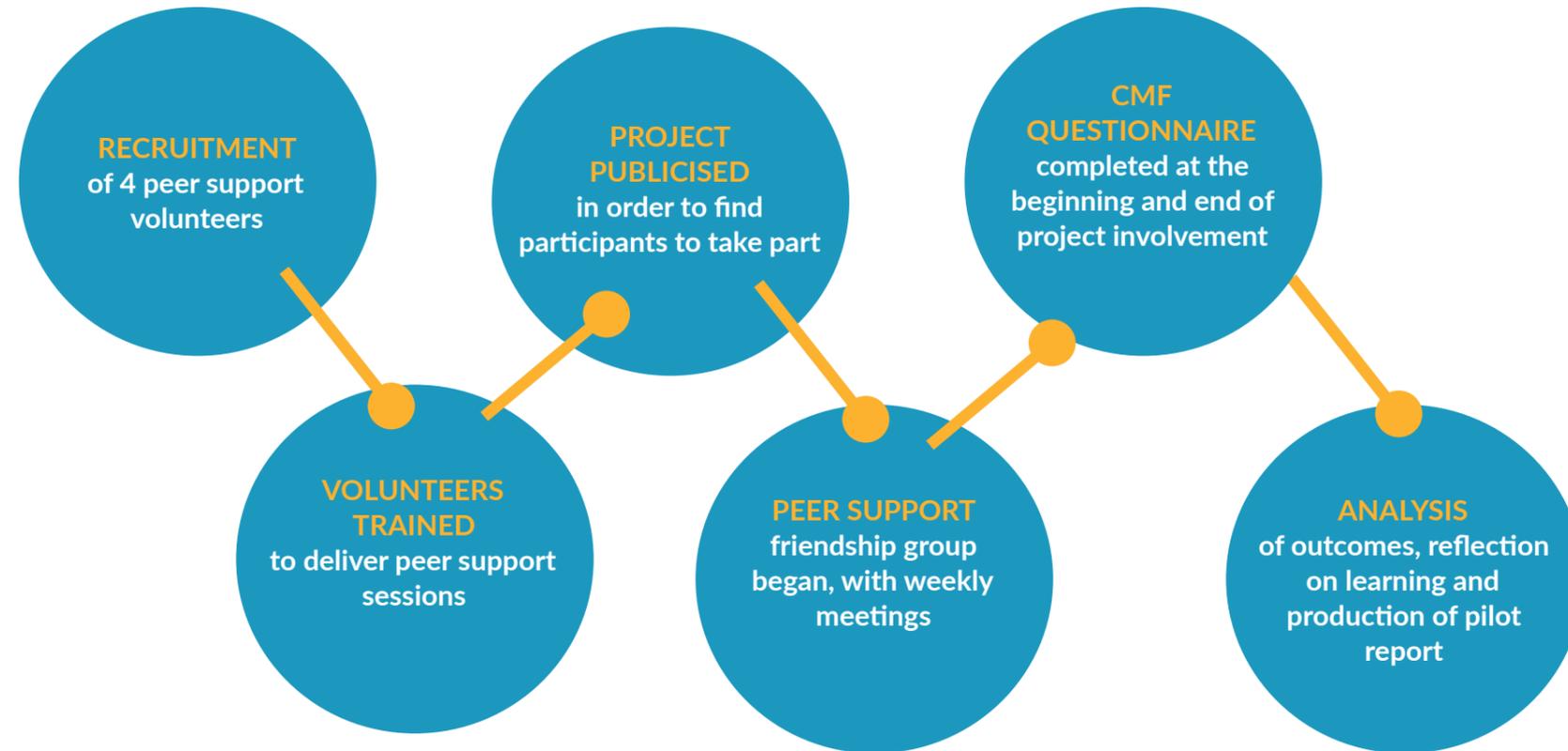
6 participants (60%) were Christian, while 4 did not have a religion (40%). All were heterosexual. The majority lived alone (80%), although 2 reported living with family.

8 reported having a long-standing physical or mental illness or disability (80%), while only 1 participant looked after or gave special help to someone who is sick, disabled or elderly.



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Project process



Outcomes for participants

Participants answered a set of questions at the start of their involvement with the pilot project, and then again at the end of their involvement. These were standardised questions in the form of BAB's Common Measurement Framework (CMF) – a series of questions completed by participants across the Bristol Ageing Better programme as well as within the thirteen other Ageing Better areas funded by The Big Lottery Fund through the Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better Programme.

5 participants answered the CMF questions at both the beginning and end of the project. The following outcomes are therefore based on the information provided by these 5 individuals.

At the end of the pilot project:

- 100% of participants reported an improvement in at least one aspect of social isolation and loneliness.
- 100% of participants reported an improvement in at least one aspect of wellbeing.

The scales overleaf show the average scores relating to loneliness/isolation and wellbeing before and after participating in this pilot project.

More detailed outcomes information can be found in the appendices.

100%

reported
loneliness improved



100%

reported
wellbeing improved





Project successes

Successful training:

- Cruse report that participants increased in confidence over the course of this pilot project, and started participating in more social activities (with each other, but also outside the group). Within the group sessions, participants also became more proactive and confident with suggesting which activities they would like to undertake. One participant went on to lead her own session (a local walk). This confidence and willingness to socialise is an important part of preventing isolation, as socialising can often be very difficult after experiencing a bereavement.

Finding older people to participate in the project:

- Participants were found through a variety of methods including: flyers sent to GP practices, online adverts (on gumtree, trade it, BAB website, Cruse Bristol website, Cruse Bristol social media, Voscur website), adverts in The Pigeon and Evening Post, information sent to a local social friendship group and to previous Cruse participants. A member of staff also attended a variety of relevant events/conferences and used this opportunity to tell other local voluntary sector and statutory organisations about the project.

- Some participants were current or previous Cruse participants, while others had not had any contact with Cruse before.

Continuation after the pilot period:

- Group members began to meet in between friendship group sessions and made their own arrangements for social activities together. This contributed towards a very warm and welcoming group dynamic even for new members joining.
- Cruse continued to support this group after the pilot funding from BAB had finished. They built on the social activities further and also held activities around practical skills. Six months after the pilot funding had ended, most of the original participants were still attending.
- The nature of bereavement support is that it is ongoing. An individual may not need support for a while, but then they attend the group when they are approaching an anniversary or significant milestone in order to receive peer support.

Project successes (continued)

Impact on volunteers:

- The volunteers reported that they found the project very rewarding. They could see the value that the group members were getting from being part of this group, and therefore saw themselves as playing an important role in creating the right atmosphere within the sessions.

Group atmosphere:

- The group was very welcoming and there was a great camaraderie in their shared grief journey. There was always laughter and the supportive sharing of achievements (for example going on their first holiday since the death of their partner).
- Participants noted that they found it helpful to be surrounded by others who “know what it’s like” to have experienced a significant loss.
- When new members attended a session the other members were welcoming and supportive. If any participant was tearful or needed to talk about a particularly difficult time, then the group was always willing to give time to this and provide their support.

- Having volunteers as well as participants meant that if anyone needed particular attention then the volunteers were able to spend more time with them and give them the support they needed.
- The venue was more informal than the one used for the majority of Cruse’s services. They believed this helped to create a welcoming atmosphere suitable for a friendship-based peer support group.

Key challenges and what would be done differently in the future

Completing BAB’s CMF evaluation questionnaires:

- Limited funding and staff time meant that it was a challenge to complete BAB’s CMF evaluation questionnaires. Participants tended to need a lot of support from Cruse in order to complete these forms.

Numbers of participants:

- It was initially expected that between 15-20 people would attend each peer group support session, however the average was between 8-10. A longer ‘lead-in’ time would be needed in order to reach the planned number of participants, as it took a few months of holding the sessions for momentum to pick up. This ‘lead-in’ time was difficult for a short pilot project, but could be factored into longer-term projects.

Learning, recommendations and advice for similar projects

Volunteers:

- Having a small group of experienced, committed volunteers can be very valuable. This allows for continuity and stability within the sessions. Volunteers also get to know the story and background of each person within the group, meaning they can be alert to anything which they (and the group) need to be sensitive to. Regular contact with the same volunteers also means that participants can get to know them, which helps in creating a welcoming atmosphere.

Appendix 1

Outcomes for Participants: Social Isolation & Loneliness

The Big Lottery Fund identifies 10 intersecting dimensions of social isolation and loneliness¹. At the end of the pilot project, 100% of the 5 participants who provided both entry and exit outcomes data reported an improvement in at least one of these dimensions.

The combined answers from these 5 participants can be seen in the table below:

	Before participating in the pilot	After participating in the pilot
I experience a general sense of emptiness	100% yes	40% yes
There are plenty of people I can rely on when I have problems	20% yes	60% yes
There are many people I can trust completely	60% yes	20% yes
There are enough people I feel close to	20% yes	40% yes
I miss having people around	100% yes	100% yes
I often feel rejected	20% yes	0% yes
How often do you lack companionship?	40% often	0% often
How often do you feel left out?	20% often	0% often
How often do you feel isolated from others?	20% often	20% often
How often do you feel in tune with people around you?	20% often	20% often

¹ From the De Jong Gierveld 6-Item Loneliness Scale

Appendix 2

Outcomes for Participants: Wellbeing

Similarly, the Big Lottery Fund identifies 7 intersecting dimensions of wellbeing². At the end of the pilot project, 100% of the 5 participants who provided both entry and exit outcomes data reported an improvement in at least one of these dimensions of wellbeing.

The combined answers from these 5 participants can be seen in the table below:

	1 None of the time	2 Rarely	3 Some of the time	4 Often	5 All of the time
	Before participating in the pilot (average)			After participating in the pilot (average)	
I've been feeling optimistic about the future	2.6			2.6	
I've been feeling useful	2.4			3.0	
I've been feeling relaxed	2.8			2.6	
I've been dealing with problems well	3.2			3.4	
I've been thinking clearly	3.6			3.6	
I've been feeling close to other people	3.6			3.6	
I've been able to make up my own mind about things	3.4			3.8	

² From the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (SWEMWBS)



Bristol Ageing Better (BAB) is a partnership working to reduce social isolation and loneliness among older people and help them live fulfilling lives.

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