



**Walsall
Bereavement
Support Service**
Reg. Charity No. 1152724

Annual Review

2018 - 2019

Let's Talk...

Walsall Bereavement Support Service



Walsall Bereavement Support Service (WBSS) was established in 1996, as no other specialist bereavement support existed for the residents of Walsall borough. Today, we remain the only local bereavement service that is open to any resident irrespective of age, relationship to the person who has died, how they died, or the length of time that has elapsed since they died.

Initially, we began as a sign-posting service for bereaved adults, but we now provide a range of bereavement support services built around our adult project '*Let's Talk*' and our children, young people, and family support project '*THE SWING*'. We also offer a specialist monthly support group for adults bereaved as a result of suicide, which has recently been named 'Hope' by its members (Helping Others through Personal Experience). Over 75% of the people who turn to us for help live in deprived areas of the borough and simply could not afford to pay for private counselling. Therefore in order to ensure our support is accessible by everyone, we do not make a specific charge for the services we offer. However, as a Charity, we do need to raise the funds to deliver these services and so we actively encourage donations.

Our Aim - to help bereaved people to work through feelings, thoughts, and memories associated with their loss and find ways to manage their grief so that they can start to rebuild their lives.

Our Services - are confidential and designed to provide flexible and appropriate support to meet bereaved people needs, irrespective of their age and circumstances

Our Ethos - to provide caring and supportive services that are open to all bereaved people in the borough



Welcome from Jim Green (Chair of WBSS) & Elaine Bullen (Head of Service)

Well what a year we have had!

The 2018-19 financial year proved to be one of the most challenging for WBSS for many years. In March 2018, we were forced to close our adult bereavement support service due to the cessation of funding from both Walsall Council and NHS Walsall, as a result of their budget constraints. These funding cuts were in no way a reflection on the quality of our work or indeed the continued need for the project. In fact, right up until that point, we regularly received over 300 referrals a year to our adult bereavement support service. We were in no doubt that this closure would be detrimental to the health and well-being of the bereaved in Walsall, but without financial support, we simply could not afford to continue to deliver this project. However, what we did manage to ensure was that every adult on the waiting list at the beginning of March, and every adult already undertaking bereavement counselling sessions, was offered the support they were promised when they first contacted us. Our last clients support ended in June 2018.



We never gave up on finding the funds to re-open our adult service

We are delighted to say that in January 2019, we received the fantastic news from the National Lottery Community Fund that our funding application to them had been successful. As a result, we were able to launch our new adult bereavement support project '*Let's Talk*', in March 2019.

During 2018-19 we were also successful in securing the necessary funds from other charitable trusts, to help us to continue to develop our children, young people, and family bereavement project *THE SWING*. As a result, in October 2018, we were able to employ an additional part-time counsellor for this project. Amanda has fitted into the team extremely well and her skills and support have not only allowed us to work with more children and young people but also enabled us to offer our support that much sooner.

We are always very proud of and thankful for the time, energy, and commitment our staff, volunteers, and supporters give to WBSS and particularly so during this last 12-18 months. We also thank Dr. Bob Crundwell, who stepped down as Chair of WBSS after 12 years of service. The commitment he has shown to the Charity has been tremendous and is greatly appreciated.



Let's Talk... our new adult bereavement support project

In 2018, we held a consultation meeting with a range of people including past service users, volunteers, the bereavement officer from a local hospital, a funeral director, a facilitator of a local bereavement support group, and a manager of a mental health service. The aim of this meeting was to help us to shape our new service '*Let's Talk*' so that it reflects the needs of the bereaved across the borough.

The National Lottery Community Fund is funding the '*Let's Talk*' project until the end of 2021. We are delighted to be in this position and we are now providing invaluable counselling services once again, which include:

- Telephone support and signposting for the bereaved
- One to one counselling support delivered by qualified counsellors or student counsellors working towards qualification
- A monthly support group for those bereaved as a result of suicide

In addition, over the next 3 years we are aiming to:

- Help establish local community bereavement support groups in communities across Walsall
- Raise awareness with local funeral directors and health services to create informal referral pathways for the bereaved
- Promote 'Dying Matters' borough wide to enable people to talk more openly about death and dying and its impact.



Although we stopped accepting referrals to the adult project in March 2018, we continued to support all those individuals who had already requested or started their counselling support. As such, between March-June, 29 individuals in total received the help that they needed to cope with their grief. We anticipate that within the first 12 months of delivering the '*Let's Talk*' project, we will support around 180 adults and that within three years, our referral totals will return to around 300 individuals each year.



Working with volunteers

Without our volunteers, WBSS would not be able to offer the level of support or the range of support it provides to the bereaved in Walsall. Over the past 12 years, the charity has developed an enviable volunteer counsellor training programme and at its most successful, WBSS had a team of 28 fully qualified counsellors able to help the bereaved adults referred to our service. Unfortunately, many of these volunteers had to leave WBSS when we closed our adult service in June 2018. However, we are now rebuilding our volunteer team once more and by February 2019, we had 10 volunteer qualified counsellors in place who donated 89 hours of their time to support the bereaved.

We have always valued our volunteers and we provide an excellent training and support programme for those who choose to join our team. Our volunteers are either qualified to at least Diploma Level 4 in Counselling or are training towards this qualification. Since WBSS started to provide placement opportunities, we have trained more than 140 counsellors. By investing time and genuine interest in the progress of each of our volunteers, we have always been able to maintain a high skill base from which to draw support for service users.

We recognise the dedication of our volunteers through our volunteer awards programme. Linda (pictured in the photo opposite) received her award for 5 years of service to WBSS in May. Five more of our volunteers have given more than 10 years' service to the charity.

"It's an honour and privilege to be a part of such a much-needed service ... helping to support those experiencing emotional turmoil, to grow and blossom" - Donna.

"I started volunteering for WBSS 8 years ago whilst I was completing my counsellor training, and just haven't left! Knowing I have made a difference to that person, no matter how small, gives me a great sense of accomplishment." - Kay

"I find volunteering at WBSS very rewarding, knowing that by being present in a room, listening and giving a person space, is often all they need to start working things through for themselves" - Linda.



Supporting those bereaved by suicide

The Hope Group

Helping Others through shared Personal Experience

This group was set up by WBSS, to help adults bereaved by suicide. Since then we have helped more than 590 adults bereaved this way.



This group, which is facilitated by two WBSS volunteers, is run on a monthly basis and currently has a regular attendance of at least 12-14 people. In this group, people can talk about their own experience with those who understand what it is like to be bereaved in this way. We provide a safe place for group members to share their loss and to feel free to discuss any feelings of anger, fear, guilt, disappointment, or sadness they may have about the death, without fear of judgment or criticism.

Group members encourage and support each other to share openly as there is healing in talking about their feelings and comfort in knowing that they are not alone in their grief. However, no one is pressured to participate as we believe that there is healing in listening too.

"I am able to share my tragic loss with people who really understand and do not judge"

"Coming to this group has made such a difference to us. We feel we have a caring family always here to help through tears and laughter"

"Help and support has helped us to cope after losing our son...it is so hard to cope with life"

We do realise that peer support is not for everyone, particularly so in the early days of bereavement in this way; therefore WBSS offers one to one support for those bereaved by suicide.

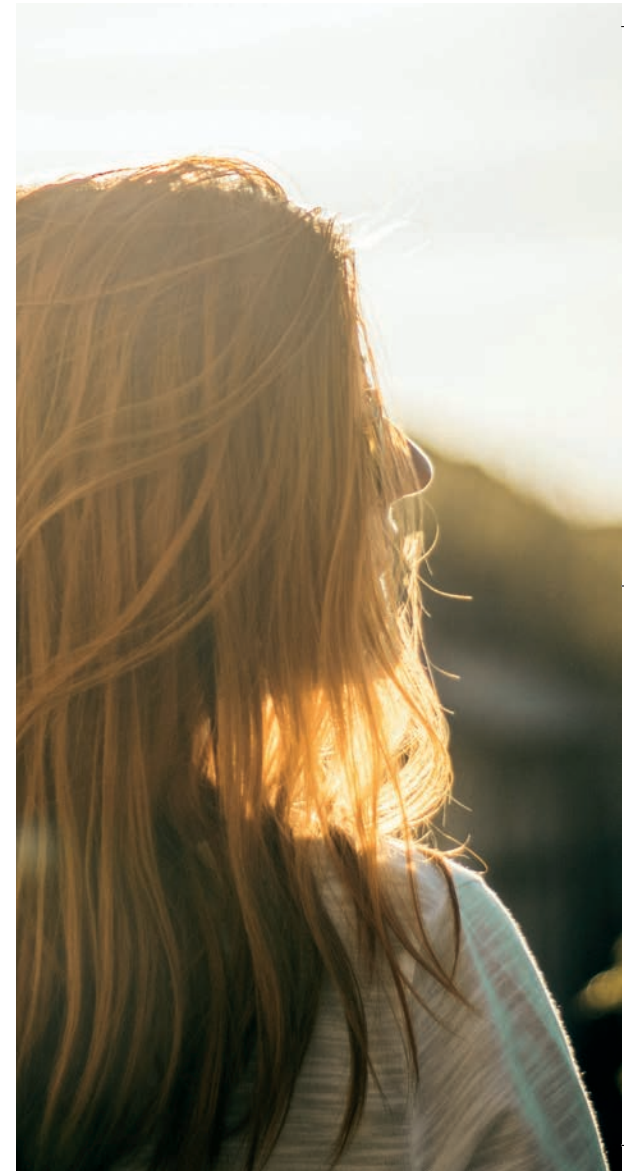


Gemma's Story

In 2012, my dad was diagnosed with an incurable cancer and to prolong his life he had to have major surgery to remove his voice box. During my dad's illness, we found out that I was expecting our first baby and he became the light at the end of the tunnel for us all. On the 25th November 2014, at 36 weeks pregnant, we found out that our baby's heart had stopped beating and I had to deliver him knowing he was dead. It was one of the hardest and most painful things that I have ever had to do.

Despite my dad being told that he only had a short time left to live, he defied all of the odds and stayed with us for another 6 months. On the 5th of June 2015, I found out that I was pregnant again and I couldn't wait to tell my dad the news. I went to the hospice and he was the happiest I had seen him in months. That was the last day I saw him that way, and he passed away peacefully two days later. I didn't feel able to grieve, because I had my precious baby growing inside me and I wanted to protect them. On the 15th January 2016, our beautiful baby girl Erin came into our world and made everything right again. 13 months later along came her baby brother Cian to complete our family. Then on the 23rd December 2017, there was a knock at my door. It was the police to tell me that my brother had hung himself and he was on a life support machine at hospital. On the 27th December, we made the decision to turn off the life support machine and my big brother, who had protected me for most of his life, was gone.

Over the years since losing Jake, my dad, and my brother, the safety of my world became uncertain and I developed anxiety, always feeling a sense of impending doom, always expecting something bad to happen. I did access some help and I had Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, which helped me to control the anxiety but it didn't get to the bottom of why I was experiencing it. Then I considered bereavement counselling, but the private counsellors charged up to and sometimes in excess of £50 per hour, which I couldn't afford to pay. Then I found out about WBSS and called them. After chatting to Elaine on the phone, I heard the words that I had been waiting to hear "We will help you". I will never forget those words and the relief I felt in hearing them. A couple of weeks later I started my counselling and over the past 7 weeks my life has been turned around. I have gone from feeling like my world would always be a sad one to realising that I can be happy again and although my losses will never leave me, I have learnt to put those feelings in a safe place where I can get them when I need to instead of carrying them around like a heavy bag full of bricks weighing me down. Thank you for reading my story.



THE SWING

Over the past 12 months, 221 children/young people were referred to *THE SWING* for support. Of these referrals, 55% came from education sources and the remaining 46% came from children's centres, parents/other family members, the local authority, NHS, CAMHS and Targeted Youth.



Children/young people accessing our services received one-to-one counselling or group support, or family and sibling counselling. In some cases, children/young people received a mixture of these support types. We provide our services to bereaved children/young people from our children's therapy room at our premises in Globe House and within local schools during the day, or out of hours for working parents. During this period:

- 166 children participated in 739 counselling sessions
- 15 children participated in 9 hours of closed group counselling
- 155 detailed assessments were undertaken
- 189 family/sibling support hours were delivered through which 49 individuals benefitted



The children and young people we helped

- 88% of referrals to this service lived in highly deprived areas of Walsall. Feedback from many of the families that we helped tells us that if they had to pay for counselling, they would not be able to afford to do so.
- 17% of referrals were defined as having specific support needs (emotional, behavioural, learning or diagnosed conditions).
- 36% were living in a one adult household and 9% were living in care (local authority or with another family member other than their parent).
- 10% had allocated social workers and 12% had safeguarding needs.



THE SWING

The impact of our support on the children/young people we helped

- **78%** improved how they managed their feelings/ emotions
- **76%** improved how they managed their behaviour
- **78%** improved how they managed their physical issues
- **77%** said their school attendance had improved
- **68%** said their family relationships had improved

In addition:

- **93%** of parents described our service as **Excellent** or **Very Good**.
- **93%** of parents stated that they would recommend our service to others in need of bereavement support.

Developing our services

As a result of the support of two major funders, in October 2018, we were able to employ a third part-time Children's Counsellor. In recent years, the demand for the services of *THE SWING* (particularly within the school setting) has increased; however, our staffing level had remained the same. With our new counsellor Amanda in place, we have been able to reduce the waiting time for children/young people to receive support and we have been able to accept more referrals.

Over the next 12 months, we also plan to develop our bereavement training programme for teachers and other education staff, with the aim of helping to improve the responses and support for bereaved children within the school setting.



Community support for WBSS

Willenhall Lock Stock – Music Festival held on 2nd September 2018 in Willenhall Memorial Park helped us to raise just over £456 through a Tombola and Name the Bear competition



ASDA – Asda St Matthews Community Champion Martin Bateman presents WBSS with a 'Green Token Giving' cheque for £200



TSB Charity of the Year – Christmas Cake Bake



TSB Walsall branches raised a combined total of £439.65 for WBSS over the Christmas period.

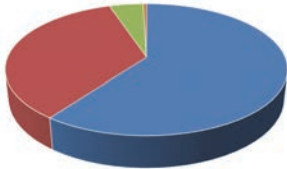


We have been working very hard to build up our presence across the borough of Walsall and have welcomed the support of local people and companies who have helped us to raise funds for our service. We thank each and every one of them for finding the time to help us.



How we raised the funds

At the end of the financial year 2018/19, WBSS had increased its income by £29,831, rising from £106,892 in 2017/18 to £136,723 in 2018/19. This was an achievement for WBSS and demonstrates our continued effort to increase and broaden our income base to improve our sustainability. The principal sources of funding for WBSS came from Trusts and Foundations (82%); however, we have been working hard to raise our profile across the borough and increase our Community Fundraising.



Donations and legacies = £82,154

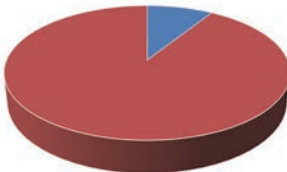
Charitable Activities = £47,592

Trading Activities = £6,811

Investments = £166

How we spent the funds

In response to the loss of the Council and NHS grants, we reduced our overheads as much as possible and increased our fundraising efforts. At the end of the financial year 2018/19, WBSS had increased its income and reduced its expenditure. This was a real achievement for the charity and demonstrates our continued efforts to manage our finances carefully.



Raising Funds = £11,358

Charitable Activities = £115,896





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WBSS has attained PQASSO Quality Standard Level 2 and we work to the professional and ethical guidelines of the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

WBSS is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)

Registration No: 1152724

