

Grief Support Services AGM Chair Person's Report

1 July 2023-30 June 2024

Grief Support Services has continued to perform a valuable service to the community supporting those who suffer grief and loss. We have increased the number of counselling sessions to clients through delivery of a professional and well supported team of counsellors, health professionals, volunteers and support staff.

The contract with Te Whatu Ora to provide suicide postvention has been renewed for a further two years. This gives the postvention team security to develop the service in ways that will meet the particular client group needs.

The Board is charged with governing the organisation in a way that ensures sustainability and continuity in service delivery. The 2023 to 2024 year has proved challenging and exciting. We have had some staff changes and also some changes to the Board, as the economic environment, staff and Te Whatu Ora changes impacted our service.

During the year we farewelled, Sharon Blythe, Amy Colonna, Rachel Burne and Janine Flowers. We welcomed staff; Anne Shiltson, Michelle Burling, Pamela Shennan and Andrea Clark. The Board agreed to fund additional staff hours to try to manage demand and the waiting list. As need in the community grows it is unlikely we will ever be able to keep up, without fundamental changes in the financial support the organisation receives. However, every small increase in the time available to work with clients helps the clients and the wider community. The commitment has impacted our financial position, it was a conscious decision by the Board to commit to more hours, despite the impact.

In August 2023 Ana Toneato began the role as General Manager of the service. She has a proven record of fundraising and developing corporate relationships. We are looking forward to positive developments in this area under her leadership. Ruth Barber took a role as Clinical Lead, to provide clinical leadership and support on site for the service delivery staff. Her experience is essential to maintaining the outstanding clinical work our staff do every day with clients.

Jen Murray continues to provide her fundraising expertise to Grief Support, as a subcontractor. The Board would like to thank her for this support, as fundraising is a critical part of ensuring our sustainability.

The staff at Grief Support is a mix of paid qualified Counsellors, students and volunteers. All ably organised by the long serving administration team, who job share. Our SLS peers provide support to those bereaved by suicide. Two volunteers facilitate the Riverlight and Horizons groups. We also partner with Elliotts Funeral service to deliver a bimonthly bereavement group.

Our staff form a tight cohesive team which is recognised in the community for the work they do.

The Board has also gone through some significant changes, reflecting the demands of the year. We welcomed Amanda Webb to the Board. Amanda brings expert strategic, risk management and planning skills to the Board. She has led the development and implementation of a comprehensive risk management framework that has been adopted by the Board.

At the time of writing the Board has five members, Bronwyn Jackson, Eddie Jackson, Philip Brown, Amanda Webb and Rosalie Liddle Crawford. The Board members cover a wide range of specialist skills. Our Board bring their talents and governance skills to Grief Support Services through monthly meetings that have a broad agenda. Progress against our business and strategic plan is monitored and discussed at most meetings. We continue to actively seek Board members who can contribute to our business and strategic objectives.

My thanks to Lynne Cotter for her role as treasurer and Philip Brown as vice chairperson.

Last year I discussed our ability to weather some financial adversity. This is borne out by the annual performance report that shows a less favourable trading position to the 2022-2023 year. It is a true reflection of the difficult time New Zealanders are facing. The cost of living and rising staff expenses is reflected in our books. Whilst we hope for a turnaround, the end is not in sight just yet. Fundraising continues to drive our financial performance. The annual performance report shows diminishing grants from a number of our usual donors. We continue to be diligent in reporting and recognising our donors, who provide so much to Grief Support Services and ensure we remain viable.

Our waiting list continues to be a challenge. One that reflects community need and one we would prefer not to have, as we would like our services to be able to meet demand quickly. It is monitored in detail by the Board. There are regular discussions as to how we can make changes to reduce the waiting list.

I would like to thank our Governors, Debbie Penlington, Eddie Jackson and Philip Brown. The role is described in our constitution and is usually titular. However, they provide a great backstop and steadying hand should it be needed.

There are many in the community who have supported us this previous year, including tradespeople who have given time and services for free or reduced rates. Our landlord is ready to help with building issues and supports us in any way he can. Our philanthropic funding (facilitated by Jen Murray) is the life blood of the organisation. Without the support of these organisations, we would not be able to function. This year we received grants from;

Acorn Foundation, Bay Trust, COGS, Lion Foundation, Lotteries, Pub Charity, TECT, Rano Trust, Four Winds, We Care, Grassroots, One Foundation and TCC.

We also received donations from clients and corporates; Craig's investment partners, ASB and DMS Progrowers.

Thank you for your kindness, it makes a real difference to our operations and sustainability.

The Board looks forward to the coming year, well aware the challenges facing us and New Zealanders are ongoing. With careful management and a forward-looking strategic plan, we hope to continue growing and supporting Grief Support Services, to provide an accessible and well-respected service to our community.

Bronwyn Jackson
Chairperson
November 2024