

Grief Support Services AGM General Managers' Annual Report

July 2024 – June 2025

Overview

This year has been one of resilience and transition for Grief Support Services (GSS). Despite tightening funding conditions, increasing community needs, and changes in leadership, the organisation maintained consistently high-quality service delivery and a strong client focus.

We are grateful to have an experienced and passionate team who are committed to improving the well-being of the clients we serve. We are especially grateful to our Clinical Lead Ruth Barber, who stepped in as Acting GM following the resignation of General Manager Ana Toneato in May 2025. Staff have continued to deliver counselling and bereavement support with professionalism, compassion, and cultural awareness, throughout such operational change.

We are also very fortunate to have a highly dedicated board who volunteer their time and varied expertise to ensure GSS is skillfully governed. Special thanks must go to our Chairperson Bronwyn Jackson, who has dedicated many hours to transition Grief Support Services from an Incorporated Society to a Charitable Trust, effective 1 July 2025. This proved an enormous project and deserves significant recognition of the hard work involved. The board also welcomed the addition of Holly Brown in January 2025, who brings a wealth of commercial experience and has also played an instrumental role in hiring myself as the new General Manager of GSS. With just some five weeks in the role thus far (and therefore entirely outside of the reporting period), I would just like to take this opportunity to signal my sincere enthusiasm for this role and for the work of Grief Support Services. My initial impressions are that of a wonderful team of people who care deeply about our clients, and I am excited to use my clinical background as a fully qualified counsellor alongside my non-profit leadership experience to continue to strengthen our service offering.

Our ongoing challenge for the coming year and beyond is continuing to operate in a strained funding environment. Work to investigate additional income streams is already underway to offset this, but I offer my sincere thanks to our contracted fundraising specialist, Jennifer Murray, and to our funding partners, for their continued support, without whom our work would not be possible. I would also like to acknowledge the value of our partnership with Te Whatu Ora, enabling us to provide critical support to those bereaved by suicide.

Our collective achievements this year can be aptly reflected by the Māori proverb “*He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata*” – what is the most important thing in the world? It is people, it is people, it is people.

Service Delivery and Client Activity

Client demand for grief and loss counselling remained robust across the reporting period, reflecting the ongoing need for mental health and wellbeing support within our community.

- **Client sessions** totalled 3,233, which is a 3.49% increase on 2023-2024. This figure included 913 clients who were funded through our Te Whatu Ora (TWO) contract.
- **Attendance** remained steady at **79%**, representing a very minimal decrease compared to 80% in 2023-2024.
- **New referrals** totalled **548** for the year, with the large majority coming through the GSS website.
- **Wait times** remain a challenge for our service, but reduced from 35.4 days in June 2024 to **30.6 days in June 2025**, with active triage and prioritisation ensuring prompt support for those in greatest need.
- **Waiting list** numbers declined from 84 in June 2024 to **66 by end of June 2025**.
- **Did Not Attend (DNA) rates:** fell from 7 % in June 2024 to **6 % by June 2025**, showing improved engagement and follow-up systems.

Client and Community Feedback

Client satisfaction and feedback remained positive throughout the year, with consistent praise for counsellor empathy, professionalism, and cultural sensitivity. Feedback from group participants and community partners also underscored the value of GSS's client-centred approach.

Group and Peer Support Programmes

GSS continues to deliver a comprehensive mix of group-based and peer-led programmes:

- **WAVES (Suicide Bereavement):** two successful intakes were delivered in Q2 and Q4, with groups described as deeply supportive and inclusive. Additional programmes were planned in Q1 and in Q3 but did not go ahead due to lack of participants.
- **Horizons (Peer Support):** groups in Tauranga and Papamoa continue to offer safe and supportive spaces on a monthly basis.
- **Riverlight:** the long-running Waihi Beach/Katikati group concluded in December 2024 after seven years of operation, with over 100 participants supported during its tenure. This finished due to the facilitator leaving the region and it was felt there was no longer the need for it in the community at this time.
- **Suicide Loss Support (SLS) Peers:** the peer team expanded with new members, including Sophie Gibson in Katikati. A "Meet the Peers" hui for professionals is planned for August 2025 to increase service awareness.
- **Learning Over Kai:** sold-out workshops in late 2024 generated both income and outstanding participant feedback.

Staff and Professional Development

Our staff and students demonstrated extraordinary commitment throughout a year of transition. Highlights include:

- Continuous professional development in trauma-informed practice, suicide prevention, cultural supervision, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and neurodiversity.
- Ongoing supervision and peer learning supporting high-quality clinical standards.
- All team members contributing to policy development, risk management, and organisational improvement.
- Both student counsellors chose to remain at GSS for further practicums — a testament to the organisation's positive learning culture.

Community Engagement and Partnerships

GSS strengthened its profile through diverse partnerships, presentations, and collaborations:

- Outreach presentations to **schools, retirement villages, and support networks**.
- The inaugural **Remembrance Picnic (Nov 2024)** was a major success, with strong attendance, local media coverage, and cross-sector collaboration. This event is expected to grow with the second picnic planned for November 2025.
- **Free radio promotion** for the 2024 Christmas campaign and strengthened social media reach.
- Engagements with **Zespri, Farmer Autovillage, Socialink, Victim Support, Acorn Foundation, TECT, Poutiri Trust and Te Whatu Ora**.

These activities have enhanced GSS's visibility and positioned it as a collaborative and innovative service provider in the Western Bay of Plenty.

Funding and Sustainability

The funding environment continues to evolve, with mental health priorities shifting nationally toward cost-of-living and community resilience initiatives. GSS has adapted by refining its narrative and exploring new revenue avenues:

- Launch of **Gift in Will, bequest, and payroll giving** campaigns.
- Strengthened **corporate partnerships** and in-kind contributions.
- Exploration of **new workshop sponsorship models** and **cost savings**, including reviewing software subscriptions and operational costs.

These measures aim to protect frontline service hours and sustain long-term financial health.

Health, Safety, and Operations

Operationally, GSS continued to uphold high standards of safety and compliance. We are pleased to report that there were no major incidents during the reporting period.

Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks to all staff, students, volunteers, board members, and community partners who have supported GSS through this period. The commitment, skill, and compassion of this team ensure that those experiencing grief and loss in our community receive the support they need, when they need it most.

Deanna Wharton

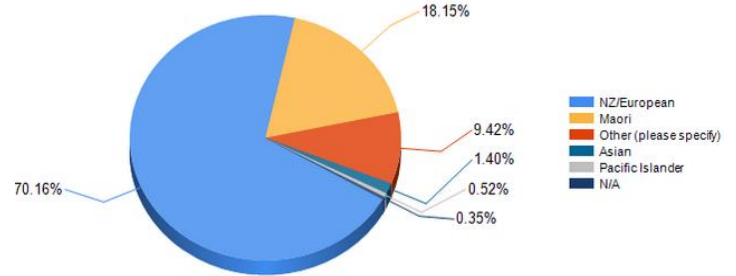
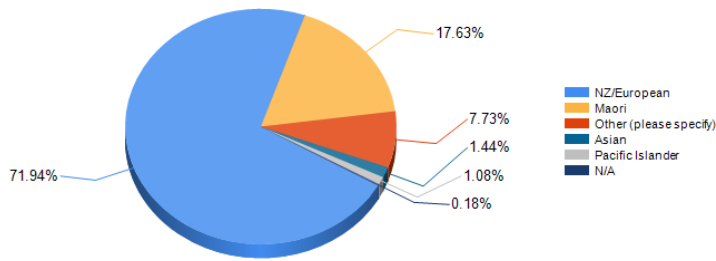
General Manager, November 2025

	2024/2025	2023/2024	2022/2023	2021/2022	2020/2021
EOY Waiting List	66	84	115	46	62
Carried fwd clients from prev. year	276	246	247*	127	86
New clients	548	567	568	476	435
Total clients seen	1026	1040	1059	605	521
TWO sessions	913	821	634	734	816
Other/PHO sessions	2320	2303	2296	1900	1592
Total sessions	3233	3124	2930	2634	2408
Av. Sessions/month	269	260	244	220	201
Attendance rate	79%	80%	77%	80%	81%
<24 hours notice	15%	13%	15%	13%	13%
Did not attend	6%	7%	7%	7%	6%
Rescheduled appts due to Covid 19	38	86	99	165	4
WAVES attendance	103	82	51	73	90
Horizons T07	67	36	37	20	60
SLS Peers – meeting with clients	28	32	33	21	28
Av. Wait time (calendar days)	30.6	35.4	27.2	39.0	24
Breakdown sessions: Pd staff	93.8%	96.6%	83%	78%	72%
Volunteer	3.4%	0.4%	7%	11%	11%
Student	2.8%	3%	10%	11%	17%

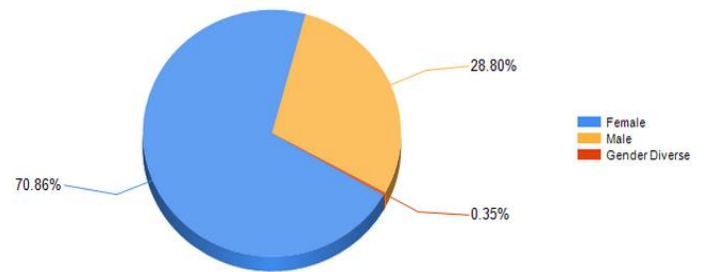
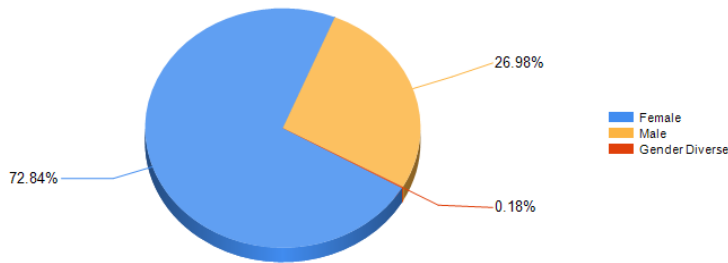
* This figure has been recalculated by using the same methodology utilised to calculate the 2023/2024 figure.

1st July 2024 – 30 June 2025 EOY Statistics / 1st July 2023 – 30 June 2024 EOY Statistics

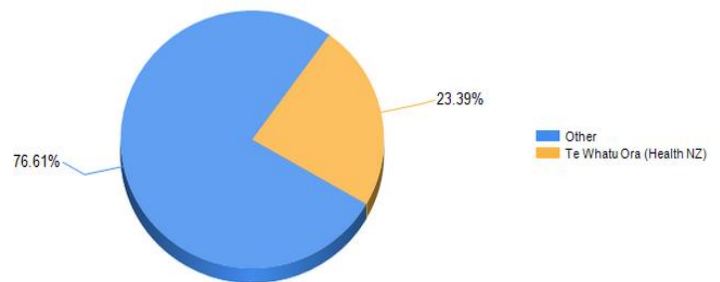
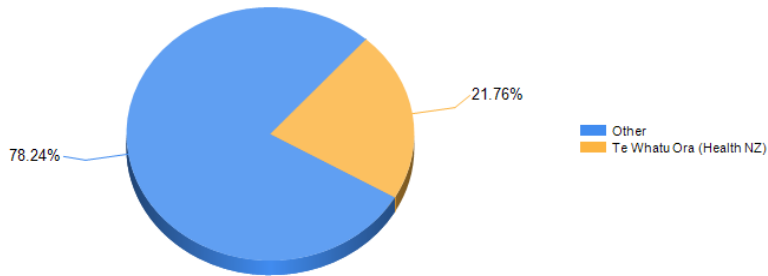
Ethnicities



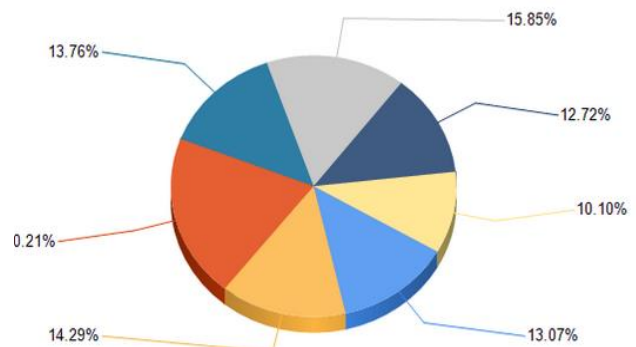
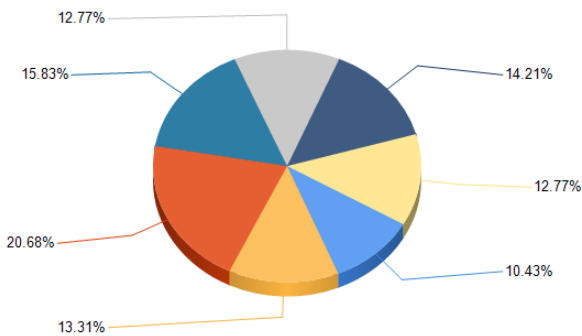
Gender



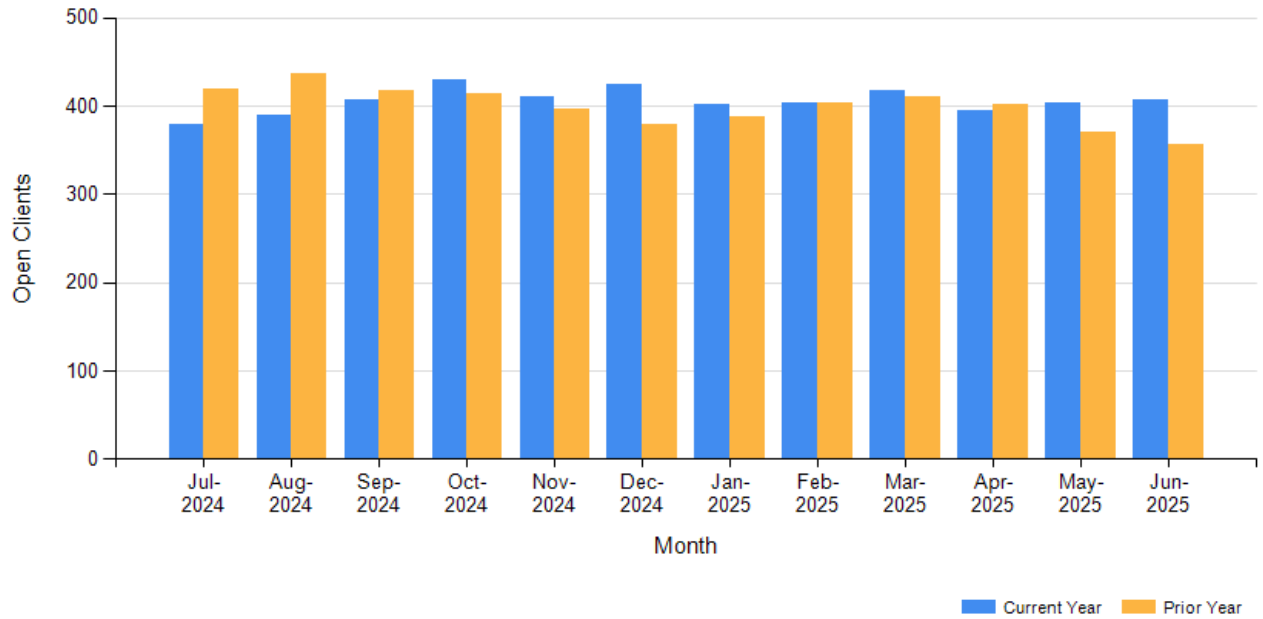
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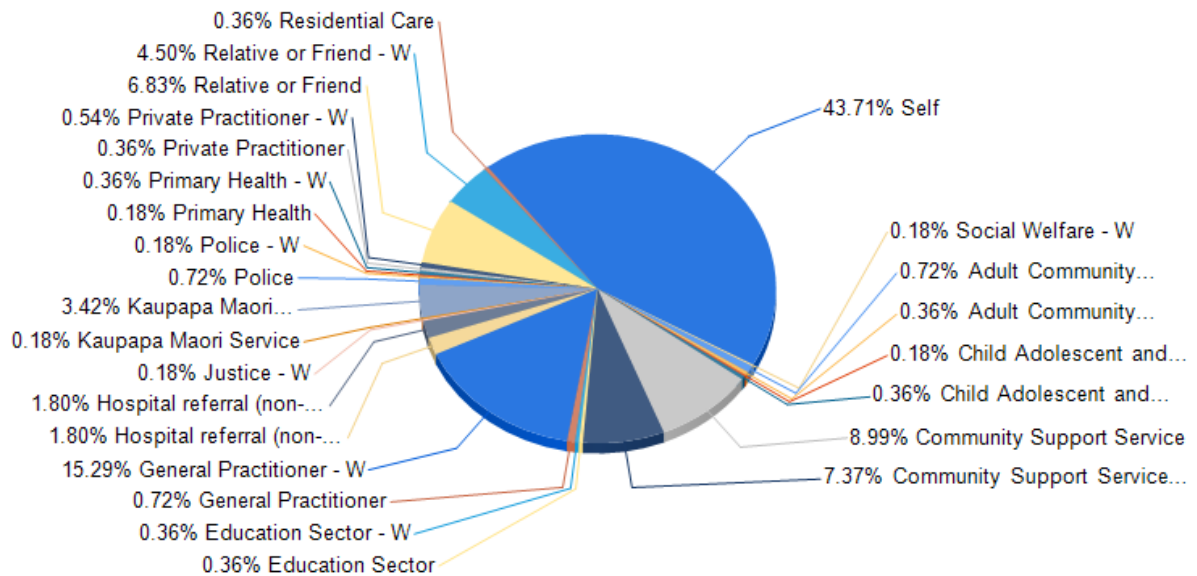
Age Referred



Number of Open Clients per Month



Referral From



Client Satisfaction Surveys

Below are the 12 outcome questions posed to clients at the completion of counselling. We received 112 responses in the 2024-2025 year.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
I feel calmer	64.29%	72
Daily life feels a bit more manageable	65.18%	73
I have worked some thing(s) out	72.32%	81
I can think a bit more about other things as well as my loss	63.39%	71
I am taking some time for myself	55.36%	62
I am eating better	29.46%	33
I am getting some exercise	39.29%	44
I feel more able to participate socially	41.07%	46
I feel more able to participate in family life	32.14%	36
I feel more able to participate in work / study / general life	34.82%	39
I am more inclined to speak up for myself or not get drawn into situations that are uncomfortable for me	36.61%	41
I have new (or remembered) knowledge / skills to help manage difficulties when they come	58.93%	66
Total Respondents: 112		

Further feedback from clients:

"Definitely helped with understanding some of my difficulties, and gave me strategies to deal with them. I have grown from the time I first went to now and can see and feel the difference having counselling has made in my life. I would especially like to thank [] for her help her easy way made talking easier which made what I was saying feel valid. Thank you for your help []."

5/23/2025 05:32 PM

"The counselling sessions with [] really allowed me to accept it was ok to feel the way I did/do, that it was ok to react to certain situations the way I did. It helped me understand that what happened was a massive impact on my life and that I was validated to feel the grief I did/do. Some of the techniques [] taught me really helped with calming my mind, easing anxiety."

4/4/2025 11:22 AM

"Given me life long tools to help in stressful or overwhelming situations."

3/27/2025 09:37 AM

"Being able to express my true feelings is freeing. I hold these back from friends and family because I know they don't want to hear."

2/12/2025 03:39 PM

"It was nice having someone to talk to who helped me understand what I'm going through. It felt good to speak to someone who was not family. Where you could say what you felt without having to think twice about things before I said them."

11/25/2024 10:48 AM

"[] helped me in so many ways. Helped me look at things in a different way, in a positive way. [] has changed my life forever."

11/1/2024 11:17 AM

Huge thanks to our clients who have generously made donations to GSS and to our funders and corporate partners listed below, for supporting this work:

Acorn Foundation
ASB Bank
BayTrust
COGS
Craigs Investment
DMS Pro growers Charitable Trust
Elliotts Funeral Service
Four Winds
Grassroots
Lion Foundation
Lotteries
One Foundation
Port of Tauranga
Pub Charity
Rano Trust
TCC Community Grant Fund
TECT
We Care