

Brent Bereavement Support Services: Evaluation Report

Overview

As part of North West London's Primary Care Winter Access Fund (WAF), funding was made available to support people who had suffered a bereavement due to the Covid-19 pandemic and who were at crisis point with their mental health. Brent Bereavement delivered a series of counselling sessions to support people who were at risk, with the aim of preventing suicides, high anxiety, depression, other mental health conditions and to improve physical wellbeing during winter months.

Healthwatch Brent gathered the views of 18 service users who had used Brent Bereavement services. The average number of sessions attended was 12, and on average the respondents reported that typically they had to wait one to two weeks for their counselling sessions to start after their initial assessment. Surveys were completed by the service users at the initial session and the final session.

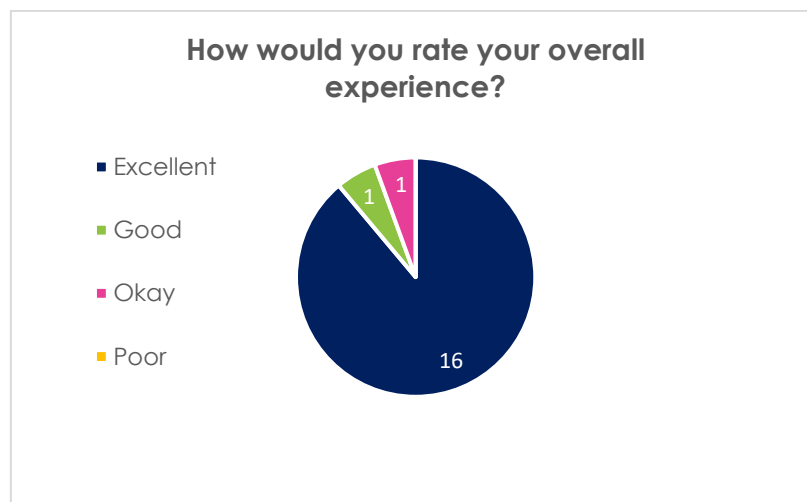
Service users had been referred into the service by variety of different methods. 72% were referred by their GP, 22% made a self-referral and 5% were referred via another health professional.

We asked the service users if Brent Bereavement were responsive when they made contact, all 18 service users said that they found Brent Bereavement to be very efficient and responsive. Comments included:

- "Very quick and efficient just when I needed it"
- "Rang Brent Bereavement in the morning and left a voicemail. I received a phone call on the same day and an assessment counsellor called me within 48 hours"
- "The service contacted me in a good time. I didn't have to wait for too long."

Some service users highlighted that Brent Bereavement were very responsive to their own individual needs. For instance: "They followed my request thoroughly, for a counsellor with Black Afro Caribbean heritage."

We asked the service users how they would rate their overall experience with Brent Bereavement. 16 service users said excellent, 1 service user said good and 1 service user said okay.



Findings

We asked the service users to tell us about their experience with Brent Bereavement. All service users were very satisfied with the service they had received. They found the service incredibly supportive and were pleased to have the opportunity to speak about their suffering and loss. The service users felt they were listened to by the counsellor, the counsellors were very approachable, and said that they would recommend the service. 50% said they had used a counselling service before, and all of the service users described the appointment time-slot they had been given was very convenient.

Feedback included:

- 'I felt listened to and this really helped me to get through the past few months.'
- 'I found the counselling very helpful.'
- 'It was really helpful and actually helped me in more ways than only bereavement management.'
- 'It was very positive and I would refer all my friends and family who needs counselling.'
- 'This was a lifeline. Before I had the counselling, I was very lost and unsure of how to cope. It was so amazing to have someone to talk to,

free of judgement. Who was there for me. I really can't stress enough that without this service I truly don't know where I would be now.'

The service users all reported that the impact had been incredible. Each individual needed a different type of support from the counsellors to help them through their grief and prevent them from hitting crisis point. The service users reported that the counsellors were able to tailor their service to help in the way that works for them, meeting their individual needs.

Some of the outcomes that service users shared with us included:

- "I felt more empowered in moving forward. I felt that my trauma was understood."
- "My mood and demeanour improved greatly."
- "I don't know what I would have done without it honestly."
- "Huge, really helped me to come to terms with pain of losing my dad from Covid and opened my eyes to see through my pain."
- "I feel much better and having someone there who was willing to listen and understand was a big help."
- "I have been able to find employment because my counselling session has helped me to move onwards."
- "I am able to live, every day is one step at a time but it's all thanks to this service. I have been able to attend work every day. I am still learning to live life with this grief but it would not have been possible without this service. I have internal gratitude for my counsellor and her support."
- "It has had a positive impact to have someone to talk to about my problems and situation."

Service users were asked questions pre and post counselling to understand the impact the service had on them in particular areas.

Pre counselling

Service users were asked if they felt isolated before having counselling. 38% of service users said they felt isolated, 38% said they were impartial, only 11% said they did not feel isolated and 5% said they did not know.

However when asked do they find social situations comfortable, 55% of service users said they were okay in social situations, 11% said they were comfortable in social situation and 11% also said they were uncomfortable in social situations.

Service users were asked if they had been prescribed any medication prior to the counselling service to help with anxiety and depression. 61% said they had been prescribed, 27% said they were not on any medication and 5% did not answer.

Service users were asked how they were sleeping prior to counselling, with 50% saying that their sleep was poor, and only 11% saying it was good.

Service users were asked if they had any suicidal thought prior to counselling. 38% said they did have suicidal thoughts, 44% said they didn't and 11% did not answer.

Post counselling

When asked whether they felt the bereavement counselling had helped, 100% of service user said that they had benefited from the counselling support.

Service users were asked if there had been a change to whether they felt isolated after having counselling. 22% of service users said they felt isolated which decreased from 38%, 44% said they felt slightly isolated which was an improvement from the start of counselling, and 27% said they did not feel isolated which is a significant improvement from only 11% who said they did not feel isolated at the start of the counselling.

There was a significant increase in service users feeling comfortable in social situations; this increased from 11% before counselling to 61% after receiving counselling. Only 11% said they felt uncomfortable in social situations after receiving counselling.

Quality of sleep had also improved after accessing the service: when asked how they were sleeping after the counselling sessions, 50% said their sleep was good which compared to only 11% before starting counselling. 33% said their sleep was okay, and a significant decrease in only 11% said their sleep was poor.

When asked were the services users on more or less medication since receiving counselling 38% said their medication had stayed the same, 38% said they were on less and 22% said they were not on medication.

There was a significant improvement to the occurrence of suicidal thoughts after receiving counselling. 66% said they had less suicidal thoughts and 16% said they had stayed the same. This compared to 38% who had said that they did have suicidal thoughts pre-counselling.

When asked do you visit your doctor more or less? A significant amount reported making less visits to their doctors at 44%, 38% reported no change, and only 5% reported visiting the doctor more frequently.

Summary

After the final session, the service users all rated the service as either excellent or good. From the conversations we have had with those receiving the service, it seems clear that it has met its aims to improve the overall mental health of people who have recently experienced bereavement, and to help people avoid reaching a crisis point.

The biggest change was seen with the relationships between the service users and their family and friends. At the start, 55% described these relationships as bad. However, after the completion of therapy sessions at least 94% described relationships with family and friends as good. This indicates a dramatic improvement in relationships between family members because of the sessions.

Therapy sessions had a notable impact on how isolated participants felt, at the start of counselling only 11% said they did not feel isolated meaning the majority of service users felt isolated however compared to post counselling 11% increased to 27% of service users said they did not feel isolated. There was also a reduction in the number of people who said they felt uncomfortable in social situations. This suggests that attending counselling sessions helped people to feel more connected with others, including their own communities – an important factor for encouraging good mental wellbeing.

The sessions also had a significant impact on the need for prescribed medication, with several participants being able to reduce their medication

after receiving counselling. A significant amount at 44% of participants also said that they made fewer visits to their doctors after completing the therapy sessions. These results indicate that the Brent Bereavement Support Service can help reduce pressure on other services.

The outcomes we observed can be very significant for the individual service users, having real impact on their quality of life. The comments received from the people we spoke to reflects clear satisfaction with the bereavement service:

"I didn't think it was the type of thing for me, but now I think bereavement counselling is fantastic, and I am trying to encourage my son to seek support."



Healthwatch Brent

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