

- Staying well
- Get help



Support for suicide loss in New Zealand

News / Support for suicide loss in New Zealand

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MEDIA RELEASE

When Greymouth parents Bronwyn Gray and Ian Richardson lost their son Liam to suicide they found they had no one to talk to who understood what they were going through.

“There were support groups for people with cancer or alcohol and drug problems but nothing for people bereaved by suicide,” says Bronwyn.

“I needed to find other people to talk to or a support group with people who had been through a similar thing but I couldn’t find one,” she says.

“A paper interviewed me and Ian for an article about Liam’s suicide and I mentioned I wanted to start a support group and one thing led to another, suddenly we had our first meeting. Over 30 people came along.”

That free support group has been running since February, 2016. They meet once a month and alternate the meetings between Hokitika and Greymouth, with some people travelling an hour and a half by car to attend.

“We’re all at different stages of grieving... I’ve met people who lost a child five or 10 years ago, and I can see that they’ve made it through and it gives me hope. It makes me realise that if they can get to where they are, I can get there too.”

Suicide bereavement support groups give people the opportunity to share their experiences of grief and loss. They are safe spaces to share stories of loved ones and give recently bereaved people the chance to talk to others who have learned to live with their loss and develop strategies to cope.

Megan’s story

After losing her husband to suicide Tauranga social worker Megan Gamble was left grieving, hurt and alone. She says her family coped with his death by sweeping it under the carpet and preferred not to speak about him.

Megan was lucky to have the support of friends who became like family and they helped her to realise she didn’t have to grieve alone. She went to counselling and joined a suicide bereavement support group.

“You can empathise through your personal experience. It gives people space to open up and that may have been the first time in many years they have been able to do that.”

Today she helps run the After Suicide Support Group in Tauranga. For Megan, attending a group put her feelings of isolation to rest. She feels she’s now in the right place for herself and able to offer help to others.

Groups provide crucial support

Suicide bereavement support groups play a vital role in helping people who have lost someone to suicide. Groups are run by individuals and organisations throughout New Zealand.

The Mental Health Foundation (MHF) runs a suicide bereavement advisory service, providing information, resources and advice to help people find groups in their areas, or set up and run support groups for suicide loss. Our team work alongside a range of other services that support communities and people bereaved after a suicide.

The MHF would like to raise the profile of bereavement support groups so those who need them know they are available.

Information about suicide prevention (including helping yourself or someone you know and coping with suicide bereavement) can be found at www.mentalhealth.org.nz/suicideprevention

If you’d like interview Bronwyn or Megan or profile a local suicide bereavement support group, please contact:

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[Media releases 2016](#)

[Media releases 2017](#)

[Media releases 2018](#)

[Media releases 2019](#)

MONTH

[June 2020](#)

[May 2020](#)

[March 2020](#)

[February 2020](#)

[January 2020](#)

[December 2019](#)

[November 2019](#)

[September 2019](#)

[August 2019](#)

[May 2019](#)

[April 2019](#)

[March 2019](#)

[February 2019](#)

[January 2019](#)

[December 2018](#)

[November 2018](#)

[October 2018](#)

[September 2018](#)

[August 2018](#)

[July 2018](#)

[June 2018](#)

[May 2018](#)

[February 2018](#)

[January 2018](#)

[December 2017](#)

November 2017
October 2017
September 2017
August 2017
July 2017
June 2017
May 2017
April 2017
March 2017
February 2017
January 2017
December 2016
November 2016
October 2016
September 2016
August 2016
July 2016
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August 2015
July 2015
June 2015
May 2015
April 2015
March 2015
February 2015
January 2015
December 2014
November 2014
October 2014
September 2014
August 2014
July 2014
June 2014
May 2014
April 2014

[March 2014](#)

[February 2014](#)

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