

Collaboration all the WAY



WAY Widowed And Young is the only peer support network in the UK for young people bereaved of their partner before their 51st birthday. WAY supports more than 4,600 young widowed people as well as offering support and advice to their families and friends through their website at www.widowedandyoung.org.uk, which has more than 100,000 visitors per year. WAY campaigns on issues that affect those widowed young, and raises awareness of the impact of bereavement at this time of life.

WAY was keen to get involved with refreshing the Bereavement Care Service Standards. Veronica Currie, WAY's National Volunteer Manager, explains: 'We are all members of WAY for the same reason. But we've all had such different experiences and different experiences of support.'

Veronica helped to organise a variety of virtual focus groups across WAY's diverse membership, which allowed the Alliance to hear a range of experiences and reflections on bereavement support and how it could be improved. One theme that emerged from the focus groups was the need for signposting.

Veronica noted that signposting was a key issue for WAY as a charity:

'It's a challenge being a small organisation with a big vision. We need to be really clear in what we offer and what we can provide. Sometimes we have people who come to us hoping that we can fix them. We can't – that's not our role. WAY brings together and creates a safe space for those widowed young to support each other.'

WAY acknowledges that it can also be a signposting organisation, as well as offering peer support to people across the UK who have been widowed at a young age. The charity already has a robust signposting process in place, referring members to both the Good Grief Trust and AtALoss for additional support, when needed. WAY also refers members with children to the child bereavement charity Winston's Wish, as part of a Full Circle Partnership between the two charities. In addition, WAY has partnerships in place with third-party providers who provide telephone counselling as well as legal and financial advice.

During holiday periods or over Bank Holidays, the organisation highlights where members can get emergency support if their own telephone support lines are closed. Yet, they are aware that this might not be enough. Veronica explains, 'It was powerful to hear that some people contact services at a time where they are feeling distressed or are already at their limit. To find out that you might then need to continue to contact services to find one that suits you sounded exhausting, isolating and demoralising.'

As a result, WAY aims to collate a list of trusted providers, but recognises that this needs to be constantly updated by the local knowledge of member volunteers around the UK and needs to be easily accessible on the organisation's Member Hub.

Veronica also noted that accessibility to and responsiveness of support was an important theme in the focus groups, and the immediacy of support was of immense value to those seeking help. Veronica reflected that WAY could improve the member journey for new members. Currently, as one of the necessary safety checks, members are not able to access support on the Member Hub until they have a confirmed UK address, meaning the joining process can often take a week or so.

WAY is constantly looking for ways to improve this process, so bereaved partners seeking help can be supported in a timely manner. The charity strives to make sure that its website has relevant information, particularly for the newly bereaved during this wait. Veronica highlights how important this is:

'We know that it can take a lot for someone to reach out for support, and we need to make sure that we are able to support them when they do.'

Veronica confirms that WAY has found value in taking part in this project and the charity is looking forward to seeing the refreshed Standards. 'It has been really interesting to be part of this project. It's so important for our members, especially those from marginalised communities, to have their voices heard. WAY and all bereavement support organisations should be continually reflecting on their practice and WAY hopes that the refreshed standards will help with this.'



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