



September 2023

Bereavement Support Project

Pilot programme delivered in
the UK, funded by Legal & General

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Executive summary

When faced with a bereavement, and the related impact that this can have on a person's life, the support that may be needed to help manage and navigate through these difficult times can often be overlooked. With thanks to Legal & General, Age UK funded four Local Age UKs to deliver the Bereavement Support Project. The four local Age UKs involved in the project were Age UK Camden, Age UK Sheffield, Age UK South Lakeland and Age UK West Sussex, Brighton & Hove. A 12-month pilot, testing a new service model aimed at supporting older people who had recently or were expecting to experience an imminent bereavement.

The overall aim of the project was to provide support to 400 older people who are experiencing, or expecting an imminent, bereavement and capture learning from the pilot to inform us what bereavement support for older people exists and what the barriers to bereavement support are, to help us fund a wider rollout with even more Local Age UKs, so we can help as many older people through bereavement as possible.

Advisors across the four local Age UKs delivery partners provided older people with a holistic person-centred service, helping with practical considerations that have to be taken when someone has died and were able to signpost to emotional support, such as counselling services, as and when required. The Local Age UK advisors had been trained in working with people who were experiencing grief following a bereavement and were able to provide the immediate emotional support that people experiencing a bereavement so often need.

Over 12 months of project delivery the Local Age UKs provided one-to-one in-depth advice and support to **363 older people**, who had experienced a bereavement or who were expecting a bereavement.

The project aimed to:

- Give older people a space to identify how they would like to take action to manage their grief, and connect people to other Age UK services, bereavement counselling and other local specialist support groups.
- Ensure wider, more holistic support is in place, if applicable and chosen, conduct benefits check to strengthen the older person's financial resilience, or provide a listening ear through telephone support.
- Provide information and advice to help older people navigate through the practical administration following a bereavement.
- Provide immediate emotional support, actively listening to the older person to understand how their grief is affecting them and, signpost older people to emotional support services. Referrals were made for more in-depth emotional support, as needed.
- Provide training for staff across Local Age UKs to increase awareness and understanding on the grieving process and the impact of loss and bereavement on families.
- Gain insight into positive practice delivering bereavement support to older people and learn of the gaps in bereavement support for older people.
- To evaluate the pilot, Age UK's project team had regular meetings with the Local Age UKs delivering the project. We held meetings both one on one with Local Age UKs and, as a working group with all the Local Age UKs delivering the project. To inform our learning on the way Age UK can support older people with a bereavement, through monthly reporting submitted by the Local Age UKs, we gathered what support the older person had received from Age UK and the support the person had been signposted to.

How support was given:

There were two elements of the project's delivery intensive advice and information, and emotional support. In the conversation between the Advisor and beneficiary, an advisor would work to understand how the

person would like to take action to manage their grief, and connect the person to other Age UK services, bereavement counselling and local specialist support groups.

Beneficiaries using the service were provided with information and advice to help with the practical considerations associated with a bereavement and, offered a benefit check to make them aware of their entitlements and support to access these entitlements if they wanted.

Throughout the project, we offered older people the option to have a home visit from an advisor. Seeing people in their home, particularly those with emotional needs, provides the older person with the space to discuss things at their own time in a comfortable environment. Offering home visits can also ensure that older people who may otherwise not be able to access a service, if living in a rural location or because of poor transport links, can access services¹.

As part of the project, Age UK were able to update two information guides, **Bereavement** and **What to do when someone dies**, which provide information on the journey of bereavement and its impact on a person's mental and physical state, and practical considerations for when someone has died. These guides were shared across Age UK's Network of Local Age UKs and made accessible on Age UK's website.

At an early stage in delivery of the project, we learnt that peer support was an important strategy to be used as a coping mechanism following a bereavement. Peer support groups are a way for people who have had a similar experience to come together and share their experiences.

One of the Local Age UKs delivering the Bereavement Support project focused on setting up and delivering a Peer Support model, supporting beneficiaries who had been bereaved. The Peer Support group was held in partnership with Bereavement Care, a local charity who facilitated the group. Through the group we provided a space for older people, who had experienced a bereavement, to come together and receive support from peers.

Conclusions and recommendations:

Age UK, through the Bereavement Support Project, have provided practical and immediate emotional support to older people, helping older people through a significant life event.

Age UK will explore how the approach that has been adopted by local Age UKs involved in the Bereavement Support project can be adopted by other projects, with specialist support on a particular topic being made available through a more generic service that is aimed at supporting older people through the significant life events that can come up in later life, such as a bereavement, a change in care needs or unexpected changes in a financial situation.

Age UK will build on relationships with organisations delivering bereavement support to continue providing emotional support to people who have experienced or are expecting an imminent bereavement.

¹ Age UK, Holistic Advice Projects: The lessons we've learned and what we want to do next, 2021.

Why bereavement support?

Each year, Age UK supports hundreds of older people whose enquiries into Age UK are linked to a bereavement. Over the financial year 2021-22, Age UK supported 1,081 people with bereavement enquiries and 178 with bereavement specific benefits. These numbers are likely to only be a fraction of the real number of people supported by Age UK following a bereavement.

Cruse Bereavement Support is the National leading charity for bereavement services in the UK and through their services they found that older people (people aged 50 years and above) are half as likely as younger generations to ask for support following a bereavement².

As the leading charity for older people, Age UK are ideally placed to help older people who have experienced bereavement. We are a trusted organisation and source of confidential, non-judgemental advice, with millions of older people turning to Age UK for information and guidance through some of the most challenging periods of their lives.

Grief can have a profound impact on someone's health and wellbeing:

- Older people are **five times more likely to be lonely** if they are widowed, than older people who are in a relationship.
- Older people going through a bereavement are **four times more likely to experience depression** than older people who haven't been bereaved³.

The COVID-19 pandemic seriously affected coping strategies people had in place following a death of a loved one. Age UK delivered a report on the [Impact of COVID-19 on older people's mental and physical health](#), one year on following the pandemic. Two significant findings were:

1. Older people who had lost someone before the pandemic had tried to rebuild their lives with coping strategies, to help manage their grief and in many cases, loneliness. Once the pandemic started, **often older people had their coping strategies taken away and were left to manage their grief alone.**
2. **There was a lack of available bereavement support.** Older people tried to access counselling services following a bereavement, to be told they were on a long waiting list. In some instances, older people were told they would need to wait up to 6 months to see a counsellor⁴.

Why advice and information?

After identifying the lack of bereavement support services for older people and the need for the support from our beneficiaries, we worked with our network of Local Age UKs and colleagues to tailor the Bereavement Support Project to provide a service supported older people greatest.

Age UK's Services Sounding Board, a group of older people who represent older people across the UK to influence Age UK's decision making, provided insightful experience on what the project should support on.

"Many people are in shock after a bereavement, and they don't really know who to call".

"Tasks of bereavement can be pretty large such as 'who do I need to tell?'"

² Cruse Bereavement Support, Bereavement Supporter Project, November 2021,

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/about/our-work/bereavement-supporter-project/>

³ Independent Age, Good grief: Older people's experiences of partner bereavement, April 2018,

<https://www.independentage.org/policy-and-research/research-reports/good-grief-older-peoples-experiences-of-partner-bereavement>

⁴ Age UK, Impact of Covid-19 on older people's mental and physical health: one year on, 2021, https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/id204712_hi_covid-report-final.pdf

“Focusing on the tasks.. registering the death, organising a funeral.. can help people through the first 2 weeks of shock.”

We were informed that support with practical administration following a bereavement was missing from existing services, and this was a service that Age UK were well established to provide.

What are the benefits to bereavement support?

Practical support

When someone dies it can be overwhelming to think of everything that needs to be done. There are many administrative tasks that have to be completed including registering the death and informing organisations and people of the death. The person, or people, having to manage this administration are likely to be grieving at the same time as having to complete these administrative tasks.

Knowing who to contact in the first place when someone has died can be a difficult place to start, and with many older people not having the digital skills or accessibility to go online, this can make these tasks even more difficult.

Providing support with practical tasks that are associated with a bereavement gives people the opportunity to grieve for the person they have lost and to not feel alone in their grief.

Emotional support

Receiving immediate emotional support when a person has been bereaved, can make an overwhelming difference to a person’s experience of grief.

Emotional support is different to counselling, it is a way of helping people feel connected and less lonely.

Age UK advisors can provide immediate emotional support to older people experiencing a significant life change, by actively listening to the older person and showing compassion.

For a person who has been bereaved having someone to talk to, who will actively listen, can help to process their grief.

Services providing longer methods of emotional support, such as counselling services, can be a lifeline for older people who have experienced a bereavement. For many people, talking to friends or family is the support they need when they’re grieving, but for some, they may not have friends or family they feel they can talk to at this time.

Peer support

A leading mental health charity define peer support as:

‘...when people use their own experiences to help each other. There are different types of peer support, but they all aim to:

- **bring together people with shared experiences to support each other**
- **provide a space where you feel accepted and understood**
- **treat everyone’s experiences as being equally important**
- **involve both giving and receiving support.**⁵

⁵ Mind, Peer support, July 2019. <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/peer-support/about-peer-support/>

Offering peer support groups to Age UK's beneficiaries, enables beneficiaries to access a more informal counselling service; providing that emotional support that so many people want following a bereavement.

The delivery model

The Bereavement Support Project aimed to help 400 older people, aged 50 or older, who had recently experienced a bereavement or who were expecting an imminent bereavement.

There were two elements of the project: **in-depth advice** and **peer support**.

In-depth Information & Advice

Since 2011, Age UK and the Age UK local partner network have been delivering projects that provide advice and support to older people experiencing significant life events. Through this work we aim to empower people to have a positive experience of later life, supporting people through very difficult times, maximising income, and reducing feelings of loneliness.

Through this project, our local Age UK advisors provided one-to-one in-depth advice and support to older people. In the initial session, the advisor would talk with the older person to understand what actions they wanted to take to manage their grief.

Age UK's delivery of information and advice can be described as being:

- **Holistic:** the advisors delivering the service take the time to explore what issues the older person is facing, both within the initial presenting problem and more widely, before offering advice and support; and
- **Person centred:** the older person being helped is at the heart of the work the advisors do; by working with their clients to understand what matters to them, what they want to achieve and then plan with the older person how they can achieve their goals.
- **Home visits:** older people have the option to have a visit from an advisor in the older person's own home. The older person may feel more comfortable speaking openly with an advisor in a space they know is safe. Home visits contribute to a sense that someone really cares if they are willing to make the journey to the home.
- **Practical support:** the practical administrative tasks following a bereavement. For example, how to use the Government's Tell Us Once service and signposting to information on funeral arrangements.
- **Benefit check:** clients were offered a referral to a benefit check. At the benefit check, an advisor would review the person's income, living situation and entitlements, including what impact the bereavement may have on these. For people in more complex situations or when a person feels empowered to manage the benefit system by themselves, Age UK advisors will signpost the person on to external organisations e.g. Citizen's Advice and the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).
- **Emotional support:** immediate emotional support is not the same as counselling, it can be defined as showing a person care and compassion for their situation and can be assisted with both verbal and nonverbal actions. All older people received immediate emotional support from the advisor. Older people who came through the Bereavement Support service often had heightened emotions; the advisors needed to be sensitive to the client's emotional needs as well as the safety of the client and the advisor.

Clients who wanted longer-term emotional support had the option to be referred to Age UK's internal counselling and emotional support services or signposted to local organisations who would provide this support e.g. Cruse Bereavement Support and Macmillan.

Peer support: one of the Local Age UKs delivering the Bereavement Support service initiated two peer support groups for older people who had been recently bereaved or who were expecting a bereavement.

During the information and advice session with the advisor, the advisor asked the person if they would like to be signposted to the peer support groups for people who had been recently bereaved.

How we chose which local Age UKs would deliver the pilot

With funding from L&G, we were able to fund four Local Age UKs to deliver and test the bereavement support delivery model.

Age UK, on a National level, capture the types of enquiries older people come to our Local Age UKs for, which could include benefits, support for carers, health and wellbeing and bereavement support and the type of advice they're seeking.

This data can help to inform us which Local Age UKs are supporting older people with a specific concern most. And it can also help us identify gaps in our local services.

We used this data to inform us which Local Age UKs had received the most enquiries into bereavement. This data included enquiries into support for funeral payments, counselling for a bereavement and managing a will.

The four Local Age UKs who piloted the project were:

- Age UK Camden
- Age UK Sheffield
- Age UK South Lakeland
- Age UK West Sussex, Brighton & Hove

The four Local Age UKs who delivered the project had established information and advice services and, reported higher numbers of enquiries into bereavement advice and support.

Main objectives of the project

To provide holistic, person-centred advice to help a total of 400 older people navigate a bereavement

Over 12 months the four Local Age UKs would each support 100 older people who had recently experienced a bereavement or, were expecting an imminent bereavement. Older people would be supported with practical and immediate emotional support and referred on to longer-term emotional support. Advisors would talk and actively listen to the older person, identifying how they would choose to take action to manage their grief.

To provide specialist bereavement training to advisors

The project would provide bespoke bereavement support training to the advisors who were directly involved in the delivery of the project. The training was bespoke for Age UK advisors working with older people, to increase awareness and understanding on the grieving process and the impact of loss and bereavement. Before the training, 60 per cent of the advisors hadn't received comprehensive bereavement training before. The training was delivered by Cruse Bereavement Support, the national leading charity in bereavement.

Gain insight into the gaps and barriers to bereavement support for older people

Local Age UKs and Age UK will gather learnings into the gaps and barriers to older people accessing bereavement support. Through the reporting for the project we will have a directory of organisations who are providing bereavement support and look to build relationships with these organisations, with the intention for the future to create partnerships delivering better bereavement support in the UK.

Age UK National objectives

Upskill our network of Local Age UK advisors

Provide bespoke bereavement support training, teaching good practice for providing emotional support to an older person who has been bereaved and, to help advisors manage their mental health while delivering the service.

Improve and develop Age UK's bereavement resources

Update the 'Bereavement' and 'What to do when someone dies' guides with current information. Print and dispatch a quantity of these guides to the whole network, giving the entire network, and more older people, access to this information.

Age UK are focused on finding ways to better support the older people who need us the most. Providing a service that supports older people when they have been bereaved, through a significant life change, helps us towards succeeding our focus.

Our target	What we achieved
<p>Provide one-to-one support to 400 older people who had experienced a recent or, were expecting, a bereavement over 12 months</p>	<p>363 older people received one to one support, following a bereavement, in 12 months.</p> <p>For the initial appointment with a Local Advisor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 193 people had a home visit from a Local Advisor, and 233 people in total had a face to face appointment with a Local Advisor. • 130 people received support over the telephone.
<p>Provide training to Local Age UK advisors and Age UK's National Advice Line advisors, to support them in providing immediate emotional support to someone who has been bereaved.</p>	<p>Together with Cruse Bereavement Support, Age UK developed a bespoke webinar. The training was delivered by Cruse and aimed for professionals working with older people who had experienced a bereavement.</p> <p>All the advisors delivering the bereavement support project received the training. We were able to extend the reach of the training and deliver to colleagues at Age UK who are delivering Age UK's Advice Line service and handling hundreds of calls related to a bereavement.</p> <p>100 per cent of people who received the training, would recommend the training to colleagues in a similar role and, 100 per cent 'felt very prepared' to deliver bereavement support, after they'd received the training.</p>
<p>Develop our resources on bereavement and distribute nationwide</p>	<p>The Bereavement and What to do when someone dies guides were updated in both November 2022 and November 2023, helping keep older people informed.</p> <p>Both guides were distributed across our network of Local Age UK's / organisations / charities. Extra guides were sent to the Local Age UKs delivering the Bereavement Support pilot.</p> <p>For the Financial Year 2022-2023:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13,916 Bereavement guides were distributed • 11,518 What to do when someone dies guides were distributed
<p>National Advice Line to support 3,000 Level 1 callers (short calls approx. 5 mins) over 18 months</p>	<p>From 1st April 2022 to 31st May 2023, 2,425 bereavement calls and enquiries have been supported by Age UK's National Advice Line.</p> <p>With support from this project's funding, the National Advice Line will continue to support bereavement calls and enquiries up to 31st October 2023.</p>

Outcomes

As of July 2023, **363 older people** who had recently experienced a bereavement, or were expecting an imminent bereavement had been supported by the project.

We have been able to help older people access services in the way that is most suitable to them, with 193 people visited at their home, allowing them time and space to discuss issues with the adviser and help to build rapport and trust with the service at a difficult time.

This flexible and person-centred approach has resulted in positive outcomes being achieved for beneficiaries of the service.

The project aimed to support 400 people over 12 months of delivery. A barrier to providing bereavement support to older people, Local Age UK's told us, is that identifying older people who have been bereaved is difficult as older people are more unlikely to seek help than younger people. The project supported 363 people, 91 per cent of the aim.

Advisors spent on average 195 minutes with an older person at their initial appointment.

The outcomes for service users were measured through reporting submitted by the Local Age UKs monthly. Local Advisors would ask the older person, once they had received the support, how the support had benefitted them. We asked Local Advisors to record the following to help us understand when support was being needed and what support had been given:

- Time since bereavement
- Advice provided
- List of signposts and referrals made (if applicable).

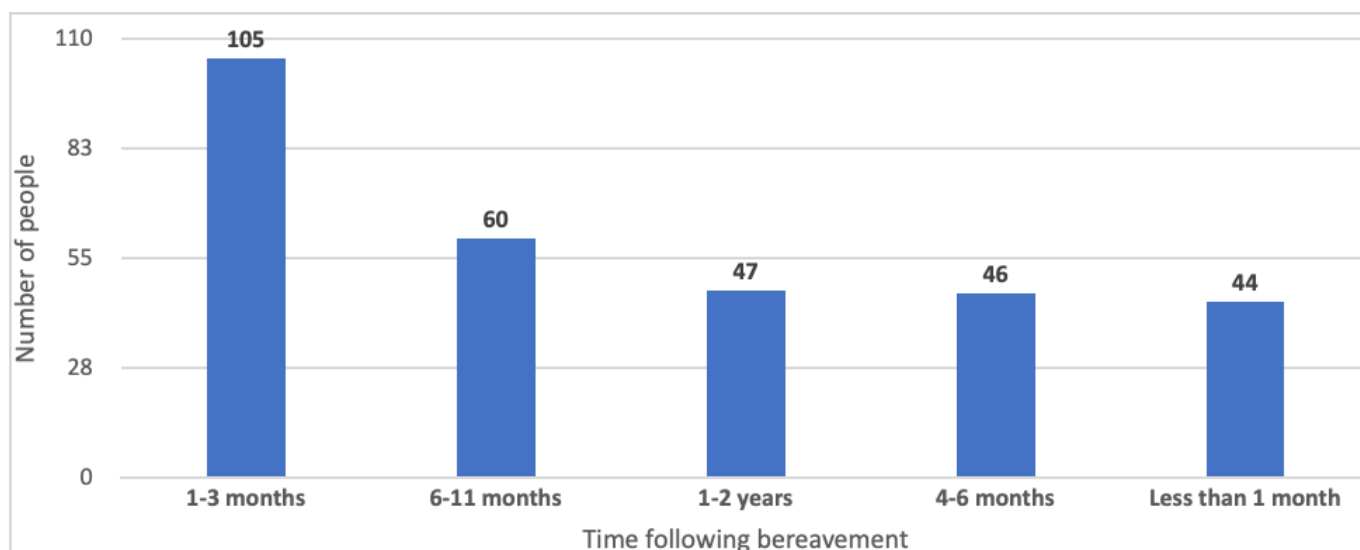
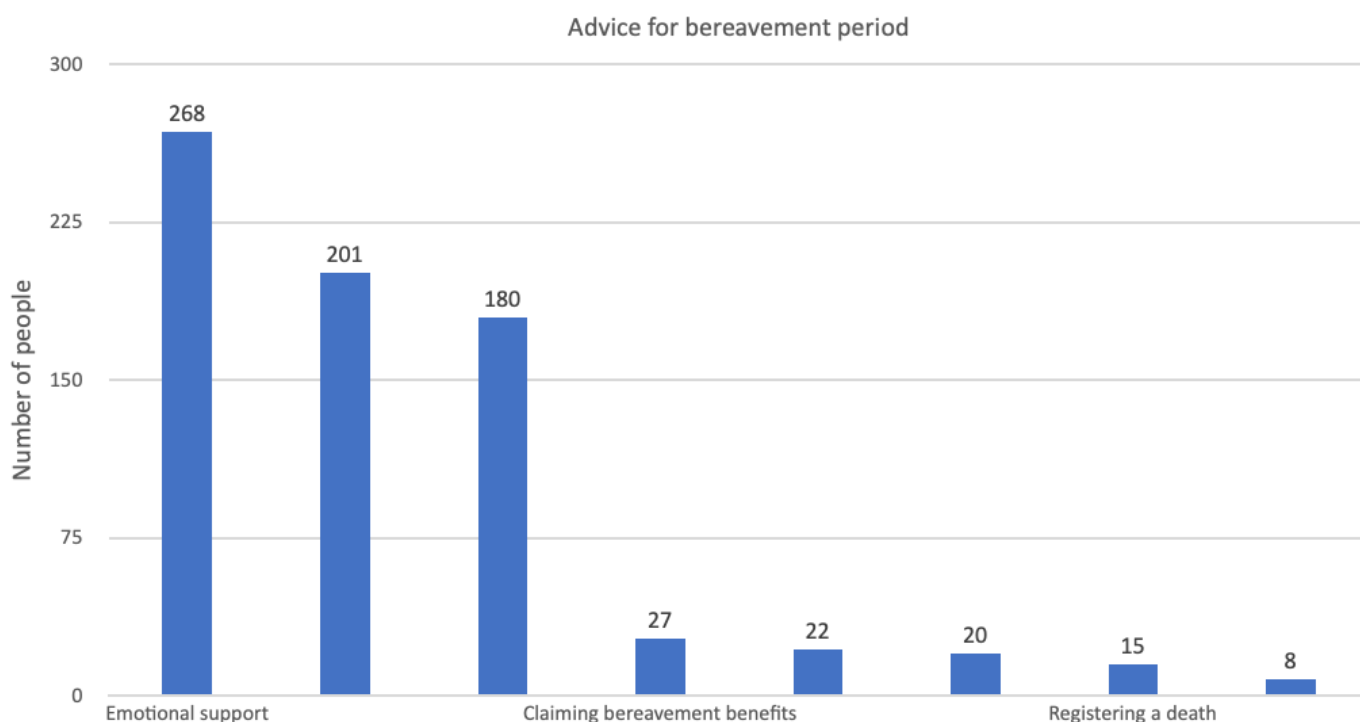
Through the reporting we can see that people who used the Bereavement Support service reported feeling helped with:

- Understanding and managing bereavement related paperwork
- Accessing emotional support, such as grief counselling
- Having more knowledge to make their own decisions
- Maximising income
- Having more space to manage their grief.

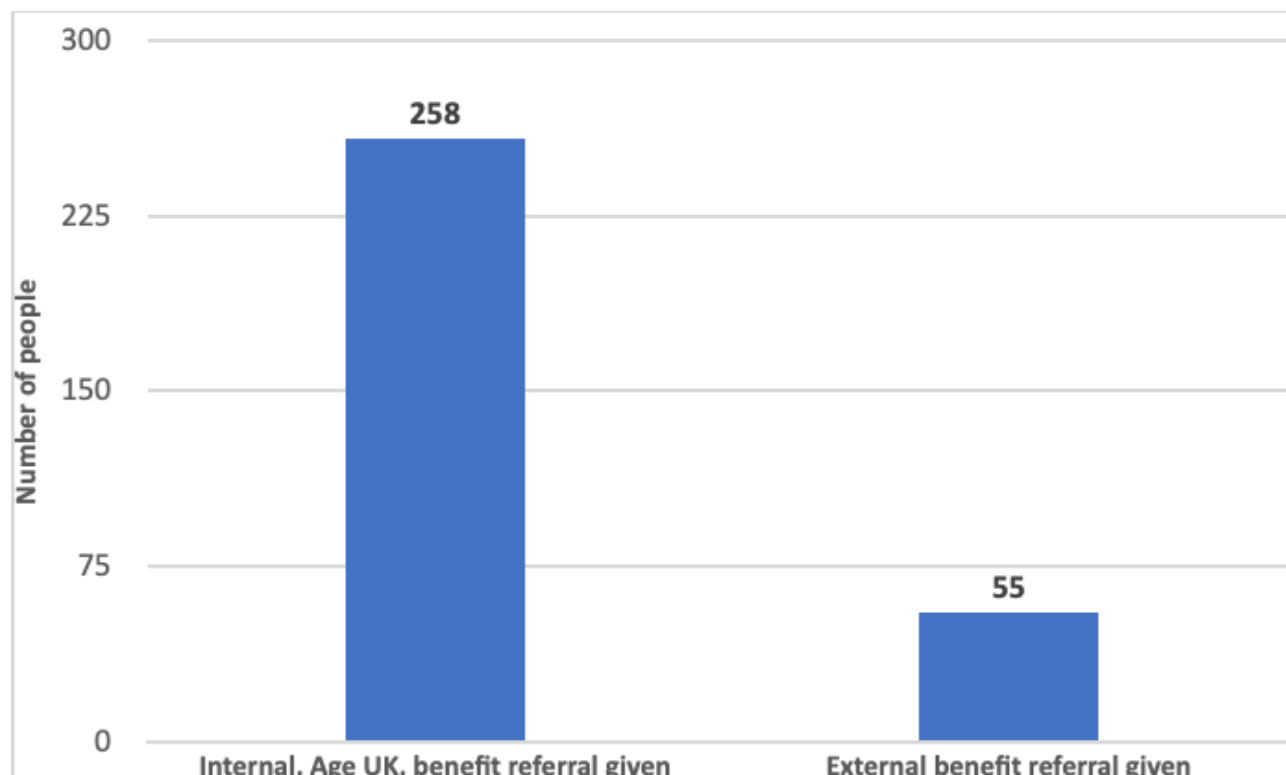
The table below summarises the topics' beneficiaries were provided with advice and support on through the project.

Emotional support and advice on housing and health care needs were the topics that beneficiaries required Age UKs' support with most often, as well as **support with managing the large quantity of paperwork** that is associated with a bereavement.

The project supported 44 people who had lost someone less than 1 month before and, 105 people who lost someone between 1-3 months before. The table below shows how long following a bereavement a person accessed the Bereavement Support Service.



Through the project, 258 internal benefit referrals and 55 external benefit referrals were given to older people, helping them to access their entitlements.



The external benefit referrals were to organisations who were more specialist, these organisations were:

- Citizens Advice Sheffield
- Heeley Trust for Social support
- Yemeni Community Association
- Camden Council.

Understanding and managing paperwork

The death of a loved one can be a very difficult and challenging time, with the impact of a loss often being felt for months and years after the event. There are many practical things that are needed following a death, such as registering the death, notifying landlords or mortgage providers, updating care providers, notifying government departments, banks and other financial institutions as well as managing the affairs of the deceased based on any final wishes.

Our Bereavement Support Service has been on hand to provide this support to 180 older people, following a bereavement, or in preparation for when someone dies.

Accessing emotional support

Specialist support through the grieving process, such as grief counselling, can often help someone who has been bereaved to overcome many of the common symptoms of grief such as anxiety, depression and isolation. Local Age UKs have been able to help older people access these services when they have been needed, helping older people to access the support they need.

Developed a bereavement peer support group

Through delivery, Age UK West Sussex, Brighton & Hove developed a bereavement peer support group and learnt of the importance of peer support when it comes to bereavement.

The Bereavement Support Navigator at the Local Age UK identified that the people they were seeing often spoke of feeling lonely, as if they were part of an “underground club”, friends and family may avoid talking about the death and consequentially, the bereaved person may stop themselves from talking about their bereavement. The Local Age UK responded to this need by partnering with Bereavement Support, a local organisation delivering bereavement support, to initiate a Bereavement Peer Support Group. The group was held the last Thursday of every month, from November 2022. Bereavement Support facilitated the group. At the group, people had the opportunity to share and listen to others who were sharing a similar experience.

Through the group, people made connections, so much so that a couple of attendees asked the Bereavement Navigator if they would be able to share contact details and meet up outside of the group.

“I found it really useful to listen to other peoples stories and realise I am not alone.”

“I just want to be around like minded people who are feeling the same as me.”

“You people, [Age UK West Sussex, Brighton & Hove’s I&A department], who encouraged me to come to this group are one in a million.”

Maximising income

Following a death, there is often an impact on many other areas of a person’s life. Money and finances is one area where there can be changes, for example if the deceased had pensions or was in receipt of income related benefits. Through our project, 313 people were referred for follow up advice maximising income and claiming benefits. This further support will involve a benefit check, to assess any benefit entitlement the beneficiary may have, as well as follow up support to claim this entitlement, if needed.

Rolled out bereavement support training nationally

The funding enabled Age UK to deliver bespoke bereavement support training, for professionals working with older people. The training was received by all the advisors delivering the project, and later on in the project the training was able to be delivered to Age UK’s National Advice Line staff.

The training was highly commended by Age UK staff who received the training. 100 per cent of people who received the training thought it was ‘Excellent’.

“Excellent trainer who was clearly very knowledgeable, I feel this training is useful for life as well as work.”

“[Trainer’s name] was great and especially appreciated learning about duality model of grief, oscillating between acute grief and more practical matters is something I see in my recently bereaved clients a lot. Also, feel it was helpful to enforce importance of self-care and professional spaces to debrief after experiencing vicarious trauma”.

Information guides

As part of the project, Age UK were able to update two information guides, **Bereavement** and **What to do when someone dies**. Both guides provide information on the journey of bereavement and its impact on a person’s mental and physical state. What to do when someone dies provides practical considerations for when someone has died.

The updated guides were distributed to Age UK’s Network of Local Age UKs, over 120 services, and made accessible on Age UK’s website. Individuals and organisations can request printed copies of the guides

through Age UK's website. The distribution figures for the **Bereavement** and **What to do when someone dies** guides for the FY 2022-23, are:

Bereavement: 13,119 in bulk orders and 797 in individual orders.

What to do when someone dies: 10,127 in bulk orders and 1,391 individual orders.

Gain insight into the gaps and barriers to bereavement support for older people

Through delivering bereavement support to older people the Local Age UKs were able to better understand the barriers to older people accessing bereavement support.

Age UK worked closely with the Local Age UKs to identify the barriers and gaps to bereavement support for older people.

Local Age UKs completed reporting every month of the project which provided insight on what older people were asking for support with, concerning a recent bereavement. From the reporting, Age UK were able to identify what support was missing in communities and, why the older person was seeking support from Age UK.

Throughout the project, Age UK held regular meetings with the Local Age UKs, individually and as a group with all the delivery partners. At these meeting, we would discuss key themes from the project and reoccurring issues in terms of barriers and gaps.

The following barriers and gaps to bereavement support have been identified by Local Age UKs working directly with older people who have been bereaved.

- **Support is best delivered and received face to face.** Providing a holistic and person-centred information and advice support service can be more difficult over the telephone when the advisor isn't able to see the client. This has been exasperated by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **Bereavement services are limited.** Long waiting lists for services. One client who was supported by Age UK West Sussex, Brighton and Hove, had attempted to access bereavement support and were told they would need to wait up to six months. Due to high demand for bereavement services, many services run a waitlist for support.⁶
- Many services don't offer immediate emotional support and require a person to have been bereaved for three months.
- **Practical support with bereavement is required.** At a time when a person may not have the mental capacity to handle administration of a bereavement, support with the practical aspect is extremely beneficial and allows the person to manage their grief. This support includes, support with housing and benefit checks.
- **Pre-death planning.** There aren't enough services available which support people to plan for their death and get their affairs in order. People experience great administrative tasks when someone close to them dies, if that person didn't plan.
- **Digital exclusion.** Many older people accessing online bereavement services have had difficulty or aren't able to access these services.
- In the UK we aren't used to talking about death openly.
- **Mental health.** Complex cases presenting to bereavement services can be too complex to manage for

these services, and likely need input and support from mental health services, who are also at capacity.

- **Peer support.** Speaking with other people who are experiencing a bereavement at the same time, is helpful to a person managing grief.
- **Identifying older people who have been bereaved.** Recent research shows that older people are half as likely as younger generations to seek bereavement support.⁷

We will share this learning with colleagues and across the network of Local Age UKs, sharing best practice and knowledge to improve and develop our services.

6 Cruse Bereavement Support Charity, Our Local Support Services, May 2023, <https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-support/local-services/>
7 Cruse Bereavement Support Charity, Supporting bereaved older people, Dec 2021, <https://www.cruse.org.uk/about/blog/supporting-bereaved-older-people/>

Age UK West Sussex, Brighton & Hove's Bereavement Navigator Service

Age UK West Sussex, Brighton & Hove (Age UK WSBH) identified a need in their area for bereavement support for older people. Age UK WSBH recognised there were established support groups but a number of these groups weren't suitable for older people. The local partner wanted to deliver this project to fill a gap in bereavement support for older people.

With the grant, Age UK WSBH recruited a new member of staff for the role of **Bereavement Navigator**. The Navigator would support older people, living in Brighton and Hove, who are experiencing loss, by providing practical advice as well as immediate emotional support. The Navigator would help people with the paperwork associated with a bereavement, help to identify coping strategies for grief and, to live independently. The Bereavement Navigator would give advice on funeral grants and benefits, make referrals to bereavement counselling and, signpost on to additional services to help people remain connected during a difficult time.

The Bereavement Navigator received motivational intervention training and bespoke training from Cruse Bereavement Support, the leading charity in bereavement support in the UK, to support them to deliver the Bereavement Navigator service.

What the Bereavement Navigator Service offered to older people

- Dedicated Bereavement Navigator, on hand to provide advice and support to older people who had experienced a bereavement.
- Bereavement Peer Support Group: set up in partnership with Bereavement Care and developed from learning that the bereavement support groups in the local area weren't always suitable for older people i.e. groups held late in the evening. The Peer Support Group was held monthly at Age UK WSBH's office.
- Bereavement Walking Group: developed as an extension to the Peer Support Group, to help people access peer support and encourage people to care for themselves.
- Promotion of the Service: Bereavement Navigator service flier and, Age UK WSBH attended local events to promote the service and build relationships with organisations in the same field.

Outcomes of the Service

- **51 people** received **dedicated bereavement support**, over 12 months of service delivery.
- **10** was the greatest **number of attendees at the Bereavement Peer Support Group**.
- **41 people** who accessed bereavement support from Age UK WSBH, received a referral to the Bereavement Peer Support Group.
- **14 people** received **a benefit check**. A benefit check involves checking if a person is in receipt of their entitlements and advising a person on how they access their entitlements, as well as supporting the person with benefit paperwork if needed.

The difference the service has made

"The service has been a life saver for me. The group offered me a place to meet other people when I was feeling on my own in my grief."

"You have given me so much help and support over the past few months, now I am ready to move on"

"Coming along to the walk today, I have not had to bother my family, it has been my best day for months"

Next steps

The Local Partner is looking for funding to be able to continue to deliver the Bereavement Navigator role and Service.

Age UK WSBH hope to gain funding to continue the Bereavement Navigator's role and extend the reach of the service through local partnerships with organisations who are working to deliver bereavement. The Local Age UK would want to share their learnings on their Bereavement Peer Support models to the network of Local Age UKs and other organisations supporting people experiencing a bereavement. If further funding was obtained, Age UK WSBH would support older people in planning ahead for death; supporting people to make sure their affairs are in order.

The Bereavement Navigator Service has been a great success in supporting people to navigate their bereavement and access peer support. Age UK WSBH and Age UK hope to be able to continue this important service.



West Sussex
Brighton & Hove
ageUK

65 years
1957-2022

Bereavement service

Ensuring older people in Brighton & Hove are supported following the bereavement of their loved ones

www.ageukwsbh.org.uk 0800 019 1310



Our bereavement service aims to offer free practical advice and emotional support to those who have lost a loved one.

The service can help people navigate the paperwork, cope with their grief and live independently. We will be able to give advice on funeral grants and benefits, make referrals to bereavement counselling and signpost on to additional services to help people remain connected during a difficult time.

We can help with

- Registering the death
- Funeral plans and benefits
- Benefits, taxes and money information and advice
- Grief Counselling
- Housing Will Wishes
- How to be an Executor
- Getting you re-engaged with the community and socially connected to others
- Getting you independent;
 - supporting you to get on top of your finances
 - getting online
 - shopping
 - cooking

How does it work?

Our Bereavement Navigators will support people aged 50+, living in Brighton and Hove who are experiencing loss, by providing practical advice as well as emotional support to help through this difficult time. The service is for anyone who needs it, regardless of time passed since their bereavement.

Do you need support? Get in touch

0800 019 1310 bereavement.service@ageukwsbh.org.uk

Age UK West Sussex, Brighton & Hove is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales. Registered Charity Number: 1096323. Registered Company Number: 04146487.

Fred's story. Fred received support from Age UK's WSBH Bereavement Navigator.

Fred is 61 years old and was referred to Age UK WSBH's Bereavement Navigator Service by the NHS Community Healthcare team. Fred was the main carer for his mother in her last two years living with a terminal illness and Fred was devastated when his mother died. Fred gave up paid employment to care for his mother and had become isolated from his friends. Fred was at risk of losing his family home due to the bereavement as the house was in his mother's name. Fred had previously suffered from mental health issues, including suicidal ideation, and once his mother died he said he often felt suicidal tendencies and considered ending his life.

How the Bereavement Navigator helped

The Bereavement Navigator signposted Fred to Brighton & Hove Mind, Samaritans, and Survivors of Suicide as immediate support contact numbers. The Navigator explained that the wait for one-to-one counselling services were long, but signposted and made a referral into the Age UK WSBH Bereavement Peer Support Group. For Fred's first attendance to the Bereavement Peer Support Group, the Navigator was available to provide a hand holding service. Fred said he was pleased that the Navigator was on hand to support with his confidence.

Fred was very stressed about his housing and financial situation and the Navigator referred Fred to Age UK WSBH's Information and Advice team to ensure Fred was receiving the benefits he was entitled to. Fred also received signposting to local foodbanks in the area.

Due to the number of services available online, the Navigator explored whether Fred had online access. Fred had poor computer skills and no access to online devices. The Navigator discussed the Age UK WSBH Digital Inclusion program and how the program could help Fred to access online counselling and other means of support easier and quicker. Fred decided he would like to be referred to the program to improve his computer skills.

The Navigator kept in regular contact with Fred via phone calls until the first Bereavement Peer Support Group date.

On looking for paid employment, Fred had recently got very upset at an interview and was dreading facing anymore interviews. The Navigator set up a meeting with Fred to explore volunteer opportunities. The Navigator, with Fred, secured an opportunity to volunteer at a local lunch club for older people. Fred reported how much he enjoyed supporting the group.

Further on into the meetings between Fred and the Navigator, Fred disclosed that he identified as gay. The Navigator referred Fred to a local LGBTQ+ charity who run a specific bereavement project for the LGBTQ+ Community.

Fred continued to attend the Bereavement Support Group sessions as well as receiving a check-in call every two weeks, from the Navigator. These calls were using motivational techniques to remind Fred to explore options of support within the local community and subsequently Fred contacted Switchboard and Survivors of Suicide.

Fred has now taken the decision to move on from Age UK WSBH support and work with his new Network Bereavement Group to help resolve his Bereavement problems and suicidal issues. As part of the Bereavement Navigator Service's exit strategy, Fred was made aware that they can always come back to Age UK WSBH and seek support.

What the Navigator's support has meant for Fred

Fred had a regular place where he felt safe to discuss his emotions regarding bereavement and could also

receive support from like-minded people at the Bereavement Support Group, so he did not feel so isolated and alone in his grief.

Fred received two sessions of Motivational Interviewing. He felt listened to and was able to disclose information that helped Age UK WSBH signpost to relevant support charities.

Fred is still battling with his suicidal thoughts and understands that they will never go away but he feels he can manage them better.

Fred has been able to build on his relationship with a family member, so he does not feel so isolated. He now has someone who he trusts within the family who “cares about him”. The Navigator constantly praised Fred about continuing his relationship with his sibling and how he can also help support them by listening.

Through the Bereavement Navigator Fred has accessed the Digital Inclusion program and started upskilling his IT skills and, has received support from the information and advice team to ensure Fred has a stable and secure home.

Fred recognises that he still has a long way to go on his journey. Fred was extremely grateful for the Bereavement Navigator Service which has helped him to “feel a lot more positive and connect with people in a similar situation. The [bereavement navigator] has built up my confidence, which helps me to attend job interviews and go to peer support groups”.

Conclusion and recommendations

The Bereavement Support project has been invaluable in allowing us to understand both the need for this type of work in local communities, as well as the impact that these types of interventions can have for older people. The project supported 363 older people who had experienced, or were expecting an imminent, bereavement.

The project filled a gap in bereavement services provision. The project enabled Age UK to deliver dedicated bereavement support to older people, helping people to manage the practical and emotional considerations following a bereavement. Beneficiaries who used the Bereavement Support Service often reported that they had tried to access emotional support services, such as counselling, before for their grief but had been informed they would be on a long waiting list. The project was able to support older people in accessing immediate emotional support following their bereavement.

Advisors delivering this service have worked intensively to deliver the highest standard of support. The advisors hold a cumulative case load and will continue supporting the older person from the first interaction to when the older person feels confident to continue managing their grief without the assistance of the service.

Having a dedicated service for bereavement meant that beneficiaries' who needed greater time spent with an advisor had access to this. Complexity of people's situations could be because of housing situations impacted by the bereavement and, or, mental health of a beneficiary, which might have been affected by the bereavement.

All beneficiaries of the service will have been assured that they can return to Age UK for further support if they ever need and, empowered to navigate and manage their grief.

Through this work Age UK were able to design and deliver, in partnership with Cruse Bereavement Support, bespoke training on supporting older people who are experiencing a bereavement. The training was professional and highly commended by the people who received it. Age UK hope to deliver this training in future across the network of Local Age UKs and with colleagues who work with older people in their roles, helping colleagues to feel confident working with an older person experiencing a bereavement. This training would support Age UK with its focus on supporting the most vulnerable people in society.

Local Age UKs across the UK are set up to provide specialist support to older people, and with access to statutory services becoming ever more restricted the role of local Age UKs in being able to fill these gaps and provide services to older people becomes increasingly important.

Next steps

Based on the findings and learnings from the project, we will continue to look for funding to be able to continue this work for older people and we will explore how the approach that has been adopted by local Age UKs involved in the Bereavement Support project can be adopted by other projects, with specialist support on a particular topic being made available through a more generic service that is aimed at supporting older people through the significant life events that can come up in later life, such as a bereavement, a change in care needs or unexpected changes in a financial situation.

We will build on relationships with organisations in the field delivering bereavement support, Cruse Bereavement Support and Palliative Care organisations, to be able to continue supporting the delivery of emotional support for people who have experienced, or are expecting an imminent bereavement. We will work with these organisations to discover ways to develop and instigate local Bereavement Peer Support Groups across the UK, extending the reach of these groups as an emotional support strategy.

Stories of people supported by the Bereavement Support service

Grace was supported by Age UK Camden's Bereavement Support Advisor

Grace is 87 years old and lives in a second-floor council property without a lift. Grace's husband died in November 2022 after a two-year battle with prostate cancer, he was 90 years old. Grace had been married to her husband for over 65 years. Since Grace's husband's death, Grace has felt very lonely and has become very isolated as she rarely leaves her home due to her very poor mobility. Grace can only walk when supported by a walking frame and requires the support of another person to get down the stairs so she can access the outside world. Grace has carers who attend her home to support her four times a day. Grace has a son who lives in Southend, and her daughter died 10 years ago from breast cancer.

Since the death of her husband in November, Grace has been feeling very lonely and misses him terribly. Grace said she spends most of her time alone these days, apart from the visits from her carers. Grace's son calls her everyday, but he lives in Southend and has his own family. The son visits every weekend with his wife and Grace's grandchildren. The son helps Grace manage her bills and these visits mean Grace can spend time with her grandchildren and daughter-in-law. Grace says she feels very well supported by her family, but they can't be with her every day. Up until her husband's death, Grace and her husband had never spent a night apart in all their years together apart from the last few months when he was in and out of hospital due to the progression of his prostate cancer.

Grace's son referred Grace to the Bereavement Support Project. Grace was struggling with her grief and her current housing was becoming more inappropriate for her as her health, especially her mobility, is deteriorating. Grace's son explained to the Bereavement Support Advisor that his mother won't listen to him, Grace won't accept her son's suggestion of any sort of counselling and is refusing to discuss the possibility of moving home. The son asked if the Bereavement Support Advisor could visit Grace at home and try where he has failed.

The Bereavement Support Advisor contacted Grace who agreed to an initial home visit appointment to discuss what support may be available to her. During the initial visit, Grace was very reluctant to accept any of the support that was offered, so the Advisor spent the first two hour visit just getting to know Grace and to give her an opportunity to discuss the loss of her husband.

Grace explained that her husband had been diagnosed with prostate cancer just prior to the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Grace is very angry because she feels her husband died unnecessarily because the NHS kept cancelling his cancer treatment and hospital appointments due to the pandemic. Grace's husband returned home in early November 2022 after a two week stay in hospital, he was only home for two days before he died. Grace said they were at home together and he was on the sofa and she was in an armchair, she said they were watching television and then she noticed he was asleep. Grace said that she didn't think anything of this initially, until she tried to wake him up and get him to go to bed where he would be more comfortable. Grace couldn't wake him up and then started to panic. Grace was able to call an ambulance and sat holding her husband's hand talking to him until the ambulance crew arrived. Grace can never get the image of her husband on the sofa out of her mind, but she was glad she was with him at home when it happened because he always said he didn't want to die in hospital.

How Age UK Camden have supported Grace

The Bereavement Support Advisor was able to give Grace immediate emotional support during the visit; Grace became very tearful when discussing her husband. The Advisor was then able to get Grace to agree to a second home visit. During the second visit Grace agreed for a referral to be made to the Age UK Camden Counselling Service for on-going support with dealing with and managing Grace's on-going grief, this service is able to visit housebound clients at home.

Grace spoke a lot about how isolated she felt since her husband's death and longed to be able to get out more but, the lack of a lift in the current block of flats she was living was making this very difficult. Grace

agreed for the Bereavement Support Advisor to make a referral for further support from the I&A Building Resilience project to look at her housing situation and also to support with an application for Attendance Allowance (AA), Grace was not currently in receipt of AA and her poor health and the effect it has on her day-to-day life means she meets the criteria for making an application.

A referral to the Building Resilience Project meant Grace received further on-going support. The Building Resilience Advisor was able to support Grace with looking at her housing options, although Grace was adamant initially that she didn't want to move she conceded that if she could stay in her local area then she wouldn't rule out the idea completely. Eventually, Grace was supported to approach the Camden Council Sheltered Housing Team and Grace has been accepted for a Sheltered Housing property which will greatly improve her well-being and increase her ability to get out of her home more. Grace said she would like to start attending a day centre for company throughout the day, the Building Resilience Advisor is supporting Grace to get in touch with local organisations delivering day time support. An application was successfully made for higher rate AA. Grace continues to be supported by the Building Resilience Advisor.

What bereavement support has meant for Grace

Grace said that although she was reluctant to initially meet with the Bereavement Support Advisor, she is glad she did and is now feeling a little brighter about her future. Grace still misses her husband terribly and thinks about him everyday. But Grace is looking forward to being able to get out of her home more in the very near future and start making social connections to help her combat her loneliness.

Grace was grateful to both her son and the Bereavement Support Advisor for encouraging and supporting Grace to make active choices and positive changes to her lifestyle.

Kate received support from Age UK Sheffield's Bereavement Support Advisor

Kate's husband, Peter, had recently passed away. Kate came to Age UK Sheffield because her financial benefits were in hers and her husband's names and Kate didn't know how to ensure these benefits were amended now she was a single claimant. Kate needed to be able to receive these benefits to pay both her rent and council tax. Kate was anxious and upset at the thought of having no money to pay her bills. This was in addition to the emotions she was experiencing due to her recent loss of Peter.

Kate is a 71-year-old woman who rents a semi-detached house. Kate spent most of her life living in America, where she met her late husband, Peter, who was from the UK. Kate and Peter married in America before settling in the UK. They were married for 15 years until Peter passed away within 3 days of being admitted to hospital.

Kate contacted Age UK Sheffield for support with ensuring existing benefits were amended. The existing benefits were joint claims for housing benefit, council tax support and Pension Credit. As Peter dealt with the finances, Kate didn't know how to ensure these were amended. Kate has spent most of her time living in America so was not used to how such benefits worked here. Kate's only income was a small State Pension.

Age UK Sheffield provided Kate with the required support, via multiple visits in Kate's home and, telephone appointments. Age UK Sheffield's Bereavement Support Advisor supported in ensuring existing financial benefits were amended, discussed bereavement support and, increasing social interaction. The Local Age UK supported Kate with informing the applicable organisations and making single claims under Kate's name and identified other areas of support following Kate's loss that might be helpful to Kate. Age UK Sheffield's Bereavement Support Advisor supported Kate with contacting the Department of Work and Pensions Bereavement Service and Sheffield City Council to advise them of Peter's death. Kate's state pension was

re-assessed and, Kate was supported with completing and submitting an application form for Pension Credit. The Bereavement Support Advisor supported Kate with completing and submitting an application form for both housing benefit and council tax support. The Advisor discussed available ongoing bereavement support available in the local area. With Kate's permission, Kate was referred to Voluntary Action Sheffield's lunch club and Friends of Age UK Sheffield, two social groups which would help increase Kate's social interaction and increase her feelings of well being.

What bereavement support has meant for Kate

Through the recommendations from the Advisor on the financial benefits available to Kate, and supporting Kate to apply for these benefits, Kate was awarded a housing benefit at £104.12 per week and £624.72 as a back payment. Kate was also awarded council tax support at £19.69 per week and a £123.73 back payment.

Kate's State Pension was increased from £85 to £150.97 per week and provided with a back payment of £857.61.

Kate's application for Pension Credit is still being processed.

The Advisors enquired into a lunch club nearby to Kate, asking if they had availability. Kate was able to join the lunch club local to her, providing her with the opportunity to increase her social interaction.

Kate felt a huge sense of relief at being awarded housing benefit, council tax support and an increase in her State Pension. She is also taking advantage of various social opportunities. As a result, Kate is finding the grieving process easier and enjoying her increased social interaction.

'I always feel much better after speaking with Age UK Sheffield as they put me at ease.'

Daniel received support from Age UK South Lakeland's Bereavement Support Advisor

Daniel lost his wife suddenly and the effect of this has been significant for him and his family. Daniel is a proud gentleman who found it difficult to ask for and accept help. He has his own significant health conditions and limited family nearby.

Daniel is 70 years old and he has cancer. Daniel had been reliant on his wife in managing their finances and all correspondence, and therefore following his wife's passing, Daniel was in turmoil in regard to how to move forward with the paperwork and financial re-adjustment.

Daniel's son referred Daniel to Age UK South Lakeland as he was concerned about how his Dad was coping and knew he needed some assistance with financial matters. Age UK South Lakeland's Bereavement Support Advisors arranged for a visit to Daniel at his home, with his son. The Advisor was able to discover that Daniel was sleeping on the sofa due to his bed being a state of disrepair, and that Daniel didn't have access to any bank accounts and couldn't find any bank cards. Daniel's energy is set up through a pre-payment meter and as such he was unable to top this up.

The Advisor discussed the process in regards to registering the death and spoke through the effect this would have on benefits. Daniel was also struggling with remaining in the marital home, and was conscious of the financial impact of this too.

The Advisor visited Daniel over numerous home visits in order to gain trust and build up a rapport, which was very important given Daniel's reluctance to accept support. As such, the Advisor was able to go on to support Daniel in many areas. Daniel was accepted grant funding to replace his bed frame and mattress to enable him to sleep more comfortably and safely. Grant funding was also gained to provide Daniel with funds in the

short-term to pay for his energy bills and basic supplies. The Advisor supported Daniel in liaising with his bank to allow him access.

Daniel was assisted with completing paperwork relating to his late wife's pension paperwork and in applying for a change of circumstance with his Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, and complete a new claim for Pension Credit.

The Advisor liaised with Daniel's landlord to discuss the options available to Daniel for moving properties, and the Advisor with Daniel completed a new social housing application to facilitate this move.

What this bereavement support has meant for Daniel

Age UK Sheffield have been supporting Daniel for four months. Daniel has subsequently received his new bed and mattress and said that he "felt human" for the first time in a long time as a result. The extra grant funding allowed Daniel to keep on top of his energy costs and meant that he didn't feel as "helpless" in not having access to any money in the short term. The issues with his access to his bank accounts have now been resolved, and Daniel feels more financially secure following the successful receipt of housing benefit, council tax reduction and, pension credit.

The Advisor is still working alongside Daniel to support with the house move and hopes that this will have a further positive impact on his wellbeing. Once Daniel has been able to move homes, he would like to discuss emotional support options with Age UK South Lakeland, to support him in managing his grief.

Age UK
7th Floor,
One America Square,
17 Crosswall,
London EC3N 2LB.

0800 678 16 02
www.ageuk.org.uk

