**NHS Education for Scotland**

**Talking about Bereavement Podcast Series - Transcript of ‘An innovative model of staff bereavement support’ Podcast**

**Presenter:** Lynne Innes, Senior Educator, NHS Education for Scotland

**Speakers**: Karen Crosbie, Healthcare Chaplain, NHS Ayrshire & Arran

Susan Robertson, Administrator for Spiritual Care Service, NHS Ayrshire & Arran

Elizabeth (Lizzie) Mackie and Isobel (Izzy) Ferrier, Bereavement Support Service users

**Lynne Innes (LI):** Welcome to the Talking About Bereavement podcast, which is brought to you by the Bereavement Education Programme in NHS Education for Scotland. I’m Lynne Innes, one of the educators in the team, and in these podcasts I'm going to talk about bereavement by sharing with you some of the work and learning our team is involved in as well as hearing from our guests. In this podcast, we will hear from the Spiritual Care Team in NHS Ayrshire and Arran who have been offering a bereavement support service to staff in Crosshouse Hospital. Susan Robertson and Karen Crosbie are offering their tenth group and will share how they have been doing that. They're also joined by Lizzie Mackie and Izzy Ferrier, who have both benefited from the service and will share how that has helped them with their own grief and bereavement. Karen is an NHS Healthcare Chaplain at Crosshouse Hospital in Ayrshire and Arran and she has been part of the Spiritual Care Team for over five years now. Her passion and purpose at work is to support and comfort all staff, patients and relatives of all faiths and none during times of loss and change. Outside of work, Karen loves to dance and spending quality time with family, friends and her cats. Susan Robertson has worked in the Spiritual Care Department since 2006 and says that she can honestly say that she has never worked with such genuinely caring, loving and dedicated staff. They're not just her colleagues, they are her friends. She feels so lucky that she can now say that she enjoys coming into work. She really feels part of a team who genuinely care about her. And the best part is that she loves her work. Outside of work she loves being outdoors and walking. She enjoys meeting up with friends for food, drink and dancing and when she can, she spends as much time as she can with her son, who's away at university. And I'm very much looking forward to speaking with them all.

**LI:** Welcome to this podcast today and I'm joined by four lovely people from NHS Ayrshire and Arran who have kindly agreed to speak to me today about the bereavement support that they offer to staff in Ayrshire and Arran. I'm joined by Karen Crosbie, Susan Robertson, Isobel Ferrier and Elizabeth Mackie and I'm really delighted that they've all agreed to join us today. They've, they've been saying it's an honour to be here, but actually I feel really honoured that they are, they've agreed to come and share what they do and I'm really excited to hearing more about that as we go through the podcast. So, Susan can I come to you first and just ask you a bit about what you do in Ayrshire and Arran to support people in bereavement or what we can do to support people?

**Susan Robertson (SR):** We've started a bereavement group, it's been running for two or three years, and that we also offer one-to-one support and sometimes following that it then goes on to the bereavement group or you can come straight into the bereavement group. It's, we run that for seven sessions. Following that we then have a monthly group that if they feel they're needing that wee bit of extra support or just to come in and chat to others who have been bereaved - we do that monthly. So, the sessions are structured, the seven sessions, they’re for an hour and a half and we, they’re, we advertise them throughout the hospital. We have them through the Daily Digest, word of mouth or they can contact myself direct. We've been running, we've had six groups running so far and we'll be starting another one next week. We've, they’ve been well attended and we feel that the staff who have come have benefited them. We gave out an evaluation form at the end of every session and we've had excellent feedback and from that that's where we started the monthly one because it, it was, a couple of ladies said that they feel that they were needing that wee bit of extra support. So that's how the monthly group come along.

**LI:** Ah, right okay.

**SR:** So, any member of staff can, can come along, they just let us know. So, whoever starts the group, we don't have anybody new starting it, coming in during the group. So, the people who start it end it, so there's nobody new can come into it.

**LI:** And sorry, this wasn't a question that we had talked about, but I'm just wondering, do you have a waiting list for the groups?

**SR:** Well, we normally do have a waiting list. We've got a couple of ladies that I've contacted to, to see if they're still wanting to come along. Sometimes the dates don't suit or the nights don't suit once it comes to it, but yeah, normally once they start running, there'll be other ones contact me. So yeah. Normally by the time the next group starts, I've normally got enough names…

**LI:** Yeah, yeah.

**SR:** …for that to start.

**LI:** For the next one to start.

**SR:** Yep.

**LI:** So, in terms of what are the specific ways that you offer to support people in the service that you provide. Karen, I think you were maybe going to share some of that?

**Karen Crosbie (KC):** I think Susan's covered quite a bit of it. So, we've got sort of three main ways that we support people, staff in Ayrshire and Arran. First one, and they're all by self-referral. So, the first one is one-to-one bereavement support and that's basically just offering a safe confidential space and we provide compassionate listening along with support and guidance on the grieving process to help them realise for themselves what's best for them to help them move forward. These will naturally come to an end and then you find that some people need more, some people don't like one-to-one. So, we thought about setting up a bereavement support group. So, this, this started before COVID, no, during COVID my colleague started it at Ayr Hospital and I observed and co-facilitated and then used her resources to start up a group here at Crosshouse in the sanctuary. And I basically had to adapt the resources to my own style of facilitating a group. So, we started up the bereavement support groups here and as Susan said, it's a maximum of eight people - myself as the facilitator and Susan as the co-facilitator. And what we offer in that again is a safe confidential space for people to learn, share and grow and the sessions are structured to achieve this. So, to give you an example of what it, what a session looks like, the first session obviously is an ice breaker to introduce ourselves. We have the group safety guidelines and we have our aims and purposes for the group and that, that’ll change from group to group. Every group is, is different. So apart from the first one they usually all follow, then after that, like a welcome and refreshments, an initial check in from the previous week, piece of music to settle people into the space and then we offer information which can be presented in a, a variety of ways followed by discussion. At the end of each session there's always another opportunity for people to speak where we can have a closing reflection on what they are taking away from that evening or just what they want to finish with. And there's always, there's never any need to talk if, if you don't want to. So, we recognise that everything has to come to an end and these sessions had to come to an end too. However, after the first session, which was always a difficult one, that was always the really painful one, people really enjoyed coming into this space each week. And again, talking with attendees of the groups because it, it's never been Susan and I that make decisions. All the decisions have been with other colleagues and especially with staff that come to the groups and it was trying to figure out what is it you're still needing and we decided on the bereavement cafe. So that, as Susan said, is once a month and they've even named it themselves because we thought what do we want to call it, do we want to call it a bereavement café and they've, they named it Be Renewed. And the bereavement cafe is, it's growing in such a way that again people are really benefiting from coming to this one. It's not as structured as the, the groups and it's, we're just forever continuing to grow and learn from each other. I mean…

**LI:** Yeah.

**KC:** …last night we, there, there is a wee bit of structure, but it's, it is different. So, there's always gonna be a takeaway reflection at the end. There's always gonna be an activity to help people either not talk about anything to do with their bereavement journey or be around people and talk about it if they want to or an activity that will help them move forward on their journey as well. But again, there's never any pressure on people. I think the support that it provides, I think Isobel and Elizabeth would be best to sort of explain how they've been supported by both the types of groups.

**LI:** And I suppose I was thinking when you were speaking there that it sounds like you've built community, through the, the kind of individual groups. And then the cafe kind of brings, does it bring all of that community together then do you think? Can anyone come to the bereavement cafe that wants to come? Yeah.

**KC:** So…

**SR:** It's just the, it's just the, the people who have been to the, the groups that are invited.

**LI:** Yes, yes…

**SR**: Aye.

**LI**: …yeah but, but it's not like just eight people that can come it can be…

**SR:** No, no.

**LI:** …anybody can kind of…

**SR:** Yeah.

**LI:** …pitch up at that yeah, if they've been yeah so, it's like, yeah, I'm just thinking that community sounds important and it matters to people, doesn't it? And I suppose Lizzie and Izzy, it's really kind of you to share your experience of going to the bereavement group and to the cafe. And so, I wonder if you would come in and tell us a wee bit about how, how that, how the groups have supported you.

**Izzy Ferrier (IF):** Yeah, happy, happy to do that. Just felt, you know, from, from the minute I arrived in the sanctuary, it felt like a warm, welcoming, safe space. It's always been made to feel like that. It became very familiar and comforting and allowed me to feel safe within that, within that space. I think one of the, the, the first things that I think it was the very first night that we went to the group we were asked by the, Karen and, and Susan what our main aims for the, for the group would be and we, we kinda set up a set of rules that we would all abide by for, for the group. And I mean it was, it was things like that there was gonna be no pressure on anyone to speak if they didn't feel like it, if they didn't feel up to it. Everyone would listen respectfully to everyone else. Anything that was said would stay within the four walls and nobody would be judged on anything that they did say, no matter how stupid it might seem to yourself, nobody would judge you. So, I think having those ground rules set right from the word go was important because it did make you feel that you were in a very safe space and that anything that you did say would be treated confidentially within the group. And I think going on from that, the group just gelled and we all learned from each other's experiences and you know talking about you know how people dealt with certain situations, you could learn from it and, and you took a lot away from, from other people. You know if you weren't sleeping people would you know have a, an idea ‘well why don't you try this or why don't you try that. Have you tried this?’ You know, so it was very much collaborative and, and everyone was out to, to try and help and support each other and that's one of the, the huge things that's come out of it for me. It allowed me to open up and talk about the bereavement that I had suffered. Sorry I’m getting emotional… it allowed me to talk about it in a way that I probably wouldn't have done with my family because I was too concerned about protecting them.

**LI:** Yes, yes.

**IF:** So it, it allowed me to open up and talk to these people who were in, you know, a similar situation to me, experiencing the same grief and, and everything, it allowed me to open up and talk to them about things that I couldn't have at that point talked to my family about because I'd have been too scared that I was making things worse for them and making, you know, and worrying them. So, it very much allowed me, allowed me to do that. Right, I’ll stop waffling on now.

**LI:** No, you’re not waffling at all and thank you, thank you so much for being so vulnerable and sharing that there, that was really kind of you. And I'm just struck by how the relationships within the, the group and the, the environment I suppose that Karen and Susan enabled…

**IF:** Yeah.

**LI:** …has been something that's been very precious for you…

**IF:** Yeah.

**LI:** …and something that really mattered to you and, and you know commend Karen and Susan for, for, for managing to do that, it sounds a really, as I said at the start I think before we started recording, I feel inspired just listening to you talking about what you've done. I hope other people feel inspired as well when they, when they listen to this and it seems like in lots of ways quite a simple thing to do but actually it requires quite a lot of vulnerability from those involved as well. So, thank you Izzy for sharing that.

**IF:** No bother.

**LI:** Lizzie, what about, how, would you like to come in and tell us a wee bit…

**Lizzie Mackie (LM):** Yeah.

**LI:** …about your experience?

**LM:** I'm the same. I kind of, started seeing Karen on a one-to-one basis, obviously through work, things to do with work. But then in between that time - separated from my husband, got divorced, lost my mum, lost my dad, had COVID in between all that. It was a really testing time. But I think I'm the same as Izzy, there's just that, even when you're going to staff care on a one-to-one, I'm just looking at the chair behind Susan, but there's just that you go in and you just sit down and you just, yeah, you just put a big sigh and you, you just feel that there's, there's nothing that you can't say, you just feel safe. And I think for me as well being in the group, we just had a great group but I also think that's down to Karen and Susan as well and the work they put in and just make us feel so comfortable. And yeah there's obviously within the group there is a structure but there is also that, as you do when it's women it goes off on a tangent and things, as we can, we can do…

**SR:** Yeah.

**LM:** …we never normally run to time but it certainly… do you know it, it worked for me and I definitely got a lot out of the group. And as I say even just the support of the girls and I'm like Izzy, for our group especially I think we got to the end and thought this cannot be it. It, it cannot finish. And that was one of the things that came out - it would be nice to have something that was kind of ongoing and obviously you don't have to go every month you don't, do you know but it, it's nice to know that, that that's there. And as I say the sanctuary’s just a safe place and yeah you don't feel, you don't feel silly with anything you say. And sometimes as Izzy says, there, there's things within your family that you don't want to discuss or sometimes you think folk think ‘really, after this time and you're still going on about that?’. But there is no time limit from bereavement or do you know? And the only reason we grieve so hard is because we love people so much.

**LI:** Yep, yep.

**LM:** So yeah, I think it's just it's, it's been great and as I said, Ayrshire and Arran were superb.It's, it’s good in, in that respect. I cannot rate it highly enough.

**LI:** I was thinking when you were talking, you know, you were, you were talking about the chair behind Susan and you would come into your one-to-one and you would just take a big deep breath out and I, I, and in that moment I had this vision of you being held, not, not physically almost, but being, being held kind of spiritually by…

**LM:** Yeah.

**LI:** …by Karen or whoever was providing your one-to-one. And that was something that was really special to you from, from the offer of spiritual care, staff care…

**LM:** Yeah.

**LI:** …which was, was, is lovely, is lovely to hear you saying that. I'm, I'm really honestly, I'm really inspired by your, your bereavement group. I feel like, you know it's something we don't do. I also work in Fife in spiritual care and it's not something we do and I'm thinking this could be, this could be something that we do more of. And I suppose you said that you advertised it on your Daily Digest, and I presume that's like your staff intranet. Is that right?

**SR:** Yes.

**LI:** Is that what Daily Digest is?

**LM:** Yes.

**SR:** Yes.

**KC:** Yeah.

**LI:** Yeah. But I wondered if you had advertised it any other places or, or you know, how did you get going, I suppose? Was it, was it slow to get going or, or were, has it taken off from the moment you started it really?

**SR:** It took off from the moment we started. We had quite a fewnames down. I think we started off with about 10 names and then obviously every group it’ll maybe start with quite a lot and then there's maybe two or three who will drop off. It's maybe just not for them talking in a group and they would rather have one-to-one’s so that, if it's not, they are offered to see Karen on a more one-to-one. So, no it's, it's always been, we've always had good intake for it. And I think having Andy and Collin as our line managers, I mean they've just let us grow with it. We've had the freedom to do it. They've let us start the monthly group and they're just behind us 100% aren’t they Karen?

**KC:** Yep.And I, I think that's the power of the groups because I've, I've reflected many a time why are, why are these really working so well? And I think it's because we've never been micromanaged. We've, we've just been left to get on with it. Because I remember when I first started the very first one, I tried to copy what I saw Elaine doing when I was observing the first set of sessions and I tried to do it her way and it just didn't work.

**LI:** Yeah, yeah.

**KC:** I had to adapt and change everything to, to my way of, of facilitating. And a big part of that was that Susan and I weren't separate from the group.We were just…

**LI:** Yeah, part of it.

**KC:** …this was, this was, this was our group and we constantly learn and grow ourselves throughout every session.

**LI:** Yeah, yeah.

**KC:** So, it's not… we don't have, we don't have the answers. It's, as a, a collective we, we all are learning and growing because we're all grieving and we all have individual experiences.

**LI:** Is there anything before we finish that you, that you haven't said about your Bereavement Support Service that you'd like to add in or anything you're thinking about doing, you know, in the future or, or how it's evolving?

**KC:** I think one thing I would like to say is that one of the, the priests that comes to the hospital each week approached me and asked about how I do the group. So, I shared resources and I think I've shared resources with another health board as well. And do you know that’s something we're really keen to do is to share what we've got and for others to share what they've got and just this continuing to, to be reflective of what's working and what's not working. I know when the priest asked if we could support in the community for their parishioners, I could only give the materials and I could only possibly meet and do, and go through them but not have, I don't have the opportunity or the time to get away to actually sit in. And I think it would be totally different dynamics as well and they would really need to tweak the materials to, to suit themselves with their parishioners.

**LI:** Yeah.

**KC:** But yeah, I just think for moving forward it's, I mean I can't say it enough times how powerful and what an honour and privilege it is to actually have been involved in this and to see it growing and how, how much it is actually supporting people, that happy to share any resources and to receive any other feedback from others as well. So, I would just like to say that.

**LI:** Thanks. Thank you Karen. No, I think, I mean, I know you're saying it's a privilege and honour to be doing it, but I think it's something, it's really special that you're offering to do it. It's, it's really encouraging and you know, thinking about this is where our humanity is when we do things like this for one another, isn't it? So, thank you so much all for, for giving of your time and of your own experiences and stories to be part of this podcast. It has been genuinely inspiring to listen to what you've been doing and, and to hear of the impact on yourself Izzy and, and Lizzie as well in terms of how you've benefited from it and how, how much it's mattered to you. So, thank you so much for, for sharing the podcast.

**KC:** Thank you very much for having us.

**SR:** Thank you Lynne.

**LM:** I know, thank you.

**IF:** Thanks a lot, thanks a lot, it's been a privilege.

**LI:** I do hope that you've enjoyed listening to us talking about bereavement and this team's Bereavement Support Group and thank you so much for listening. Take care and hope that you can join us for future podcasts.

The podcast was recorded in April 2024 and can be found at <https://www.sad.scot.nhs.uk/events/podcast-series/> or <https://open.spotify.com/show/11AORpjHqbsYwgg1DJUtLk?si=687dba351d1f45d4>

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