



Supporting Families In Grief

A National Lottery Community Fund project by Families in Grief

Steve Allman - April 2022



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Introduction

Every 22 minutes in the UK, a parent of a child under 18 dies; that's 23, 600 parents each year.

This means 111 children are bereaved of a parent every single day around the country and, with 1 in 29 school children being bereaved of a parent or sibling, that's a child for every class.

Child Bereavement UK estimates that around 7000 children born each year will experience the death of their mother before they're 16 and the number losing their father could be double.

Whilst the majority of families referred to the charity are grieving the loss of a parent, others are supported following the death of a sibling, grandparent or someone else close to them.

Coping with grief and finding a way forward can be difficult for bereaved families. There might be changes within the family, there might be big emotions like anger and regret and family members may become more isolated.

That's why Families In Grief was established in 2006 by volunteers who recognised the need to support families as they come to terms with their grief following the death of a loved one.

The charity works across Torridge & North Devon to improve family relationships, improve engagement with school and reduce isolation.

Through home visits, online support and specific groups and activities for children, young people and parents, FIG enables bereaved families to understand their emotions, learn how to cope and find meaning in their life.

Their unique approach has been endorsed by national experts, including Child Bereavement UK, and the charity works in close partnership with other professionals, including local schools and Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services.

FIG has continued to adapt its services to meet the needs of grieving families and in 2020 it was successful in receiving grant funding from the National Lottery Community Fund, which enabled the charity to achieve a sustainable foundation on which to broaden its range of services and therefore impact more families.

The aims of the grant are broad and include support to improve governance, management and volunteering, but this report focusses on the project's impact on families.

About The Project

The National Lottery Community Fund project is broadly based around enabling FIG to provide a high quality bereavement service to families and professionals in Torridge and North Devon.

This three-year project began in April 2020 and the evaluation took place in the early part of 2022, towards the end of the second year.

The project aims to enable FIG to build on its three core aims of improving family relationships, improving engagement with schools and reducing social isolation through a range of activities, including developing more support groups for children, young people and parents, increasing the number of home visits and increasing the number of families helped.

Who Does FIG Help?

Sadly, demand for FIG’s services has grown significantly, with the charity seeing an 89% increase in the number of families seeking help in the second year of the NLCF project.

In total, 127 families were referred across both years, including 213 children and young people, which also saw a substantial increase in Year 2, rising by 54%.

FIG keeps the referral process simple to encourage more families to reach out for support. Families are asked for basic contact details and some background about the person who died and their relationship to the person seeking support.

Families are also asked how they heard about FIG, whether the child has additional needs, whether they are disadvantaged and whether the child is accessing any other support , such as counselling or a designated Social Worker.

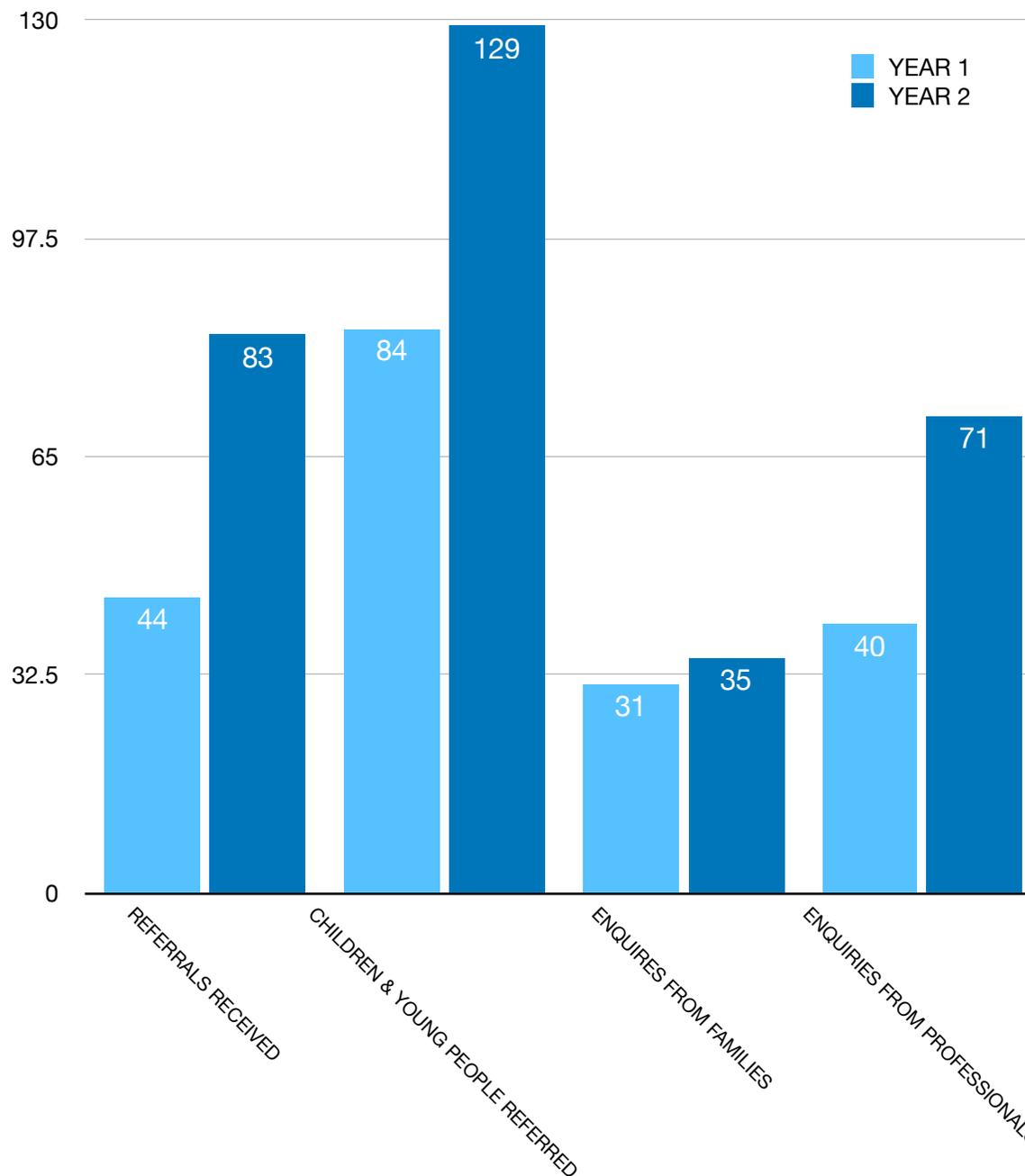


FIG routinely records the reasons for referral, although national statistics provide an indication of the reasons families are most likely to be bereaved and referred to FIG for help:

- 5224 people died by suicide in England & Wales in 2020.
- 6608 children under 5 died in 2017.
- 10,061 children and young people under 25 died in 2016 (28 deaths per day).
- 164,000 people die each year from cancer each year, with the number of new diagnoses increasing by almost a third (27%) since 2001.

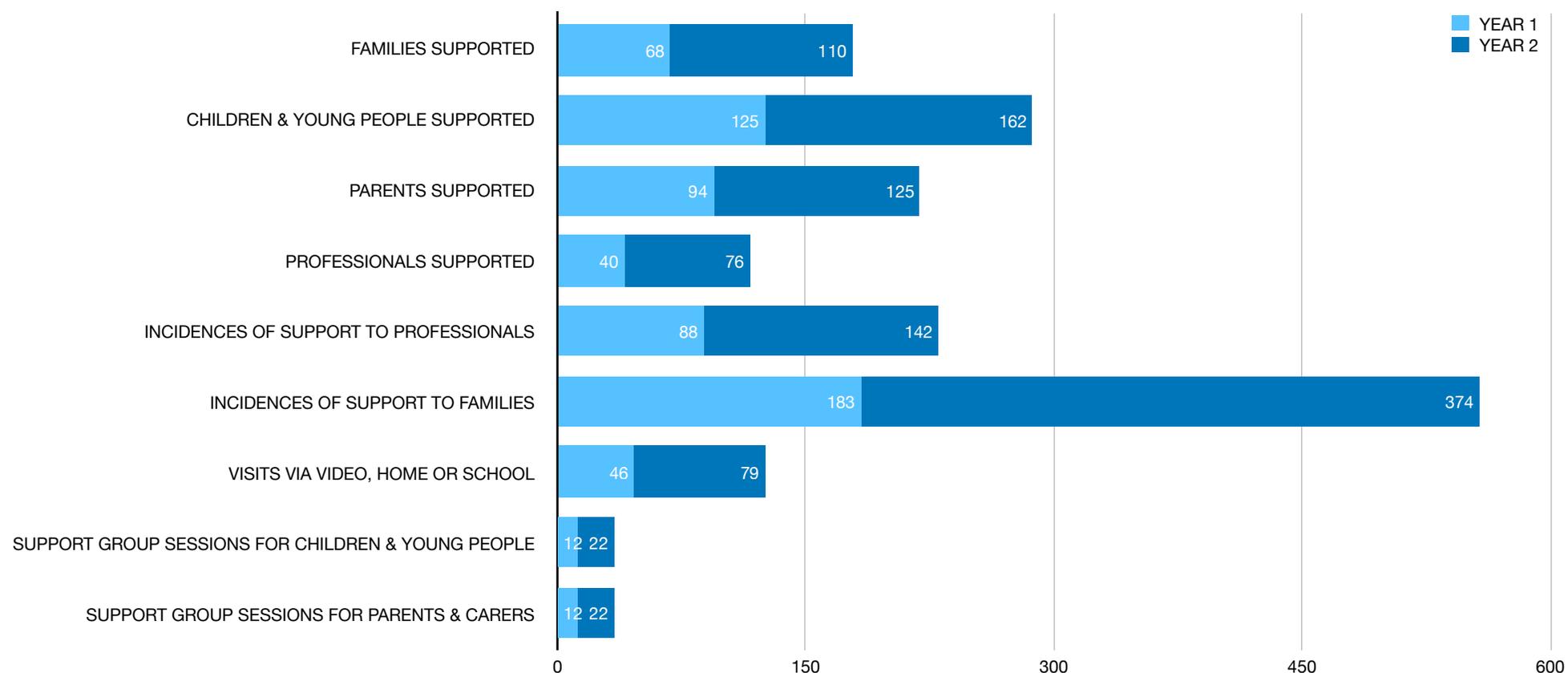
In total, 177 enquiries were received, with 63% of enquiries coming from professionals (111) and 37% coming from families (66).

Most importantly, 72% of all enquiries result in a family being referred to FIG, but the charity plays an important role in helping the remaining enquiries to access support via other means, such as accessing information online from either FIG or another organisation.

FIG supports families under three core outcomes; improving family relationships, engagement with school and reducing isolation. These headings form the basis of our evaluation, although it should be noted that some activities may achieve multiple outcomes.

Impact at a Glance

The chart below shows the full extent of the project's impact during the first two years, with all measures exceeded in the second year:



Improving Family Relationships

FIG improves family relationships by providing grieving families with the strategies and resources to enable them to open conversations and spend more time together.

The charity finds that, following the death of a loved one, family members can close up or find it hard to initiate conversations about their loved one for fear of upsetting each other.

Demand for FIG's services has increased substantially during the project, with 178 families supported so far and the total number of families supported increasing by 62% in the project's second year, rising from 68 to 110.

These families include 219 parents and carers, with the number of those supported also increasing during Year 2, rising by a third (33%) from 94 to 125.

This substantial increase is thought to be due to increased awareness of FIG which, since receiving Lottery funding, is more active on social media and appearing in online searches.

It's also due to the grant enabling FIG to increase the level of partnership working with other organisations supporting children and young people, including schools and colleges, social care services and healthcare services.

Interestingly, the number of times families are supported by FIG has more than doubled since the start of the project, with the charity recording 557 episodes of support, which can typically include phone calls, sending information or calling professionals on behalf of a family to discuss the support they need.

The number of episodes of support increased by 104% in Year 2, from 183 to 374.

FIG reports that the level of support required by families is increasing in intensity, which could be down to the pandemic making families feel more isolated, but it is also the result of FIG extending the range of support it provides,

whereby families might access group support and continue to receive 1:1 support or advice.

There are a number of ways in which FIG's activities improve family relationships:

Home Visits

The charity provides highly trained, experienced staff who visit families at home to discuss their bereavement and explore strategies for coping. For example, a worker may use an Emoji Chart and encourage children to point to emotions, or provide books and ask if they can identify with the characters.

Phone/Online Support

Phone and online support has increased significantly during Year 2, largely as a result of the pandemic and various lockdowns. Some families have welcomed this change, particularly those who are rurally isolated and find it easier to attend than driving into town.

FIG is able to facilitate difficult conversations between family members online and ensure that everyone is heard and understood.

Peer Support

FIG tries to create opportunities for peer support, both for parents and young people who each say they benefit from speaking to others in similar situations. This has been more challenging during the pandemic, but the charity has been able to relaunch its face to face groups and continues to explore other methods to enable families to support each other.

Supporting Children & Young People

287 children and young people have been supported by the project so far, with the number of children and young people supported in the last year increasing by almost a third (30%) from 125 to 162.

Children's Groups and Teens In Grief

Children and young people are supported on an individual basis, but also via the charity's flagship Children's Groups and Teens In Grief groups, with 34 sessions being provided over the course of the project so far.

The groups provide a structured format for children and young people to come together and take part in fun arts and craft activities whilst providing space to share their experience of grief in their own way, and in their own time.

The typical format includes telling their story, remembering the person who died, making salt memory jars, dealing with big emotions, including body mapping and Emotional First Aid, exploring how to cope with special days, such as birthdays and anniversaries, and saying goodbye through a remembrance ceremony.

COVID-19 has presented a number of challenges in the first two years of the project, but FIG has been able to adapt the groups to overcome these and ensure COVID-safe delivery. The charity has also adapted the groups to meet the needs of children and young people with additional needs.

Some older young people have struggled to engage in the group, but FIG has been able to overcome this by providing 1:1 support to enable them to get to know staff and volunteers and is exploring developing a different type of "drop-in" group for older young people.

We spoke to Sam, who told us how much her children got out of the Children's Group:

My children had a complicated relationship with their Dad before he died. He developed severe depression and they only saw him 2-3 times a year.

In some ways, they'd already grieved for him whilst he was alive, but when he died I was looking for someone who could help them with the grieving process, particularly as they were more distant and two of them have special needs.

Someone told us about FIG and they got in touch quickly to arrange a chat, find out what had happened, what sort of help we needed, etc. It was the start of the pandemic and they were in the process of moving everything online.

We tried talking on Zoom, but the kids didn't respond well to seeing a stranger on the

computer, so we waited for the Children's Group to start again in the summer.

It worked well, the kids were in COVID "bubbles", but still got to interact with each other and it was good for them to mix with other children their own age.

The activities were great, they helped the children talk without realising they were talking, it was very informal. They made memory boxes about their Dad and learned that it's OK to feel this way, there's no right or wrong, it was very subtle.

They loved it. They would come away smiling and chatting about their Dad very naturally. It helped that it was very informal, FIG went at their own pace.

Since the group, we haven't had so many difficult emotions and the children seem

better at thinking things through and putting their thoughts in order.

The only downside was that it went so quickly! If there was more funding, it would be nice to carry on with social activities. It's the same for parents too, we've got each other's email but it seems no-one wants to make the first move!

Without FIG, I think things would have been much harder for us and I don't think we'd have found anything else where they could speak freely, without judgement.

Responding to the Needs of Young People

FIG's experience is that grief impacts on teenagers differently to children. Some young people find support groups intimidating and can be reluctant to attend, or they're unsure about committing to a regular time slot for six weeks as there are other things they want to do.

As a result, the charity has found itself doing more 1:1 work with teenagers, going for a coffee in town or walking in the park. This was particularly apparent during lockdowns, when young people lost their usual support networks, such as school, college or friendships which were all inaccessible.

Those working with young people have noted additional outcomes, including increasing confidence, increased empathy towards parents and increased understanding for parents as to why their young people might be displaying changes in mood or behaviour, which benefits the whole family. Young people say they feel listened to by FIG and not judged by them.

FIG has also increased the level of support provided via video, including conducting home visits and attending school meetings. 125 visits have been provided so far, with the number increasing by 71% in Year 2, when 79 visits were conducted compared with 46 visits in Year 1.

This is partly in response to the pandemic, when lockdowns have necessitated video communication, but also reflects FIG's commitment to supporting children and young people in ways which best suit them.

Drop In Sessions

FIG has also run 6 drop-in sessions for young people aged 16-17 during the second year of the project. The drop-in came about because the charity identified a need for continued social contact between older young people, who didn't always feel comfortable in a formalised group, or didn't like the idea of taking part in some of the craft activities.

Laura told us how FIG helped them when no-one else could and, although her daughter wasn't keen on joining a group, she felt she got a lot from having someone to hang out with:

We tried to get help through the NHS, but it was a nightmare. It felt as if you said what you needed and you might get help a year later, but we needed help right now.

Our daughter's anxiety was through the roof. Her grandmother had died and she was scared to sleep at night in case her mother died during the night like her grandmother did.

FIG helped us when no-one else could, or would. They visited my daughter and took her out a couple of times. She enjoyed it and, whilst she wasn't interested in group support at the time, she seemed to get a lot out of being able to talk to another adult about things on a 1:1 basis.

Without FIG, I'm not sure where she'd be right now. The system is reactive, not preventative and it felt like, unless you were

on the verge of suicide, statutory services were unable to help.

Supporting Parents

The project has supported parents by providing them with advice, information, access to online support, referrals to professionals, supporting their children and young people and direct support through groups.

The parents groups have run in conjunction with Children's Groups and Teens In Grief groups, with parents being supported in another room, making it easy for them to take part whilst their children are engaged in the activities.

The parent's groups are less activity-based than the children's groups, but parents report the groups as being valuable, saying they welcome the opportunity to speak with others in similar situations, with some going on to form lasting friendships with others beyond the group itself.

Clare told us how FIG was able to support her through her own grief which enabled her to

understand her daughter's grief and improve their relationship:

My partner worked for the NHS and died within a week of catching COVID. We were so isolated, even more so as we were in lockdown and couldn't see anyone.

Our daughter was 12 and she was struggling. She was self-harming, cutting her arms. She stopped eating and was talking lots about death and suicide.

I wanted to help, but I couldn't relate to her and she seemed to find it hard to talk about it. She was angry, but I think she was also worried about upsetting me.

We found FIG and it was really good for her. She finally had someone to talk to who understood her and knew what she was going through.

She met other children in the same situation and they could relate to each other. It helped that she found out she wasn't alone after all, her feelings were normal.

With grief, it's like you put on a mask and say you're fine, but underneath you're sad, scared, angry. You hide it because it makes people uncomfortable, but everyone at FIG understands so you can just be yourself.

Gradually, she stopped self-harming, but the anger took the longest to work through. Some of it was directed towards me, I was busy giving CPR to my partner so, in her worst moment, I wasn't there for her.

The things that happened that night really stuck with her. For example, she stopped eating because she overheard the paramedics saying my partner was too heavy to lift, so she wanted to stay thin in case the same happened to her.

It didn't matter what I said, but if someone from FIG told her something, like it wasn't her fault, she listened to them and she took it on board.

Thanks to FIG, we turned a corner. It helped to do the activities, like drawing feelings and smashing plates, it was a moment of release.

I've since joined a walking club because FIG helped me realise that it's important to take some time out just for me. I was looking out for everyone else but myself.

Improving Engagement With Schools

FIG recognises that bereavement impacts on all areas of a child or young person's life, including school. It seems that schools also recognise the need to support bereaved children and young people, with almost half (48%) of referrals in June to November 2021 coming from schools.

Grieving children might change in their attitudes towards school, they might be unwilling or reluctant to attend, or they might lose interest in school or friends.

FIG helps by liaising with teachers and giving them resources and strategies to help grieving children and young people.

Stacey told us how FIG helped by providing resources after her school put her in touch:

We lost our baby son in May and it was an extremely traumatic time, especially for our eldest child who's 5 and saw the ambulance and Police arrive to perform CPR.

School put us in touch with FIG and they were really helpful. They gave us lots of worksheets and recommended books for the children, but it was the little practical things that helped most. For example, they helped us see that if our son's talking about his feelings but he walks off or changes the subject, we shouldn't keep talking, it's his way of saying it's too much right now.

If it wasn't for FIG, I don't think my eldest would be as happy as he is now. He's like a completely different child. He talks to other people, he talks about his feelings.

FIG were so understanding and didn't judge us, which helped me feel less guilty about my own feelings. It's sad, but it's a common

thing and I'm not the only person who's been through it. FIG kept in touch, they helped us realise that other kids go through it, it's normal, they just need time.

The charity uses a range of tools to explore feelings and emotions including body-mapping, self-care kits and emotional first aid kits, which help children manage and work through big emotions to prevent them being overwhelmed in class.

FIG contacts schools before and after children and young people take part in group programmes to share their progress and provides ad hoc support to teachers.

FIG also created a booklet for school staff which could be downloaded from its website. The booklet helps staff when there's a been a bereavement within the school community and has been well received:

"I have downloaded the booklet and shared it with staff. It is brilliant and very useful. I am supporting a few teens at the moment,

and it has been a fab resource so thank you.”

MEMBER OF SAFEGUARDING, ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH TEAM, SOUTH MOLTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The charity has also supported a local junior school to develop a lunchtime club for children who have experienced bereavement. FIG has supplied resources to help the teacher run the group, which appears to be going well so far.

COVID has presented the project with a number of challenges, including schools being closed for long periods during lockdowns, but FIG has been able to adapt its services to support families through home-schooling.

Examples of how FIG has helped include:

- Supporting a young girl who was struggling to engage with online classes following the death of her Dad. FIG liaised with school and managed to get her support from a Teaching Assistant she had a good relationship with, who was able to help her re-engage in lessons.

- A teenage girl was struggling with trauma and anxiety, which was displaying as behavioural “meltdowns” at school. Attending the group enabled her to manage her emotions, which led to her to her being able to focus at school and improve relationships with her teachers.
- FIG liaised with a SENCO at school to identify support for a young person who was being bullied following the death of his grandmother. This gave his mum the confidence to tackle issues impacted by his Autism and increase contact with school.

Jane told us how FIG helped when her daughter was struggling with home-schooling:

We moved to Devon with our youngest daughter shortly after our son died, but then the country went into lockdown.

There she was, just 14, living in a new area and going to a new school, but with the added challenge of homeschooling and online lessons. I was worried about her

being so isolated after her brother died and she was going into herself more.

We'd had some help before, but it didn't really work as the helper was much older and couldn't relate to teenage girls. FIG was different, Abi knew how to talk to older kids and my daughter really liked her. She said she felt like Abi could get on her level and she really listened to her.

We did the family group in Bideford. I must admit, I hadn't realised that parents stay and get support too, so I was a little defensive as I felt ambushed! My daughter found it helpful though and made a lovely friend she still sees now.

She liked being able to talk about her brother and it made up for some of the time she was locked away during lockdown and couldn't meet people in person. There's still

a long way to go, but I feel like FIG has really helped her.

Working In Partnership

Schools are just one of the local partners FIG works alongside. The charity recognises that working in partnership alongside other professionals extends and enhances the impact of its support on bereaved families.

63% of all enquiries come from professionals (111) and the number of enquiries from professionals increased by 78% in 2021-22, which is thought to be the result of FIG's improved partnership working in North Devon.

116 professionals have sought help from FIG to support grieving families, with this number increasing by 90% in Year 2, when 76 professionals sought support.

230 episodes of support have been provided to professionals by FIG during the first two years of the project, with the number of episodes increasing by 61% in the project's second year.

Advocacy is an increasing part of FIG's support in recent months, particularly advocating on behalf of young people. For example, mental health services in North Devon are stretched to capacity and FIG has liaised with a number of services, such as CAMHS, to help young people get additional support or counselling.

Our evaluation finds that the extent of FIG's work with local partners has increased so significantly that it has become a major area of work and we wonder whether the core outcome of improving engagement with school should be widened to improve engagement with school and other professionals/services.

I have found the booklet for both teens and the school community really helpful - and even though I don't work in a school many of the strategies in the booklets are relevant to my work in the ambulance service. I have both of the booklets downloaded on my desktop so that they are there should I need to refer to them or recommend them.

PARAMEDIC, NORTH DEVON NHS

Reducing Social Isolation

The project supports bereaved families to feel less socially isolated in a number of ways. Part of the reason FIG focusses on groups rather than 1:1 support is to encourage togetherness and reduce isolation, both within the home environment and with other families.

Even at home family members can become isolated as they might become withdrawn or shut themselves away to deal with their grief and FIG enables them to start conversations which lead them back to each other once more.

Families who have attended support groups report feeling less alone and take comfort in knowing other people are going through the same thing and sharing their thoughts and feelings. Some people keep in touch after the sessions, which reduces their isolation further.

John was reluctant to ask for help, but he tells us that he's pleased he contacted FIG:

A Police Liaison Officer put us in touch with FIG after my boys lost their mum in a car crash. We'd been split up for some time, and the boys were living with me, but it was still a big shock to them.

There's only so much you can explain to your kids. They had a lot of questions and I didn't know what to say. You think you're the only ones going through it, but then you meet other families who understand what it's like and it makes things easier.

I don't usually do things like this, so I felt a bit weird doing some of the activities, but I knew it was important to the kids to take whatever help we were offered. It helped me to talk about it and now we talk about their mum everyday. Her photo's on the top of the stairs and the boys see it every morning.

Somehow, the kids have been able to keep it together and carry on, and I think a lot of that is down to the support we had from FIG. After the accident, the Police gave us a book about grief for the kids, which was kind, but I think this FIG should be the thing they offer to everyone.

Impact of COVID-19 on Isolation

When FIG submitted its project plan to the National Lottery Community Fund in 2019, it could not have foreseen that it would be delivering the project during a global pandemic.

Children and young people losing a loved one during the pandemic faced a number of new challenges, in addition to coming to terms with their bereavement:

Schools were closed for long periods, reducing the potential for additional support, but also reducing the opportunities for social contact with friends and peers.

Many parents found themselves working from home, which meant they missed out on support from colleagues, felt more isolated from other adults and missed the routine and purpose of work.

Grieving parents, children and young people were forbidden from having visitors in their home, or visiting other people, which severely reduced the opportunities for support from grieving friends and family which are often crucial following the death of a loved one.

Furthermore, many of the rules made it difficult to support grieving families. We were encouraged to stay 2 metres apart, avoid hugs and physical contact, wash hands, wear masks.

The full impact of these measures is unknown, but it seems likely they would have had a detrimental impact on bereaved children, young people and families looking for support.

FIG had to quickly adapt its services as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and our evaluation finds the charity was successful in maintaining the project's impact by introducing new measures:

Video calls were introduced to enable FIG to interact with families at home. This seemed to increase contact with families, with each family receiving substantially more calls than usual.

Substantial efforts went in to making sure group activities were "Covid-Safe" when the law allowed groups to restart during Year 1.

FIG increased its online support to bereaved families, producing digital guides and booklets which could be freely accessed via its website and downloaded at home.

Beth told us that when her Dad died, she was only allowed 30 people at the funeral because of COVID restrictions and it helped to meet others who understood how hard this was:

We were really struggling after my Dad (their Grandad) died unexpectedly. I asked the school for help and the Inclusion Officer suggested FIG. Another mum happened to overhear our conversation and she said FIG helped her family after her husband died, which reassured me.

FIG came out to see us 2-3 times and we took part in the Children's Group and Parents Group. I didn't talk much, but I said about what happened and it felt good to know we weren't the only ones going through it. Even little things helped me a big deal, like having other people understand how hard it was only having 30 people at the funeral because of COVID.

In a weird way, the COVID restrictions helped me as I suffer from anxiety with big groups of people, but the group was much smaller because they had to comply with the new rules.

FIG helped me realise that I was maybe pushing people away, or not making friends because I was scared of losing someone else, but most of all I learned that grief is unique to everyone.

The children have become more open about their bereavement. They did lots of the activities, like making invisible heart strings, memory boxes and worry monsters. They can write down their worries, put them in the worry monster's mouth and I can have a look and help them with it.

FIG normalised it for us. I think the kids learned that it's normal to feel how they do, that it doesn't help to bottle it up and now they're much happier to talk about it. They mention my Dad now and they don't feel it's off limits. We talk about what he might have done or said and I like that.

FIG Activity Packs

Activity Packs were one of the ways in which FIG adapted its services to maintain contact with bereaved families during COVID lockdowns and ensure they felt supported by the project.

Two activity packs were developed, one for primary school aged children and one for young people. The pack for younger children included chocolate buttons, craft items, instructions for making a worry doll and a book called "Silly Billy", which is the story of a boy who makes lots of worry dolls to help him manage his worries.

Young people received a self-care activity pack to help them think about ways to cope when they experience overwhelming emotions.

The pack included a journal, lavender eye pillow, chocolate bar, hot chocolate sachets, advice on sleep and relaxation and advice on making an emotional first aid kit.

41 activity packs were sent to families in North Devon & Torridge and feedback from those receiving them was extremely positive, with parents suggesting that the most prevalent benefit was that the packs enabled them to start conversations about grief with their children.

FIG Ambassadors

During the course of the project, FIG has attempted to run a group for FIG Ambassadors,

families who have been supported by FIG who can provide feedback about its services, marketing and materials and help the charity to develop new projects.

It's been difficult to recruit ambassadors and it seems likely that many families are reluctant to reflect on what will have been a difficult time for them following the death of a loved one, or that they are simply too busy juggling family life, work and other commitments following bereavement.

FIG has been able to gain feedback from a handful of Ambassadors, who have reported positive experiences of the project. Families have provided feedback on the charity's printed materials and booklets which are available to download via the website and these have been altered as a result.

Families have shared constructive feedback to enable FIG to improve its services in future, such as suggesting that support groups could include parents who have experienced a similar type of bereavement (eg: loss of a partner or spouse). FIG is already acting on their feedback

and hopes to increase Ambassador involvement over the next twelve months.

Helen told us how FIG helped her children to come to terms with their emotions and even helped when they faced another bereavement:

My kids were really close to their grandmother, they stayed at her house every weekend and saw her the morning she died.

They were 11, 9 and 14 months when she died and it crushed them. I was worried about behaviour with one child, whilst another child shut themselves off from us all. We'd tried getting help, but it takes so long, we'd been on the Children's Centre waiting list for 6 months.

I was hoping FIG would help them see it's OK to feel what they were feeling, and they did. They gave us some books, which were helpful, and even gave my daughter a

Worry Monster to share her feelings with, which was really kind as she wasn't even in their age range.

The boys loved the Children's Group. They enjoyed the activities, especially being allowed to smash plates! It was always their favourite time of the week and they made some friends.

It definitely changed them. They didn't seem to hold everything in any more and they found it easier to speak about my mum. It helped me too, we had another bereavement shortly after this one and I think it was the support I had from FIG the helped me deal with it better.

Potential Areas for Development

Feedback about the project has been hugely positive. Families only identified one minor areas for improvement, which is listed below.

This section therefore explores potential developments rather than areas for improvement as there are ways in which the project could be developed to increase impact, but we are not suggesting that there is any failing on FIG's behalf, merely sharing some of our key findings which the charity may like to consider in future. These potential developments also form the basis of our recommendations for maintaining or increasing the project's impact on children and families.

Matching Families Based on Bereavement

This is the only minor improvement suggested by some families, who said the experience of losing a child, for example, is different to losing

a grandparent which, whilst still potentially devastating, is the expected order of events.

Some parents have suggested that matching families in groups who have experienced the same type of loss might make it easier to relate to each other and provide mutual support.

Unknown Benefits of FIG Support

FIG estimates that it will support around two thirds of families who enquire to access support from another professional. However, very little is known about the impact of this referral as families are unlikely to revert to FIG unless they are unable to access support.

This creates a grey area around potential impact whereby it seems likely that this support results in positive impact for families and the project creates additional value, but effectiveness is unknown. We suggest that FIG explores how to understand this impact by following up with parents or professionals after their referral.

Improving Recording and Reporting

FIG has made significant progress in its recording and reporting processes since the National Lottery Community Fund grant was awarded, but we still consider that some processes are unnecessarily cumbersome.

For example, we understand that family information could be accessed in at least four ways, through family folders, referral folders, the calls spreadsheet or caseload records. We suspect this creates additional work for FIG, but we understand that the charity is in the process of exploring a potential database which could be implemented by the summer and resolve some of the challenges around recording.

Understanding the Impact of The Journey

FIG records a significant amount of information about the families it supports and measures progress in three ways. As part of our evaluation, we've reviewed two "family journeys" and it is our view that the level of

work undertaken by FIG is significantly higher than that which is currently reported to NLCF.

For example, one family journey is described over 10 pages and describes how FIG has liaised with the family, school, social services, a social inclusion worker and other professionals. We suggest that FIG explores new methods of reporting changes over time and being able to demonstrate the significant amount of time and resources that it provides to families in grief.

This might include a different classification of support, such as intensive or moderate support, but it would enable funders and other parties to see the full extent of the charity's support.

Realistic Evaluation Expectations

FIG is committed to learning and development and the charity's appetite for continuous improvement has only increased since the award of the National Lottery funding. Whilst this is a positive sign, we do wonder if the charity is setting itself realistic expectations around evaluation. Every activity is evaluated and reported on separately, with multiple surveys and evaluation forms distributed.

Some of these activities receive no, or very low, responses, such as the ambassador forms and activity pack evaluation forms. It could be that, in its attempt to understand and demonstrate impact, the charity is making too many requests for feedback and perhaps there could be scope to consolidate all of this feedback into an end-of-service survey or an annual review.

Expanding the Nature of Support

Similarly, our evaluation finds that FIG most likely provides more support than it reports. For example, families might have support from FIG whilst they determine whether group support is right for them, but if they choose not to attend the group, this support may not be counted.

The nature of support provided by FIG has already expanded during the course of the project, primarily driven by the pandemic and the move to online support and video calls. In addition, some young people have benefited from 1:1 support prior to attending a group, or instead of attending a group. FIG has been able to provide information online, allowing families to access support more conveniently.

Other types of support have been mentioned throughout the evaluation process, such as potentially being able to put parents in touch with whether they attend a group or not and increasing the upper age range to 25. These could be further developments to be explored.

FIG has traditionally described its support as being in three stages; phone support, visits, then support groups, but it seems these are no longer chronological stages of support and could be three of a range of ways in which FIG expands the nature of its support in the future.

Grief Isn't Always The Primary Need

Bereavement is the common need for all families supported by FIG, but it is not always the primary need for support. For example, one parent described how their child's diagnosis of Autism was a more prevalent need than their recent bereavement.

Whilst FIG seeks to support families with a range of needs following bereavement, it might not always be the best-placed organisation to do so and we suggest the charity keeps this under review to focus on what it knows best.

About the Evaluation

Families in Grief (FiG) commissioned this external evaluation with a view to understanding the full impact of the Family Services element of its National Lottery Community Fund project.

It was originally hoped to interview parents at the Parents Group in October 2021, but the uncertainty around COVID-19 restrictions led to the evaluator interviewing 10 parents individually by telephone and Zoom.

Furthermore, we have undertaken a substantial review of data and documents relating to the project, including End of Year reports, case studies, training records and volunteer records and supported FIG throughout the process to improve how it records and reports impact.

This report is intended to summarise the key areas of the project's impact, allow families to share impact in their own words, highlight any

areas for improvement and make recommendations for widening the impact of the project, both in Year 3 and in the future.

Please note that the names of parents and carers interviewed have been changed to protect privacy and for safeguarding purposes.

We're grateful to everyone who took the time to contribute to this evaluation, but particularly the families who shared their personal stories in the hope it would help illustrate FIG's impact. Find out more about Families In Grief here:

www.familiesingrief.org

This report was researched and written by Steve Allman, an independent charity consultant with an extensive track record in working with children, young people and families.

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