

# Supporting people who have lost a loved one to suicide for 20 years

**Evidence-based, effective postvention support is a critical contribution to the mental health and wellbeing of those impacted by suicide loss.**

Postvention is fundamentally a relationship between people and between people and their community. When someone takes their own life, the support needed, involves intensely personal engagement with individuals and communities. Those bereaved by suicide need to know that support will continue to be available for as long as they need it.

Since 2004, Jesuit Social Services has operated Support After Suicide throughout parts of Melbourne and regional Victoria.

Support After Suicide assists children, young people and adults left behind after the suicide of a loved one, by providing services including counselling, support groups and online resources. We also deliver training to health, welfare and education professionals.

Our experienced counsellors have particular expertise and knowledge around suicide, trauma and grief. By speaking with a counsellor, participants learn how to manage the intense and complex experience of losing a loved one to suicide. We do not place any time limits on our support.

## Our Integrated Support Model: Belonging, Acceptance and Understanding

**Individual counselling.** Support After Suicide's experienced suicide bereavement counsellors provide regular and ongoing counselling to those that have experienced suicide loss. There is no specific number of sessions nor length of time counselling is provided for – it is on an "as needs" basis as determined by the bereaved person, alongside their allocated counsellor, to support them in their grief.

**Early bereavement program.** An 8-week program, implementing a set weekly outline with a small group of participants, using an evidence-based design developed from years of suicide bereavement research and counselling. Research conducted shows that most participants experienced the program as a place of connection, belonging, growth and hope.



**Dedicated peer support groups.** Meeting monthly and facilitated by a bereavement counsellor and a trained lived experience volunteer, our dedicated peer support groups offer people the opportunity to spend time and communicate with others bereaved by suicide, experience being understood and not feel so alone, and learn strategies to help find the way through the grief and trauma.

**Community information sessions.** Initiated in areas that may have experienced high suicide rates, or in partnership with local community groups, Support After Suicide runs open community information sessions to educate on grief, provide practical strategies for those experiencing loss and/or supporting others in loss and provide an opportunity for the community to hear from professionals and those with lived experience of grief and loss.

**Specialised postvention coordination.** Support After Suicide's Postvention Project Coordination operates in the south east of Melbourne and Gippsland, coordinating an integrated community response after a suicide with the aim of mitigating community impact and reducing the risk of suicide following a death that is likely to have widespread impact.

**Professional training and education.** Many people working within health, welfare and education come into contact with people who are bereaved by suicide. Our training empowers professionals in these roles to understand suicide bereavement issues and respond effectively and sensitively to people bereaved by suicide.

In 2022:

**1,415**

people supported

Counselling participants

1,174

Counselling sessions

Referrals from Victoria Police

932

Regular Support Groups

Participants attending at least one of our support groups

241

Support Groups facilitated

Hours of support

5,606

## Research shows:

Those bereaved by suicide present higher levels of depression, and suicide ideation and behaviour than other bereaved individuals

There is no one-size-fits-all type of support after suicide bereavement.

People may benefit from different types of support depending on their needs and where they are in their grief process.

Support groups provide an important sense of belongingness.

Support is most effective when it is available over time in multiple sessions, whether it's from support groups or individual counselling.

Postvention should be aligned with suicide prevention strategies and programs.

A person bereaved by suicide often has a relentless experience of trying to understand why it happened; how it was that this much-loved person ended their own life. Family breakdown and estrangement can sometimes occur as well. Overall it is a deeply distressing and difficult experience.”

Louise Flynn, Support After Suicide  
General Manager

### What the numbers tell us

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) preliminary causes of death data shows that in 2022:

- 3,249 people died by suicide
- An average of 8.9 people die by suicide each day in Australia
- Suicide was the leading cause of death for Australians aged 15 – 44

Beyond the tragic loss of the person, the impact of suicide deaths are felt by up to 135 people, including family members, friends, work colleagues and first responders at the time of death<sup>1</sup>. Researchers have found that bereaved people are 65% more likely to attempt suicide if they are grieving for loved ones<sup>2</sup> who took their own lives.

Research also shows that those bereaved by suicide have a greater likelihood of experiencing mental health issues, as well as a withdrawal from life and society. This means a program like Support After Suicide not only provides critical bereavement support but also works to prevent further suicide and positively supports mental health.

#### References

<sup>1</sup> Cerel et al, 2019 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29512876/>

<sup>2</sup> Pitman et al, 2015 <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/6/1/e009948>

<sup>3</sup> Andriessen et al (Eds.), <http://www.mdpi.com/journal/ijerph>

<sup>4</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022), Causes of Death, Australia, ABS Website, accessed 24 October 2023.

### Our participants' stories

“I had a notion of depression before but after the suicide you really start to experience it yourself. It was so important to get reassurance that these feelings were ok, that I was going to be ok. It is such an important distinction between feeling depressed and sad because I had lost my son, but not feeling so depressed and sad that I would end up like my son. I cannot imagine where I would be without the service.”

“My needs were met with the ability to meet online at a time that suits me, with no cap on the number of sessions and a warm and competent counsellor.”

“I do not know how I would have survived without the Support After Suicide program and its people in my life. I cannot thank them enough.”

### About Jesuit Social Services

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation working to build a just society where all people can live to their full potential. We accompany people and communities to foster and regenerate the web of relationships that sustain us all – across people, place, and planet; and we work to change policies, practices, ideas and values that perpetuate inequality, prejudice and exclusion.

The work of Jesuit Social Services is informed by Catholic Social Teaching and our Jesuit tradition of respecting the preciousness of each human being, walking with the disregarded, and caring for the earth.