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Good Grief!

Bereavement Healing Services

Impact Report →

Senior Bereavement Pilot Project Evaluation

Funded by the Government of Canada New Horizons for Seniors Program

2023



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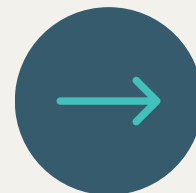
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→ **"We have something in common. Whatever they have suffered - we share."**

→ **"Every week I left with at least two thoughts that I had never considered. To me they were invaluable."**





About → Good Grief!

Good Grief! is a registered charity dedicated to promoting the health and well-being of grieving adults. We connect participants with essential healing support services, including healthcare professionals, educational programs, and community resources.

Grief, with its far-reaching effects on physical health, daily life, social connections, and mental well-being, is particularly challenging for seniors. The COVID-19 pandemic and its lingering effects have left many seniors grappling with a rapid succession of losses, including increased social isolation and the sorrow of grieving loved ones.

Recognizing this gap, Good Grief! offers grief and loss support groups for adults, including seniors, in Ontario. We connect participants with essential healing support services, including access to healthcare professionals, in-person support groups, and community resources.



33+%

of Canadian seniors reported feelings of loneliness during the pandemic.

- Public Health Agency of Canada, 2021

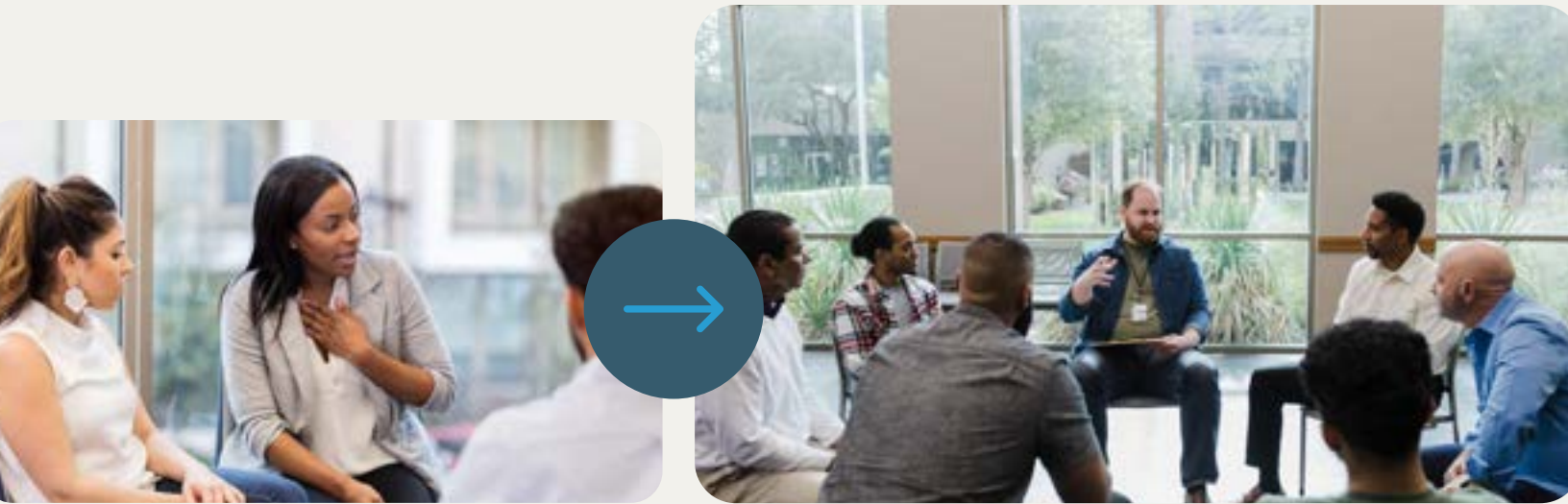
87%

of excess pandemic deaths were among Canadians aged 65 years and older.

- Statistics Canada, 2021



Our → Mission



Good Grief! promotes health for grieving adults by providing essential healing support services, such as access to bereavement professionals, programming, and community resources.

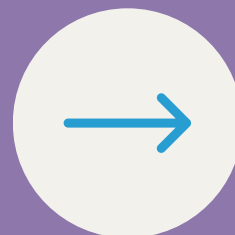
Grief Counseling for Seniors

Introduction

Good Grief! offers grief and loss support services across the Greater Toronto Area. While we have previously offered support groups and sessions suitable for all adults, we identified the need for a more tailored approach for seniors.

Some of the challenges we encountered in providing grief counseling to seniors included:

- Limited connection and rapport building between participants as a result of virtual sessions held during the pandemic.
- Evening sessions were less desirable for seniors who do not like travelling alone at night and preferred in-person meetings.
- Limited community-building opportunities as a result of the short duration of the sessions.



Grief Counseling for Seniors



To address these challenges, we introduced two 6-week grief and loss groups for 8-10 seniors. Our in-person group sessions - lasting 2-3 hours and including meals - encouraged interpersonal interactions and focused on specific grief coping strategies. We also established a Senior Advisory Committee, comprised of peer leaders with personal grief experiences, to guide program development.

The Good Grief! Seniors Bereavement Pilot Project offers valuable tools for coping with grief and serves as a lifeline for those seeking understanding and hope during their bereavement journeys. The program is especially important in a rapidly aging population, such as Toronto's, where the number of seniors is expected to grow by 25% by 2031, and the fastest-growing age group (4.4% per year) is 85+.



1 in 3

Canadian seniors has lost a spouse or partner, and one in five has lost a child. Seniors are more likely than any other age group to experience bereavement.

- The Canadian Grief Centre

↑ 10%

increase in hospitalizations for grief and bereavement among seniors.

- The Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2021

Grief Counseling for Seniors

About Our Participants

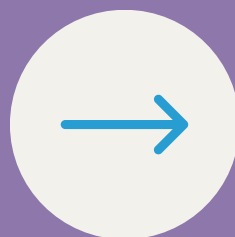
Participants in our Seniors Bereavement Pilot Project formed a diverse group, united by their experience of loss.

Ranging in age from 65 to 85+, with most falling between 70 and 85, the group included an equal distribution of men and women from various postal codes in the Greater Toronto Area.

Before joining the program, our nine participants expressed the desire to develop coping skills, including emotional resilience in communicating their grief and navigating special occasions. They also sought a deeper understanding of their loss and strategies for addressing loneliness.

During intake, participants voiced varying expectations, ranging from seeking social support to desiring educational materials about grief and bereavement.

Approximately 57% of program participants had prior experience with bereavement support, such as group participation, familial support, or reading materials.



Program → Activities



The program addressed diverse topics, including myths about grief, common physical symptoms and reactions, self-care and meditation, tasks of mourning, secondary losses, dealing with unwanted comments, handling regret, anger, and guilt, and commemoration. Activities were adapted to meet participants' specific needs and interests.

The Seniors Bereavement Pilot Project spans six weeks and combines educational materials with group and individual activities, which include:

1. **Psycho-educational materials**

Facilitators provide information on the grief process, coping strategies, and available resources, including handouts, videos, and presentations.

2. **Sharing and discussion**

Facilitators led discussions that incorporate the psycho-educational materials and participants' personal lived experiences, making connections between the two.

Methodology



The assessment of the Seniors Bereavement Pilot Project employed several qualitative data collection methods, including pre- and post-survey questionnaires, participant interviews, and meetings with the Senior Advisory Committee.

The responses, while influenced by grief's impact, provided comprehensive insights into the program's effectiveness, informing future development decisions.

Key areas of analysis included:

- Participant satisfaction with the program
- Perceived improvement in coping with grief
- Suggestions for program improvement
- The relationship between self-reported emotional well-being, coping mechanisms, social support, grief-related symptoms, and quality of life

Methodology

A Qualitative Approach to Gathering Insights from Senior Grievors

Data Collection

Due to the sensitive nature of the topics discussed and the limited time available after each session, a qualitative data collection approach was deemed most appropriate. This approach allowed for in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences and provided them with the flexibility to share their thoughts and feelings in a way that was comfortable for them.

Data Collection Methods

A mixed-methods approach was employed to gather data from a variety of sources. One-on-one interviews, semi-structured small group discussions, and evaluation forms were used to collect data. This approach allowed for in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences while also providing them with structured ways to share their feedback.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis and content analysis were used to analyze the data from the interviews and small group discussions. The data from the evaluation forms was analyzed quantitatively.

Limitations

Due to the sample size of the pilot and the sensitive nature of the topic, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to the wider population of seniors. Additionally, the time constraints and the sensitive nature of the topic may have impacted the participants' willingness to share their experiences fully.

Despite these limitations, the findings of this study provide valuable insights into the experiences of seniors who have experienced a loss.



Before the Program

→ Participants' Expectations

Participants in the Seniors Bereavement Pilot Project, hailing from different socio-economic backgrounds, ages, and geographical locations, shared such expectations as:

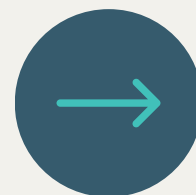
- Seeking a safe space to navigate grief.
- Finding solace in self-help and mutual support.
- Developing coping mechanisms.
- Expressing the desire for lasting connections within the group.

While participants generally expressed optimism, they also collectively longed for understanding and healing amid this challenging phase of life.



"Coping mechanisms are like tools. The more tools we have, the better equipped we are to deal with the challenges of life."

- Elizabeth Kubler-Ross



During the Program

→ Sharing Grief

The Good Grief! Seniors Bereavement Pilot Project created a supportive environment where seniors began addressing their profound loss, embarking on a journey of self-discovery. Group discussions and shared experiences yielded positive changes in emotional well-being, reducing anxiety and enhancing self-esteem. This is especially vital for seniors, who face heightened risks of depression, anxiety, and physical health issues during grief.

Participants expressed strong satisfaction with the program, often wishing for extended sessions and ongoing support, reflecting their deep appreciation. Qualitative feedback underscored the program's role in providing essential support and a sense of community.

These sentiments align with the Canadian Mental Health Association's (CMHA) assertion that seniors who are grieving may withdraw from social activities and relationships, emphasizing the vital role of programs like Good Grief! in combating social isolation.

"Knowing about this group has been a relief."

"Grief is difficult to talk about with friends. Here it's out in the open, and it's incredible."





After the Program

→ Insight & Impact

Participant feedback highlighted the senior bereavement program's effectiveness, emphasizing its structured approach and empathetic facilitation. Attendees reported newfound assurance in coping with grief, as well as the need for follow-up programming. This increased self-assurance is a testament to the program's impact on emotional well-being.

The program fostered a sense of community among participants, providing a space for shared experiences. While participants generally rated their understanding of the grieving process and connection to the group highly, they expressed a desire for additional time and resources to enhance the program's impact. One participant aptly remarked, that they would prefer for the program to be extended by two weeks or more.

Participants consistently expressed appreciation for the program's structured approach and empathetic facilitation.

Leadership received praise for their guidance, and participants outlined various plans for their ongoing bereavement journey, confirming the program's positive impact and the continuing need for comprehensive support.

"I can now express my grief and sadness I was feeling."

"Excellent program. I liked the topics each week and the sensitive way they were introduced."



Conclusion



The Good Grief! Senior Bereavement Pilot Project has demonstrated its immense value in providing essential support to seniors navigating the complex landscape of grief.

Participant feedback emphasized a crucial point: the journey through grief does not conclude with the program's end. Many participants expressed the need for ongoing support during both the initial and subsequent years of bereavement.

The Good Grief! Senior Bereavement Pilot Project serves as a beacon of hope and healing during a challenging phase of life. It equips seniors not only with emotional tools but also offers a platform for deeper self-understanding and inner peace. As Toronto's senior population continues to grow, programs like this will be increasingly vital in providing essential support.

Good Grief! was funded by the Government of Canada New Horizons for Seniors Program.

