

Bereavement Support Groups for families and carers in East Lothian

The new support available

The NHS Lothian Bereavement Service has received funding from NHS Lothian Charity to offer a new bereavement support service for people living in East Lothian for 5 years. Before this, the only available support came from Edinburgh-based groups which are not easily accessible to those in rural communities.

Support from NHS Lothian Charity enabled the creation of two new Bereavement Support Groups: one launched in Musselburgh in June 2024 and another in Tranent in January 2025. These groups, facilitated by members of the NHS Lothian Bereavement Service and Carers of East Lothian, meet monthly. They offer a safe and consistent environment for individuals to discuss their feelings, thoughts, and the impact of grief on their lives.

This Impact Report summarises the feedback from the first year of this new service, illustrating the impacts for those that have attended the groups and how the project aligns with NHS Lothian Charity's priority objectives.



This group has helped me to keep sane and try and see a way forward – can't see it right now – that's why I need to attend these!"

Support Group attendee



45
People have been supported through the groups between June 2024 – May 2025

Bereavement Support Group demographics:

- On average, the Musselburgh group has had 17 attendees and Tranent group has had 5 per session (Tranent group was only established in January 2025)
- 40 females and 5 males have attended groups
- 51% of attendees are in the age bracket 51-70, 35% aged 71-90 and the remaining 15% are younger than 50
- 75% of the attendees lost a spouse, the remaining 25% lost either a sibling, parent or child



Members of the NHS Lothian Bereavement Service

Why is bereavement support important?

The East Lothian Palliative Care Team supports patients and their families during the end of life period. Dealing with loss can be an incredibly isolating and difficult experience. Without adequate support, processing grief can feel overwhelming. This is why local Support Groups are so important. One Support Group participant shared before attending the group: "I was very isolated in my grief, totally distraught and unable to function and lonely." Another person shared: "I had a fear of facing and beginning to process the sudden loss."

Lise Brown, Senior Palliative Care Charge Nurse from the team explains how this also supports staff wellbeing: "We are now able to reach out to bereaved families and carers that we have supported, offering them information about local bereavement support. This was never available in East Lothian before, and as a team we no longer feel we are leaving families to deal with their grief alone after the trauma of losing a loved one."

Impact on those who have attended a Bereavement Support Group in East Lothian

Improved wellbeing

75%

of attendees reported feeling happier/uplifted

Improved ability to cope with grief

70%

of attendees reported feeling more connected/supported by others in a similar situation

Reduced feeling of isolation


60%

of attendees reported feeling less isolated/lonely in their feeling of grief

More informed

40%


of attendees reported feeling more informed about the grief process and coping strategies




"At first I felt sad and thought this is not for me. But now feel much happier and able to cope with most things."




"I felt more relaxed and able to open up. I even managed to laugh and smile."



"It was good to be in a group where we were all in the same boat. I found this very calming and helped me to move on with my life."




"The group is a place where people can see life from other people's perspectives..it makes you think if they can get on with this thing then so can you!"



"This group has helped me realise that I am not alone in feeling this grief as it is like no other that I've felt."



"Began to feel less lonely, and found another lady who lives near me."



"I hadn't realised how many useful coping strategies I had gained from the group until I supported a couple of friends who have been bereaved recently. This is very valuable to me to have this knowledge."

How Bereavement Support Groups have a wider community benefit

The public health toll of bereavement is well documented*. By providing a safe and understanding space for individuals to process grief, Bereavement Support Groups can help prevent normal grief reactions from escalating into more complex mental health conditions like prolonged grief disorder, severe depression, or anxiety. This, in turn, can reduce the need for individuals to seek formal clinical interventions from GPs, therapists, or mental health services, freeing up stretched healthcare resources. This also helps the Bereavement Service Team identify individuals within the group who might need more specialised support sooner, leading to better outcomes and reducing the need for complex interventions later. [*Investing in bereavement care as a public health priority](#)

Case study – How the group has supported Michelle through her loss

Michelle's husband passed away on December 22, 2023, with the East Lothian Palliative Care Team providing support. This was a challenging time for Michelle and her family. A few months after her husband's passing, Michelle received a letter from the East Lothian Palliative Care Team, inviting her to join a new Bereavement Support Group in Musselburgh. She initially set the letter aside, not feeling ready to attend. However, a few months later, something prompted her to revisit the letter, and she decided to register. The group format appealed to Michelle more than individual support. She shared how attending the group has been a significant help during this time in her life.



Michelle

"It was very daunting attending that first meeting but I quickly realised we were all in the same predicament and we had lost someone, be it a spouse, a parent, a child. In the early days after my husband passed, I felt like I was the only person going through this experience and did feel a bit isolated. It was nice to hear other people's experiences and to be able to open up about how I was feeling.

"We were made to feel very safe, and the facilitators are fantastic at putting people at ease with their calming and sympathetic nature. You get a name badge, and you can introduce yourself, ground rules are set at the beginning of the session, and you don't have to talk if you don't feel up to it. It's very welcoming.

"There is a topic covered at each meeting which made me confront things I would never have done if I hadn't attended the group. I was able to learn about the process of grief and some coping strategies.

"After every meeting I feel a weight lift off my shoulders and this is down to hearing other people's experiences and being able to talk openly to people who really understand you and most importantly don't judge you. You start to understand that what you are feeling is normal. I wouldn't talk to my family about some of the things I have shared in the group. I don't want to burden my family with my worries and problems, they would worry, and they would feel guilty which I don't want them to do so the group offers that safe space for me.

"I am a bit further in my journey, but I still attend the group as I have built up friendships with the other participants. I also want to repay the huge support that I got in the early days by offering hope to others that you can live with grief after someone passes and you can have a life, albeit a different one."



This group helped stop the pain eating away at me and I think groups like this are a vital lifeline and can prevent people getting physically and mentally unwell from grief which saves them using other NHS services in the future."

Thanks to NHS Lothian Bereavement Service, East Lothian Palliative Care Team and to attendees who provided feedback. Find out more about NHS Lothian Bereavement Service [on the NHS Lothian website](#).

Report compiled by Rebecca Caulfield, Evaluation Manager, NHS Lothian Charity