

Bereavement Support Groups for families and carers in East Lothian (Year 2/5 of funding)

The support available

The NHS Lothian Bereavement Service has received funding from NHS Lothian Charity to offer a 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 brings together quantitative data and participant feedback from the second year of the service, demonstrating who has accessed the groups and the positive difference the support has made to their lives following bereavement.



I now realise that we all cope in different ways. I thought I was different in the way I was dealing with grief but I have found others similar to me."

Support Group attendee, 2025/2026



Members of the NHS Lothian Bereavement Service

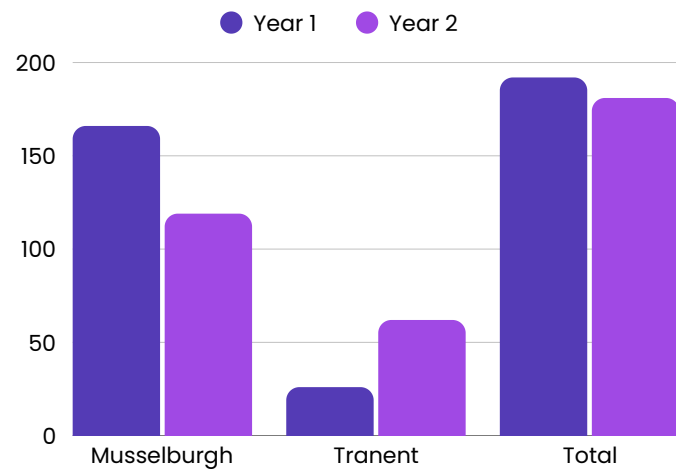
Why is bereavement support important?

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."

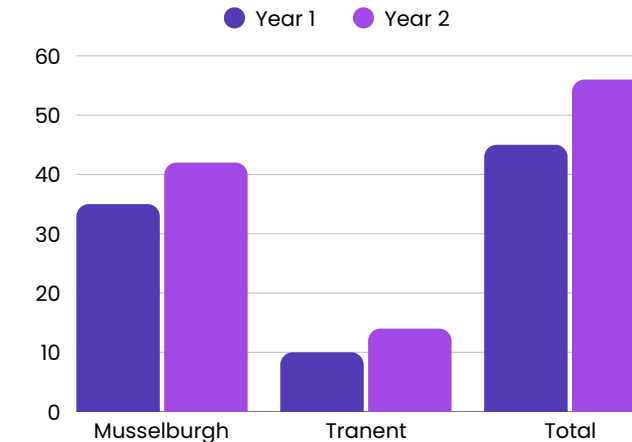
Beneficiaries

Attendance at groups



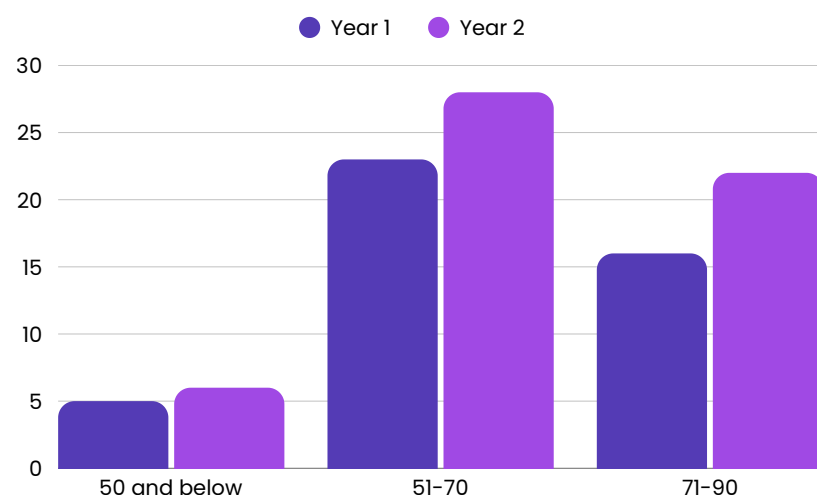
Attendance has been lower at the Musselburgh sessions, with average attendance decreasing from 17 participants in Year 1 to 10 in Year 2, which reflects the turnover in the group rather than a drop off in attendees. The newer group in Tranent has continued to establish itself, maintaining an average attendance of 5 participants. Overall, attendance across both groups was slightly lower in Year 2 compared to Year 1.

No. of patients that have attended groups

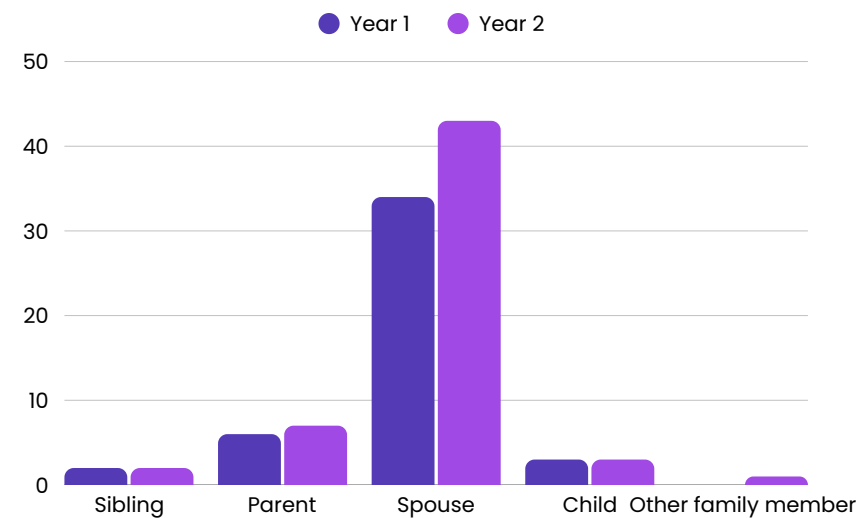


Both groups have welcomed new attendees with 11 new people joining in year 2.

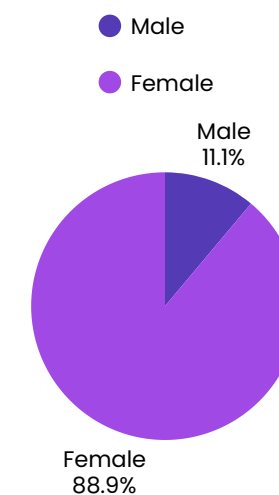
Age of attendees



Relation to deceased



Gender of attendees



Trends across the different areas stayed largely the same from Year 1 to Year 2:

- 50% of attendees are in the age bracket 51-70, 40% aged 71-90 and the remaining 10% are younger than 50.
- 77% of the attendees lost a spouse, the remaining 23% lost either a sibling, parent, child or other family member.
- 50 females and 6 males have attended groups (of the 11 individuals who joined the groups during Year 2, only one was male).

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

*The statistics reported below are based on survey data gathered in 2025.

Improved wellbeing

75%

of attendees reported feeling happier/uplifted

 Usually found that a weight had been taken off my shoulders as some people sadly were in a worse position than myself.”
Support Group attendee, 2025/2026

 My anxiety lessens, but I still feel emotional.”
Support Group attendee, 2025/2026

Improved ability to cope with grief

70%

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

 We share our experiences of grief and help each other move forward.”
Support Group attendee, 2025/2026

 Good to have had an opportunity to talk with others who are not family!”
Support Group attendee, 2025/2026

Reduced feeling of isolation

60%

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

 The group has led to meeting folk with whom I now meet up regularly. We understand each other.”
Support Group attendee, 2025/2026

More informed

40%

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

 Found that people were going through the same thing and was able to find things others did to help.”
Support Group attendee, 2025/2026

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