

A large, soft-focus pink feather graphic that frames the logo text.

HUGG

HEALING UNTOLD GRIEF GROUPS

A close-up photograph of pink cherry blossoms in bloom, with some flowers in sharp focus and others blurred in the background.

Strategic Plan

2021 – 2023



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Preface

1.1 A Message from our Chief Executive Officer

In January 2016 I lost my 11-year-old daughter Milly to suicide. Amid the pain, shock, and grief, was a burning desire to meet others who had walked this hellish road, but were still living and functioning in the 'real world'.

I found it difficult to find a support group, connect with anyone who could share with me their lived experience and provide proof of surviving this grief tsunami. Eventually I found a group in the Midlands, and people there who gave me hope and a reason to carry-on. But I also realised that the lack of services nationwide was too important an issue to ignore. Extensive research, meetings and discussions clarified the landscape of suicide bereavement in Ireland. We started with a single peer support group in 2017. This planted a seed which has since grown into HUGG, a charity with a mission to make a difference in the lives of those devastated by the loss of a loved one to suicide.

Every 40 seconds someone in the world dies by suicide¹. Obtaining timely and accurate figures on suicide in Ireland is complicated. Many deaths by suicide go unrecorded, for societal or religious reasons, and in Ireland, unlike in the UK, the criminal standard of proof ('beyond reasonable doubt') must be met before a death can be ruled as suicide by the Coroner.

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) publish suicide statistics each year. The provisional figure of 421 suicides in 2019, is an increase of 19% on the previous year. Suicide is the leading cause of death in young men (15-24 years) and the highest number of male suicides occurs in older men (55-64 years). Young females (15-24 years) account for the highest rate of suicide in Ireland overall and Ireland has the fourth highest rate of youth suicides in Europe. For the suicide bereaved, there are some startling facts too. Recent research indicates that as many as 135 people can be affected by a single death by suicide and between 15 and 30 people can be severely affected by a suicide². Taking the more conservative figure of 15 people implies that there are 6,315 people each year who need some level of suicide bereavement support.

We also know that due to the complicated legacy of suicide those recently bereaved are 10 times more likely to die by suicide themselves. Furthermore, a recent study by the National Suicide Research Foundation³ indicated that there were also higher levels of cardiovascular disease, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), Diabetes, physical pain and GP visits by the suicide bereaved, when compared to those non-bereaved.

**HUGG is different.
All our services are
delivered by volunteers
who themselves have
been bereaved
by suicide.**

Thankfully, the landscape for suicide bereavement in Ireland is changing. The National Office for Suicide Prevention's (NOSP) 5-year plan, 'Connecting for Life 2015-2020'⁴, included a commitment to provide support to those bereaved by suicide. This inclusion has, for the first time, given the suicide bereaved a voice. HUGG is working hard to make that voice heard through our collaboration with organisations and agencies in this field. We are committed to extending our reach and providing hope and healing to the thousands of people affected by a suicide in Ireland.

1 World Health Organisation, 2019: <https://www.who.int/teams/mental-health-and-substance-use/suicide-data>

2 Cerel, 2018

3 Spillane et al, 2017

4 <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/connecting-for-life/national-strategy-to-reduce-suicide/>

HUGG is different. All our services are delivered by volunteers who themselves have been bereaved by suicide. This gives everyone who connects with us the reassurance that we understand their pain and loss. COVID-19 has challenged us to respond to those who need our services in new ways. For now, we've moved all our support groups online and when lockdown prevented us running our training weekends on location, we moved them into the virtual world too and adapted our delivery to suit.

We are looking forward to 2021, a year which begins with the launch of our 3-year strategic plan. We're just at the start of a journey to realise our mission and fulfil a vision of society where all those bereaved by suicide are supported, and where stigma, blame and isolation play no part in suicide bereavement.



Fiona Tuomey,
Chief Executive Officer,
HUGG.

1.2 A Message from our Chairperson

Over the past 12 months we've been strengthening our policy base in HUGG, with the twin aim of providing assistance and direction to all volunteers and staff, while at the same time confirming our commitment to comply with the **Companies Act** and all regulations and guidelines issued by the **Charities Regulator**.

Our intention is to extend our services nationwide in the coming years. In doing so, we're conscious of the need to continually review and update our policies in order to stay current and adaptable in this ever-changing environment. That ability to be flexible stood to us in 2020. In direct response to the restrictions imposed during the global pandemic, we moved the support groups and facilitator training online, enabling us to maintain a schedule of bi weekly meetings with our users and continue the recruitment and development of volunteer facilitators.

**We're on a journey.
We've set ourselves
some ambitious
targets over the
next three years.**

At HUGG, we strongly believe in the need to root all policies in our core values of empathy through lived experience, respect for all, courage in raising awareness and advocating for change, collaboration with professionals and other organisations working alongside us - while always promoting inclusion and transparency, and aiming to deliver the highest possible quality of service for our users.

We're on a journey. We've set ourselves some ambitious targets over the next three years but we do so in the knowledge that the need to provide services and support for those bereaved by suicide continues to grow, and our determination to provide that support and deliver those services is stronger than ever.



Adam Grennan
Chairperson,
HUGG

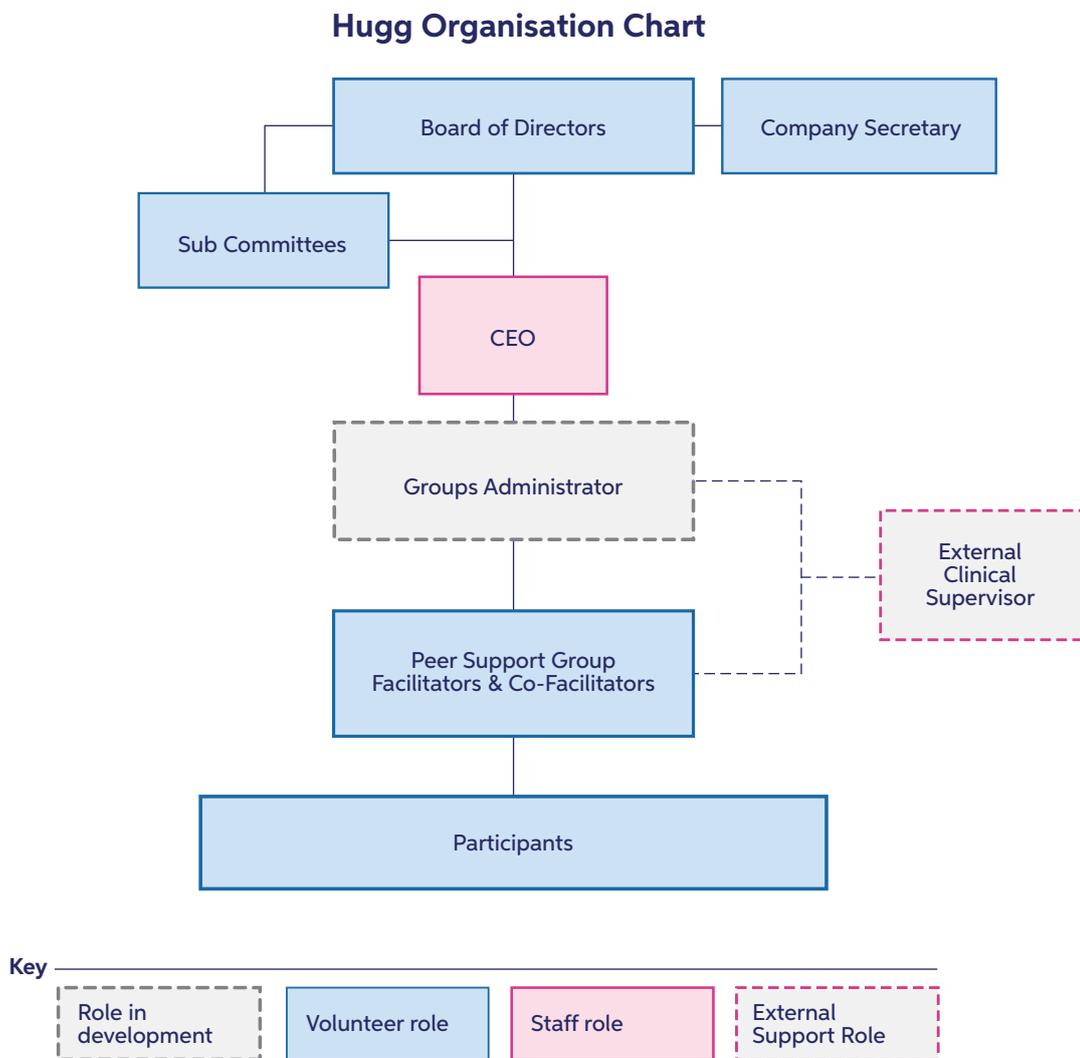
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About HUGG

2.1 Overview

Healing Untold Grief Groups, or HUGG for short, was founded in 2017. HUGG provides a safe, confidential environment where those bereaved by suicide can share their experiences and feelings, receive and give support to each other. All HUGG's peer support groups are led by people with lived experience, people who themselves have been bereaved by suicide.

FIGURE 1: HUGG ORGANISATION CHART



2.2 Vision and Mission

OUR VISION IS:

Hope and healing for anyone bereaved by suicide.

OUR MISSION IS:

To offer hope and healing by providing information, telephone support and local peer support groups led by volunteers with lived experience.

To engage with suicide research, to better inform public policy and improve bereavement services.

To collaborate with professionals and organisations in the bereavement sector to advance best practice.

To raise public awareness about suicide bereavement, and be a voice for those bereaved by suicide.

To advocate for change in how state institutions engage and support with those bereaved by suicide.

2.3 Core Values

Empathy through lived experience

Every peer support group is led by people who have been bereaved by suicide.

Respect for all

We are non-judgemental and respectful with all our volunteers and stakeholders. We provide a warm and welcoming atmosphere for all members and potential members and we ensure everyone has equal access to peer support groups. Our strategy has been specifically developed to promote inclusion throughout the organisation.

Courage

We continually raise awareness of the challenges faced by those bereaved by suicide and we advocate for change in how state institutions engage and support those bereaved by suicide.

Collaboration

We build close working relationships with professionals and other relevant organisations to ensure better services for the suicide bereaved. We gather feedback on our services from our volunteers, group members and facilitators to inform programme improvements and decisions making.

Transparency

We clearly communicate our service model and approach to all stakeholders. We publish our organisational strategy, policies and annual reports as well as the results of evaluations and research activities.

Quality-driven

As a registered charity we continuously aim to achieve the best governance standards and ensure high quality services and support by:

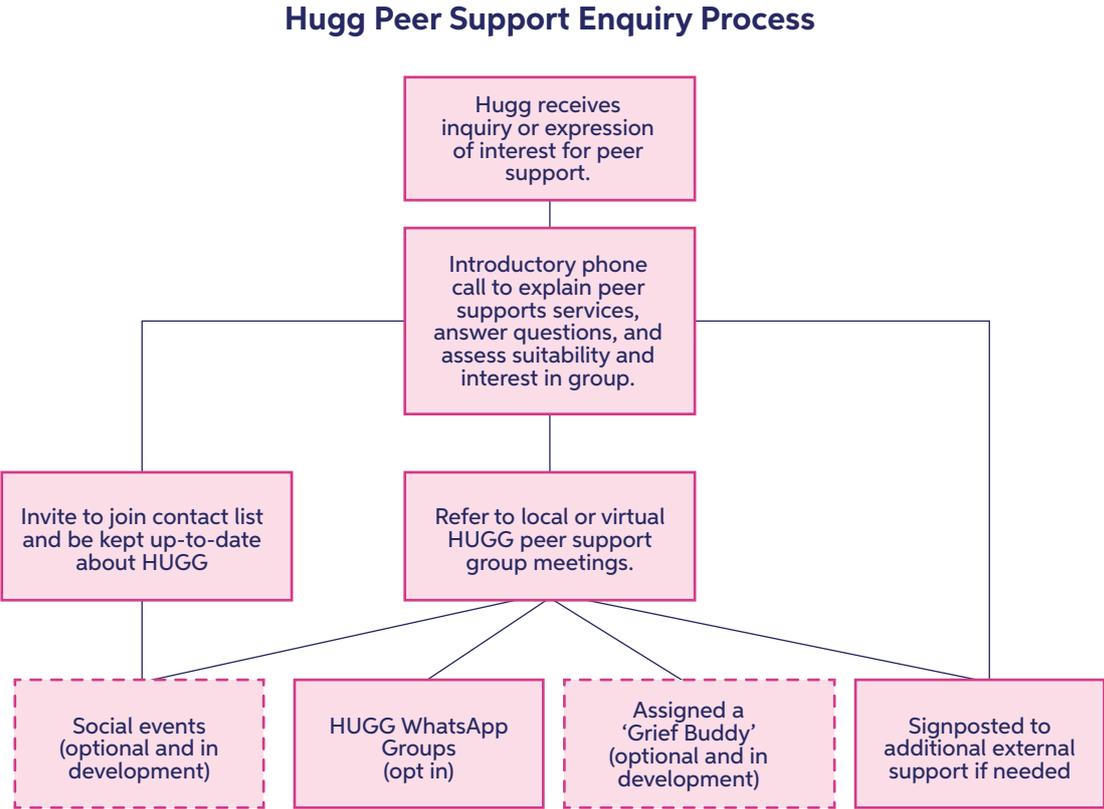
- Adhering to all statutory and sector regulations
- Developing and implementing internal quality standards which drive consistency throughout the organisation
- Implementing evidence based and evidence informed training, policies, and practices
- Offering regular clinical supervision to all of our facilitators
- Implementing a continuous evaluation and feedback process that engages support group members
- Maintaining strong boundaries as a level two organisation by sign-posting to other organisations and supports if/as needed and never providing advice or direction in groups

2.2 Approach

OUR SERVICES INCLUDE:

- Providing peer support groups facilitated by people with a lived experience of suicide bereavement who themselves receive evidence-based training and clinical support.
- Providing information on suicide prevention, intervention and postvention through our website, social media, and community engagement.
- Signposting to relevant services and supports for people bereaved by suicide.
- Networking with similar groups and organisations in Ireland and abroad to share learning and collaborate in service delivery.
- Supporting and participating in suicide postvention research.
- Advocating for change to national policies and practices surrounding death by suicide.

FIGURE 2: PEER SUPPORT ENQUIRY PROCESS



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The Development of the Strategic Plan

3.1 Development Process

HUGG partnered with Quality Matters, an independent charity whose mission is to support charities and social services to provide high quality evidence based services, to develop this strategic plan. The process included:

- Stakeholder survey: All peer support group facilitators and participants were invited to participate in a survey: The survey was completed by 16 peer support group participants and seven group facilitators.
- Stakeholder interviews: Interviews with 14 stakeholders including but not limited to, peer support group participants, peers support group facilitators, HUGG board members, and representatives from relevant organisations in the field.
- Workshops: Multiple workshops and review meetings were facilitated with the HUGG leadership team to review the organisations vision, mission and values, findings from stakeholder engagement and develop strategic actions for the coming three years.

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Overview of the Strategic Objectives

4.1 Overview

HUGG is committed to its mission of providing hope and healing for anyone bereaved by suicide and has developed an ambitious strategic plan to guide HUGG in extending services nationally over the next three years.

The plan includes 12 strategic objectives for 2021 – 2023. These 12 objectives are organised under three core themes: capacity development, service development and advocacy, and quality improvement.

Overall the strategy outlines a three-year plan for continuing to strengthen the governance, policies, strategies, and research that guide the work of HUGG and on extending HUGG services nationwide in order to meet the demand for peer support in Ireland. The section below provides an outline of the 12 strategic objectives. The following section provides a detailed explanation of each objective and the corresponding action steps.

4.2 Objectives

- 1** Develop and implement a marketing and communications strategy for the organisation to guide both internal and external communication processes and raise awareness of HUGG and the services it provides among target audiences in new communities.
- 2** Develop a three-year fundraising strategy that considers all potential income streams including: state funding, corporate sponsorship and donor funding.
- 3** Develop a facilitator recruitment and engagement plan.
- 4** Hire a core team to drive the delivery of HUGG services and support the team of volunteers nationally.
- 5** Grow the number of 'in person' and online peer support groups with the aim of providing nationwide services.
- 6** Engage in on-going internal and external research and evaluation to support the development of evidence for suicide prevention.
- 7** Provide social opportunities for people bereaved by suicide.
- 8** Undertake a feasibility study for developing peer or group non-clinical⁵ suicide bereavement supports for young people under 18.
- 9** Advocate for change in the burden of proof in the Coroner's Court⁶ from the current criminal standard to a civil standard in order to improve experience of Inquests for bereaved families.
- 10** Develop and implement a three-year inclusivity strategy for HUGG that involves measures to increase representation from across society, among facilitators, co-facilitators and group members.
- 11** Develop quality standards for peer support groups and an assessment and monitoring process to support adherence to the standards.
- 12** Design, develop and implement a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, or other Information Management (IT) system, to facilitate the effective administration of all group, volunteer, stakeholder and fundraising activities, in compliance with all HUGG policies and statutory regulations.

⁵ In this context clinical refers to specialized professional psychiatric, psycho-therapeutic or psychological support

⁶ HUGG would like to advocate for amendments to be made to Coroners Act 1962.

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Detailed Strategic Objectives

5.1 Theme One: Capacity Development

5.1.1 Objective One

Develop and implement a marketing and communications strategy for the organisation to guide both internal and external communication processes and raise awareness of HUGG and the services it provides among target audiences in new communities.

Rationale

For the organisation to continue to grow and expand into new communities, HUGG must increase awareness of the supports that it provides in order to recruit new members and volunteer facilitators with lived experience of suicide bereavement among the target populations in locations across Ireland. Effective internal communication practices help to ensure new groups are integrated and supported by the organisation.

Outcome

People across Ireland who are bereaved by suicide are aware of HUGG, the services and supports that it provides, and how to engage with the service either online or in person at the location nearest to them. Facilitators, staff and board feel fully informed and can communicate effectively and efficiently with one another.

Actions	Timeframe for completion
Undertake a review of current internal and external communications, considering all stakeholders	Q4 2020
Develop and implement a communications strategy that clarifies principals and procedures for all facets of communications, as well as responsibilities of all stakeholders in this regard	Q4 (Annually)
Review and update the communications strategy on an annual basis	Q4 (Annually)

5.1.2 Objective Two

Develop a three-year fundraising strategy that considers all potential income streams including: state funding, corporate sponsorship and donor funding.

Rationale

HUGG seeks to develop diverse income streams in order to find a balance of financial sustainability and flexibility to develop new initiatives.

Outcome

HUGG has increased financial sustainability, which results in a capacity to implement the wider strategy and objectives.

Actions	Timeframe for completion
Identify and recruit a trustee with fundraising expertise	Q1 2021
Define fundraising proposition(s)	Q1 2021
Develop a comprehensive fundraising strategy	Q1 2021
Review and update, as necessary, fundraising guidance for volunteers or members of the public wishing to fundraise on behalf of HUGG	Q2 2021
Review fundraising strategy annually and adapt the process according to lessons learned	Q4 (Annually)

5.1.3 Objective Three

Develop a facilitator recruitment and engagement plan.

Rationale

In order to sustain current service provision and scale HUGG to meet the potential demand for the service, there is a need to recruit, train, and maintain a large number of volunteer facilitators.

Outcome

HUGG has enough trained facilitators to meet growing demand for new groups across Ireland and facilitators feel connected to each other and HUGG regardless of their location.

Actions	Timeframe for completion
Develop an informational pack to share with volunteers considering training as HUGG volunteer facilitators	Q1 2021
Review and publicise the facilitator screening and selection process	Q1 2021
Schedule regular HUGG facilitator training events each year	Q4 (Annually)
Publish an annual schedule of training required and recommended by HUGG for new recruits and existing facilitators.	Q1 2021
Develop a portal that hosts all documents and schedules for facilitators	Q1 2022
Host at least one volunteer appreciation event per year	Annually

5.1.4 Objective Four

Hire a core team to drive the delivery of HUGG services and support the team of volunteers nationally.

Rationale

In order to effectively deliver on this ambitious strategy and extend our service provision nationally, it was identified that moving from a voluntary model to one with a core paid staff is needed. A core staff team will support volunteer-lead ethos of the organisation and ensure facilitators can receive effective, timely support to continue their work.

Outcome

The organisation will have paid staff who will report to the Board on progressing this strategy and supporting the national team of volunteers to deliver services to those who need them.

Actions	Timeframe for completion
Identify positions, develop role descriptions and assess all HR requirements	Q2 2021
Develop a recruitment and hiring policy	Q3 2021
Secure funding for positions and hire staff in line with internal recruitment and selection policies and procedures	Q1 2022
Agree requirements and locate a suitable premise for the core team	Q1 2022
Provide supervision, support and performance management in line with human resource policies and procedures	Q1 2022 – ongoing

5.2 Theme Two: Service Development and Advocacy

5.2.1 Objective Five

Grow the number of 'in person' and online peer support groups with the aim of providing our services nationwide.

Rationale

HUGG has identified that it provides a niche service that meets a need in Ireland and therefore aim to be national within three years. Our ambition is for every person in the Republic to have access to a HUGG peer support within 70km of their home or online within five years.

Outcome

People bereaved by suicide anywhere in Ireland will have access to either an in person or online peer support group.

Actions	Timeframe for completion
Develop an annual implementation plan to expand the number of 'in person' and online peer support groups over a three-year period that clarifies: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Annual targets for extension of services,– How new locations will be selected and prioritised– Recruitment plan for facilitators,– Local promotion plan– Approach to local partnerships– Funding required,– Process for providing training, supervision, and support to new groups	Q2 2021
Agree funding targets for developing new groups	Q4 2021
Review implementation progress annually and adapt as necessary	Q4 (Annually)



5.2.2 Objective Six

Engage in on-going internal and external research and evaluation to support the development of evidence for suicide postvention.

Rationale

HUGG's services are evidence informed, drawing from research and best practice in relevant fields such as general bereavement and suicide prevention, however there is limited research available that is specific to Ireland and on best practices specific to suicide postvention and peer support groups for suicide bereavement. In addition, the changes HUGG observe that happen for our members and facilitators, if documented through evaluation of our processes and outcomes, may contribute to a wider evidence base on the topic of suicide postvention.

Outcome

HUGG's work will continue to draw on emerging evidence in relevant fields, and in turn will contribute to a growing body of evidence to support improved services and peer-lead services for people bereaved by suicide.

Actions	Timeframe for completion
Participate in NSRF study on the effects of peer support group for people bereaved by suicide	Q4 2021
In all grant applications and internal allocation of funding, specify and reserve resources for evaluation and research	Ongoing
Prepare and run an annual service user engagement survey	Q4 (Annually)
Recruit a research consultant to develop and implement an outcome evaluation framework	Q3 - Q4 2022 (thereafter in two-year cycles)
Agree an implementation plan in response to recommendations	Q1 2023
Share findings from the external outcome evaluation with HUGG stakeholders	Q1 2023

5.2.3 Objective Seven

Provide social opportunities for people bereaved by suicide.

Rationale

In our experience, people bereaved by suicide often feel isolated. Anecdotally, at certain points in the grieving process, the company of others bereaved by suicide can be preferable to those who have not been through it. We would like to provide opportunities for our members, or people bereaved by suicide who may not feel ready to participate in an ongoing peer support group, to come together and socialise in an informal setting with others who can relate to what they are experiencing.

Outcome

People bereaved by suicide feel less isolated.

Actions	Timeframe for completion
Undertake initial research with members to develop a long-list of options for social engagement for members, and undertake corresponding scoping exercise to identify suitable options in terms of feasibility, addressing issues such as safety, costs, and internal organisational capacity	Q4 2021
Run a pilot event and review to assess feasibility of future events programmes	Q4 2021
Pending outcome of Step 2, develop an annual plan for social activities	Q2 2022
Develop a guidance document with a menu of options for local groups	Q2 2022
Host an annual event	TBD
Review and report on social activities	Annually Q4 review

5.2.4 Objective Eight

Undertake a feasibility study for developing peer or group non-clinical suicide bereavement supports for young people under 18.

Rationale

HUGG has identified through strategic planning that there may be a need for non-clinical suicide bereavement support services for young people.

Outcome

HUGG makes an informed decision regarding whether to develop a non-clinical bereavement support service for young people

Actions	Timeframe for completion
Engage an external researcher/consultant through an open tender process to undertake a feasibility study	Q2 – Q3 2023
Review findings from the feasibility study, and reach agreement on whether to progress with service development	Q3 2023
Pending a positive outcome in step 2, develop a full-service scoping document and implementation plan	Q4 2023
Develop, pilot and review the service in line with agreed project plans and agreements.	TBD

5.2.5 Objective Nine

Advocate for change in the burden of proof in the Coroner's Court from the current criminal standard to a civil standard in order to improve experience of Inquests for bereaved families.

Rationale

Ireland's coronial laws rule on suicides using the criminal standard of proof i.e. beyond reasonable doubt, which has a direct impact on the number of suicides recorded.

Outcome

A more accurate number of suicides will be recorded and the required level of healthcare support identified.

Actions	Timeframe for completion
Engage with external stakeholders and develop a report on the current legal landscape including challenges, barriers, opportunities and potential steps for an advocacy plan.	Q1 2023
Review findings, form a working group with external stakeholders	Q2 2023
Draft amendment to the Coroners Act 1962	Q3 2023
Develop and implement an advocacy strategy	Q4 2023

5.3 Theme Three: Quality Improvement

5.3.1 Objective Ten

Develop and implement a three-year inclusivity strategy for HUGG that includes measures to increase representation from across society, among facilitators, co-facilitators and group members.

Rationale

While the organisation continuously strives for inclusion, we believe there is an opportunity to better engage and include people from groups that are currently under-represented on our peer groups. We know these groups are at least equally, and in some cases disproportionately, impacted by suicide and want to ensure that we are providing equality of access and inclusion to them.

Outcome

People from minority groups who are bereaved by suicide have information about, and access to, a peer-lead bereavement service where they feel included and supported.

Actions	Timeframe for completion
Agree an organisational strategy to addresses inclusivity and create an annual plan targeting specific under-represented group	Q1 2021
Identify and deliver training on bias and effective inclusive working to volunteers, staff, facilitators and the Board	Q1 (Annually)
Establish partnerships with identified community organisations working with priority target groups	Q1- Q4 2021
Survey target groups to identify their needs	Q1 (Annually)
Engage volunteers from priority target groups to train as facilitators	Q1 – Q 4 2021
Provide ongoing training and mentoring for volunteers from each target group to help build and maintain their skills as facilitators	Q1 – Q 4 2021
Review the process on an annual basis, and incorporate lessons learned	Q4 (Annually)

5.3.2 Objective Eleven

Develop quality standards for peer support groups and an assessment and monitoring process to support adherence to the standards.

Rationale

Quality standards will help to ensure that, as the programme expands, all peer support groups provides the same level of quality and adhere to a standardized model.

Outcome

All HUGG and other peer support group members receive the same level of high-quality support regardless of which group they attend.

Actions	Timeframe for completion
Identify and recruit an advisory group to support and guide the development of quality standards	Q1 2021
Review existing, or develop new quality standards and corresponding organisational policies and templates	Q2 – Q 3 2021
Develop a process for peer-auditing adherence to quality standards and developing, implementing, and monitoring an individual group improvement plan if needed (coordinate/ integrate this with other organisational evaluation practices). This should include consultation with members and facilitators.	Q3 2021
Train all facilitators on the quality standards and auditing process	Q4 2021 (ongoing thereafter)
Pilot, review and roll-out the audit process	Q1 2022
Publish quality standards for peer support groups	Q1 2022

5.3.3 Objective Twelve

Design, develop and implement a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, or other Information Management (IT) system, to facilitate the effective administration of all group, volunteer, stakeholder and fundraising activities, in compliance with all HUGG policies and statutory regulations.

Rationale

As the number of groups expand, both online and in new locations across the country, a CRM, or other suitable IT system, will be needed to administer the groups and ensure compliance, with HUGG policies and statutory regulations, particularly the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). A CRM or IT system will also benefit the management of volunteer and fundraising activities.

Outcome

The HUGG team will be able to monitor, manage and control the administration of the support groups and also ensure compliance with all policies and regulations. Volunteer facilitators will be able to access the system to upload and view all information related to their specific groups and ultimately, HUGG will have a system that will provide ease of access to user information and highlight trends which may be of value to the development of existing and new services.

Actions	Timeframe for completion
Perform a system requirement analysis	Q1 2021
Seek quotes and proposals and select a vender/ consultant	Q1 2021
Develop and pilot CRM or other suitable IT system, and update functionality and training documentation as require	Q2 2021
Fully implement across HUGG	Q3 2021
Review use, acceptance and functionality of system	Q4 2021



HUGG

HEALING UNTOLD GRIEF GROUPS

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