

National Centre for Childhood Grief

IMPACT REPORT 2022-2023

Caring for bereaved children and families after the
death of their parent, sibling or close loved one



Our Story

The National Centre for Childhood Grief (NCCG) was established in 1994 to support bereaved children aged 3-17 years and their families to rebuild their lives following the death of their parent, sibling or other close loved one. The NCCG provides a place of safety, nurturing, understanding and learning, where bereaved children and families learn to live with their grief, build their coping skills and resilience and are empowered to lead their own best lives.



Our Vision

Our vision is a community which accepts there is no right or wrong way for children to grieve, and that grief is a normal and ongoing process which, with compassionate support, children can accommodate into their lives as they become adults.

Our Purpose

Our purpose is to provide the best possible care for grieving children, their families and support networks, to enhance their opportunity to live full and meaningful lives.

Our Services



Counselling

Professional, client-centred services provided by experienced NCCG-trained counsellors. Individual and group programs for children and parents/carers.



Adventure Camps

Our Peter Coupland Adventure Program provides special opportunities for bereaved children and families to meet, share with others who have similar experiences, explore their grief, learn new skills and simply have fun.



Community Support & Outreach

Outreach support and training for schools, businesses, health care and community organisations looking after bereaved children and families.



Professional Education

Training courses for professionals and new students in specialist bereavement counselling skills and practical care.



Publications

The NCCG publishes a range of books and resources for bereaved children, adults and other caregivers supporting bereaved families.

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Front cover: past child client Finn Harrison and (inset) Finn aged 6, the year his dad Andy died.

Our Impact in 2022-2023

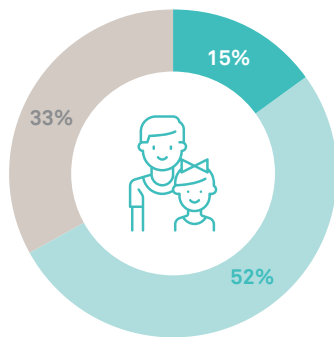
From July 2022 to June 2023 the NCCG's community of staff, volunteers and supporters have made so much care possible. All of the NCCG's services for bereaved children are provided free of charge to families, funded principally by community donations. Care services for parents and other adults are also generously subsidised.



433 children

received personalised care services

↳ a 9% increase on last year and an NCCG record



Ages of Children**

- 3-6 years 15%
- 7-12 years 52%
- 13-17 years 33%



1,368 sessions

of specialist bereavement counselling for children*

A national service

Child and family clients in every Australian State and Territory



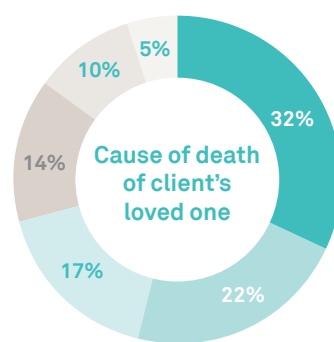
236 adults

received personalised care services

↳ a 40% increase on last year and an NCCG record

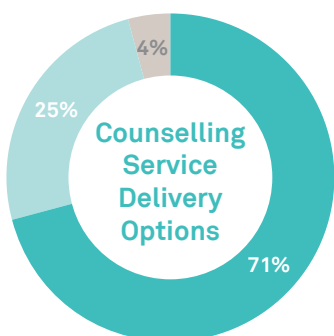
259 professional students

trained in NCCG bereavement care education courses



Causes of death**

- Cancer 32%
- Other Medical 22%
- Suicide 17%
- Cardiac Issue 14%
- Accident (including MVA) 10%
- Other Non-medical 5%



How we connect***

- Face-to-face 71%
- Online 25%
- Phone/email 4%



1,599 copies

of NCCG bereavement care publications provided

* each counselling session up to 2 hours duration
 ** based on proportion of services provided
 *** services provided to both children and adults

Maddie's Story

Maddie received individual counselling and participated in the Kids Group program for three years, following the death of her father Rod in 2019. Maddie graduated from Kids Group in late 2022.

Grief can often feel unbearable and overwhelming, but when we talk about it and share our stories of loss, the grip of isolation and confusion can start to loosen.

For a child, sharing their stories of loss at a young age can change the trajectory of their grief, and of their life.

When Maddie's father Rod died suddenly of a stroke in 2019, a knowing hand reached across the schoolyard to lead her and her family to the National Centre for Childhood Grief and its Kids Group program.

Another family at Maddie's school had also experienced the death of someone close to them. They knew how "important and special" NCCG's Kids Group could be.

Maddie said she was given a tool to help navigate the world without her dad from the very first sentence she said to the group.

"One thing that came from attending Kids Group was just that very first step when you are asked to introduce yourself, your parent who has passed away, how long it's been, and how they died," she said.

"I think that was the biggest tool for me because that sentence that I said every single time I entered the group, I would reuse every time I met a new person".

Maddie's mother Sophie would attend a session for parents and admitted it felt "intense" for her, but she could see the "almost immediate" positive impact on her child.



Maddie with her mum Sophie, who also participated in Parents Group at the NCCG



Knowing the group sessions exist could be helpful to those facing all-consuming grief

"To get in the car and see that your child just had a really great couple of hours, that just blew me away. She was really on a high after the group [sessions], which was so beautiful to see", she said.

"And it could be the total opposite. You know, you think maybe you've just talked about your dad with your friends for two hours. It could be very depressing, but it was the total reverse."

After three years of Kids Group, friendships and connections made, tools learnt and stories told, Maddie said she felt like she returned to her "bubbly self".

She said even knowing the group sessions exist could be helpful to those facing all-consuming grief.

"I feel like if you try those first three, maybe even two group sessions, ... you can go - well, I'm not alone," she said.

"Even if it's not for you, you still have that in the background that you know Kids Group is there. Then if you feel [bad] like that again, you can try coming back to Kids Group again".

"And I feel like having Kids Group there is such an important thing."

Measuring our Impact

In 2020 the NCCG commenced development of a specialist Impact Measurement System (IMS) to track and assess the clinical impact of the centre's bereavement counselling services. This IMS includes an outcome and assessment framework tailored to each core service for bereaved children: individual counselling, group programs and the Peter Coupland Adventure Program. Each framework employs the core outcome pillars for the NCCG, summarised as Hold - Head - Heart - Hope, as outlined below. Child clients and their parents/carers are surveyed every six months to capture their personal progress across these four outcome pillars and associated sub-outcomes.

The IMS and client surveys were launched in early 2021, collecting outcomes initially for the individual counselling program for children. Surveys have subsequently been introduced for the Kids Group program and Peter Coupland Adventure Camps for bereaved boys and families.



Turks.

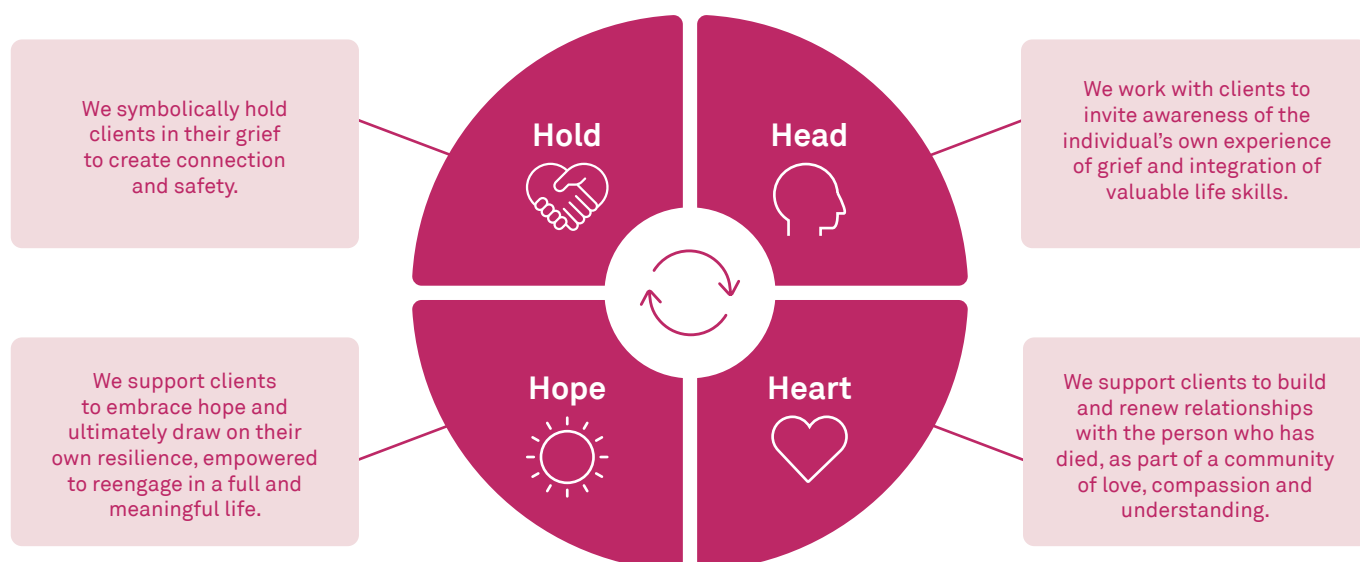
This first impact report includes summary outcomes and analysis for the individual counselling program for children, exploring responses from new clients in 2021-23 in the first 12 months of their bereavement counselling with the NCCG.

Additional impact studies will be produced over coming years exploring the rich evidence collected on the personal needs and experiences of bereaved children and families and the impact of various NCCG services over the medium to long term.

For more detailed information on the research methodology used in the NCCG's IMS, please contact the NCCG by: E:info@childhoodgrief.org.au. P: 1300 654 556

The NCCG's Theory of Change

By providing a safe and nurturing space (HOLD), bereaved children and their families learn to live with their grief (HEAD and HEART), empowering them to lead their best life possible (HOPE).



Our Impact

Children's feedback

As part of their surveys, child clients were asked the following open question:

"How has coming to the NCCG (A Friend's Place*) helped you?"

Their responses to this question focused on 5 key themes:

Theme 1

A majority of respondents stated that the centre had simply 'helped'.

Theme 2

Children felt that the NCCG had helped them understand their feelings and feel okay to talk about the person who had died. For example:

"[coming to the centre] helps me understand what I'm feeling and it helps me to feel what I want to feel and to remember and think about why I like that."

Child client aged 12 years

"It has made me feel better since mum died. I understand it's ok to share my memories about mum and me."

Child client aged 13 years

"Coming to NCCG has helped me experience grief and know what to do when I am in doubt or when I am feeling sad. Coming to NCCG has helped me relax and not to be tense so much."

Child client aged 11 years

"It has helped me by being able to use my own creativity to talk about things that have happened and not be judged or given a pep talk about it."

Child client aged 15 years

Theme 3

Children reported that their counselling sessions provided a safe and comfortable space to talk about their grief and what they needed. For example:

"[coming to the centre has] helped me become a better person and helped me talk freely about my grief to trusted people."

Child client aged 13 years

"Knowing what I say is private. Counsellor very friendly. Feels like a safe environment."

Child client aged 17 years

"When I'm here I can be myself and be open to others about grief."

Child client aged 11 years

"I really like ____ [counsellor] and feel comfortable talking to her. I also enjoy the activities we do together. I hope she sees this [feedback] eventually so she knows that what she does helps me."

Child client aged 13 years



'A Friend's Place' is the name given to the NCCG's care centre. This name both expresses the warm and welcoming spirit of the NCCG and provides an easy phrase for a child client to use with their own friends, when they may not want to talk about their bereavement. If someone asks where they are going, the child client can simply say with honesty, "I'm going to a friend's place".

Theme 4

Children reported feeling more able to remember and think about their loved one who died. For example:

“It helps me remember the memory of ___ [my brother] and keeping his memory alive and strong.”

Child client aged 11 years

“It has helped me think and remember my dad and why I miss him. It helps me park that thought and come back to it when I need to. It also helps me feel that I can talk to people and other children who have gone through what I have experienced.”

Child client aged 12 years

“It’s taught me that it’s actually fun and nice to share the funny memories of my dad and it makes them laugh which is nice. And that me and my dad are much more similar than I thought we were.”

Child client aged 12 years

“It helps me feel like I’m not alone...I’ve also done activities that bring back memories of my dad and I feel that even though I have not been here long, I have learnt a lot about my dad through the activities.”

Child client aged 12 years

Theme 5

Children reported enjoying the activities provided by their counsellor. For example

“[my counsellor] has played and done activities with me to help me cope with my grief. Doing these activities has helped me relax myself often and to not be tense all of the time and to not always keep my guard up around people, the activities help me focus and have fun whilst talking about ___ [my brother who has died].”

Child client aged 11 years

“The activities are lots of fun and help a lot.”

Child client aged 11 years

“A Friend’s Place is really fun because I like all the activities you plan for us... I like expressing my feeling through art.”

Child client aged 10 years

“My friend’s place has a great garden and crafting materials.”

Child client aged 9 years





A Camp Story

The NCCG provides camps for bereaved girls, boys and families.

Our Adventure Camps for Bereaved Boys are a special opportunity for boys aged 8-15 years who have been recently bereaved by the death of their parent.

This camp provides an opportunity for the boys to meet others the same age whose parent has died, explore and share their grief experiences, challenge themselves and enjoy some fun outdoors.

Grief can be a very isolating experience for children, who can feel a significant emotional and personal gap from their established friends and community. This camp helps them to see they are not alone, that other children have had a similar experience and allows them to spend time with people who understand what they are going through.



This camp has been helpful by showing ways to deal with grief and know that I'm supported.



Grief can also deeply undermine a bereaved child's self-confidence and resilience. The activities held at the camp, including physical challenges, games and clinical therapeutic programs are professionally designed to help rekindle a child's self-confidence, build a sense of safety and resilience and give them new personal skills to manage the grief.

Boys who attended a camp in 2023 said:

"This camp has been helpful by showing me ways to deal with grief and know that I'm supported"

"The camp has made me understand that I'm not alone and I have learnt a lot, made lots of great new friends and had so much fun"

"I've been vulnerable and told other boys and adults about the difficulties of my grief and shared memories of my deceased parent. It has showed me that there are boys who I can talk to and relate to as they are also bereaved. It has also made me aware of the amount of support which surrounds me at the NCCG"

→ **The Adventure Camp for Bereaved Boys is part of the NCCG's Peter Coupland Adventure Program, which provides special opportunities for bereaved girls, boys and families to find new ways to re-engage in the fun challenges of life, enjoy some respite and connection with other people with similar bereavement experiences.**

Our Impact

Summary of Parent/Carer feedback

Parents or carers of child clients aged 3-17 years who received individual bereavement counselling in June 2021 - June 2023 were asked to complete surveys upon commencement with the NCCG, then every six months. Parents and carers of 361 children completed 748 surveys to provide feedback on the initial 12 months of counselling.

Parents and carers commonly identified steady improvements for their children across all four outcome pillars. The average change reported across all four outcome pillars over one year of care was a 15% positive growth.



15% positive growth

The average change reported across all four outcome pillars over one year of care

The average improvement for children assessed by their parent or carer for each of the individual outcome pillars was as follows:



OUTCOME PILLAR

Hold

↑ 24% average increase

This outcome pillar relates to supporting the bereaved child's emotional survival by:

- creating a safe and respectful connection between the child and counsellor
- the child developing trust with the counsellor and feeling heard, understood and reassured.



OUTCOME PILLAR

Head

↑ 15% average increase

This pillar relates to the child:

- understanding their feelings and grief reactions
- learning about internal strengths and strategies for managing their grief reactions.



OUTCOME PILLAR

Hope

↑ 12% average increase

This pillar relates to the child:

- drawing on their own resilience
- feeling empowered to participate in their lives and having aspirations for the future.



OUTCOME PILLAR

Heart

↑ 10% average increase

This pillar relates to the child developing their "new normal" through:

- building and renewing their relationship with themselves by accepting they can be themselves and understand what they need
- building and renewing their relationship with the person who died
- having a sense of belonging to a community where grief is understood.

Our Impact

Parent/Carer feedback

Parents and carers were also surveyed on two open questions:

1. What is your hope for your child attending counselling (at the NCCG)?
2. How has coming to counselling been beneficial for your child?



Parent/Carer responses to open question 1

What is your hope for your child attending counselling (at the NCCG)?

Parent and carer feedback to this question in the first year of counselling most commonly focused on concerns and positive outcomes related to the Hold and Head outcome pillars.



“I would like [my child] to have a safe place to express her feelings and develop life-long coping strategies to help her move through stages of grief (as and when they arise) following the loss of her father.”

Parent of child client aged 8 years

“[I hope he can] talk about the grief and feelings associated with the suicide death of his older brother.”

Parent of child client aged 14 years

“I would like them to be able to carry the grief with them and for it to be a part of who they are but not the defining part of them. Being able to recognise their grief and what they can do when it surfaces. Help them with building their memories of their mum.”

Parent of child client aged 9 years

“To get support through the toughest stage in their young life of losing their father. Help teach them how to process emotions, to identify triggers, positive professionals to guide them with proven strategies and support.”

Parent of child client aged 10 years

“[he] needs a safe and (his own) private place to talk openly and not hurt anyone’s feelings or upset anyone.”

Parent of child client aged 14 years

“[I hope she] gains confidence within herself and [can] work through her pain in a dignified way. [I hope they] create a safe space to speak to someone she trusts other than a family member who is also grieving and confused.”

Parent of child client aged 10 years

The three most common themes identified in the parent and carer feedback to this question were:

1

Hope that their child will learn ways to talk about their grief and develop coping strategies to help manage their grief reactions

2

Hope that their child will learn to recognise and understand their feelings and grief reactions

3

Hope that their child will find a safe space to be open about their grief experiences

Parent/Carer responses to open question 2

How has coming to counselling been beneficial for your child?

Parent and carer feedback to this question again most commonly focused on benefits related to the Hold and Head outcome pillars.



“[The centre] has provided a place to explore emotions that are often overwhelming for a person of this age.”

Parent of child client aged 15 years

“[The centre is] a private, non-judgement place. [he] can talk about [grief] without thinking he may upset us, and he can say things in confidence that [the counsellor] will not share, even with us. This trusting relationship is very important to him. I am pleased it gives him a place to talk.”

Parent of child client aged 14 years

“My child now knows how to state to me ‘Mum, I’m not coping’. To me that is a massive step in the process of helping her.”

Parent of child client aged 11 years

“We have developed strategies for when panic attacks come on and how to deal with them.”

Parent of child client aged 11 years

“He has recently been showing more emotion outwardly and crying...which is a positive development.”

Parent of child client aged 11 years

“Coming here is helping my daughter understand it is ok to grieve and talk about losing someone they love. She thoroughly enjoys talking to the counsellor and reflecting on memories of her brother.”

Parent of child client aged 11 years

The two most common themes identified in the parent and carer feedback to this question were:

1

Their child found someone to talk to who they trust and feel heard

2

Their child has learnt strategies to cope with their grief

Overall Parent/Carer Feedback

Overall, parents and carers were very satisfied and grateful for the counselling services provided by the NCCG. Examples of common feedback include:



“I wish more people had access to the NCCG. It is woeful that in this day and age there is not more funding to have ‘A Friend’s Place’ in every city.”

Parent of child client aged 10 years

“This place is just wonderful. Having a place with experienced people to work with children is so vital.”

Parent of child client aged 5 years

“I am so thankful it exists. It has taken a weight off my mind knowing I am not in this alone when trying to help guide my kids through their grief.”

Parent of child client aged 5 years

“Thank you for everything you are doing for my family. You are slowly but surely putting a little colour back in the lives of my children. I appreciate all of your hard work.”

Parent of child client aged 11 years

Thank you

We would like to recognise the support provided this year by:

- Third Link Investment Managers
- Turks
- Macquarie Group Foundation
- HNECC Primary Health Network
- St George Foundation
- Thyne Reid Foundation
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- Inger Rice Foundation
- Westpac
- Rotary Clubs of Epping, Eastwood, Hornsby and Wahroonga
- Our wonderful and diverse community of other individual and organisational donors
- The NCCG's Board, staff and volunteers for their ongoing energy, commitment and professional skills in support of bereaved children and their families

Support the NCCG

The care services provided by the NCCG are principally funded by community donations. We receive minimal government funding. To help support bereaved children and their families please donate today. All donation of \$2 or more are tax deductible.



childhoodgrief.org.au/donate



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Caring for bereaved children and families after the death of their parent, sibling or close loved one

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