

# An introduction to the Support After Suicide program

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# Acknowledgement of Country

We would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we meet today, and pay respects to Elders past and present.

We also acknowledge that the sovereignty of this land was never ceded.



# Acknowledgement of Lived Experience

We recognise the lived experience of suicide that each of us brings here today.

We acknowledge that each of our experiences is unique, is valuable and matters.

We also acknowledge that many others in our communities and workforces are significantly impacted by suicide.

# Safely speaking about suicide

| Issue                                   | Problematic                                 | Preferred                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Presenting suicide as a desired outcome | 'successful suicide' 'unsuccessful suicide' | 'died by suicide'<br>'took their own life'<br>'suicide attempt' |
| Associating suicide with crime or sin   | 'committed suicide'<br>'commit suicide'     | 'died by suicide'<br>'took their own life'                      |
| Sensationalising suicide                | 'suicide epidemic'                          | 'increasing rates'<br>'higher rates'                            |
| Language glamourising a suicide attempt | 'failed suicide'<br>'suicide bid'           | 'suicide attempt'<br>'non-fatal suicide'                        |
| Gratuitous use of the term 'suicide'    | 'political suicide'<br>'suicide mission'    | Refrain from using the term suicide out of context              |

Visit Mindframe's Guidelines here: <https://mindframe.org.au/suicide/communicating-about-suicide/mindframe-guidelines>

# Overview of the session

- Understanding suicide
- Grief and suicide bereavement
- About Support After Suicide

# Understanding suicide



# A Perfect Storm

"I sometimes think of suicide as a kind of perfect storm...

**...It's the coming together of multiple factors in just the wrong way...**

"This includes the person's biology, their thinking, their life circumstances, things that have happened long ago, as well current stressors in their life...all just in the wrong way that allow it to happen."

Jack Jordan



# WHY?

They probably  
weren't choosing death  
as much as choosing  
to end unbearable pain.

John Hewett (1980) *After Suicide*

# Grief and bereavement overview



# Grief is...

**...our response to loss.**

It is the normal, natural, inevitable response to loss.

Grief affects every part of our life:

- our feelings
- our thoughts
- our behaviour
- our relationships
- our physical health/our bodies
- our spiritual and philosophical beliefs

# Experiences of grief

Physical

Behavioural

Emotional

Social

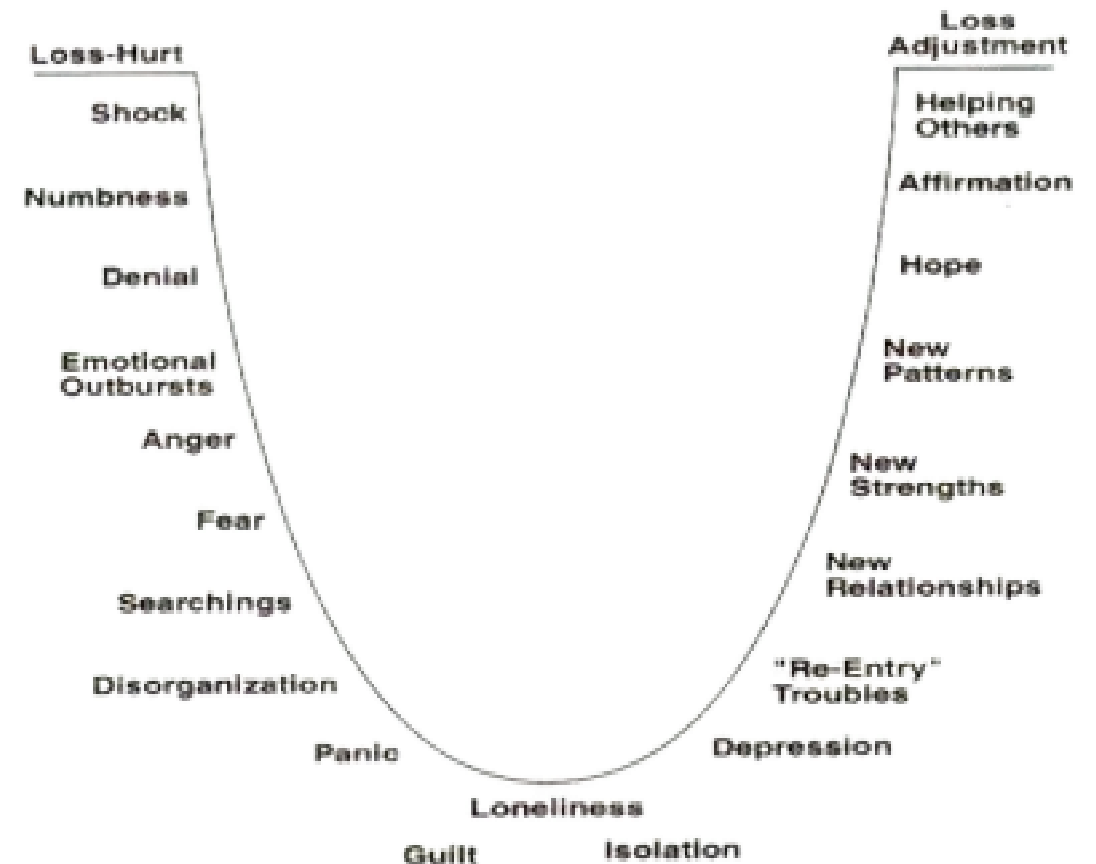
Cognitive

Spiritual

# Grief is not sequential

- There is a common myth that there are five “stages of grief”
- It assumes there is a predictable order to grief
- Sets up the expectation that there is an end to the grieving process

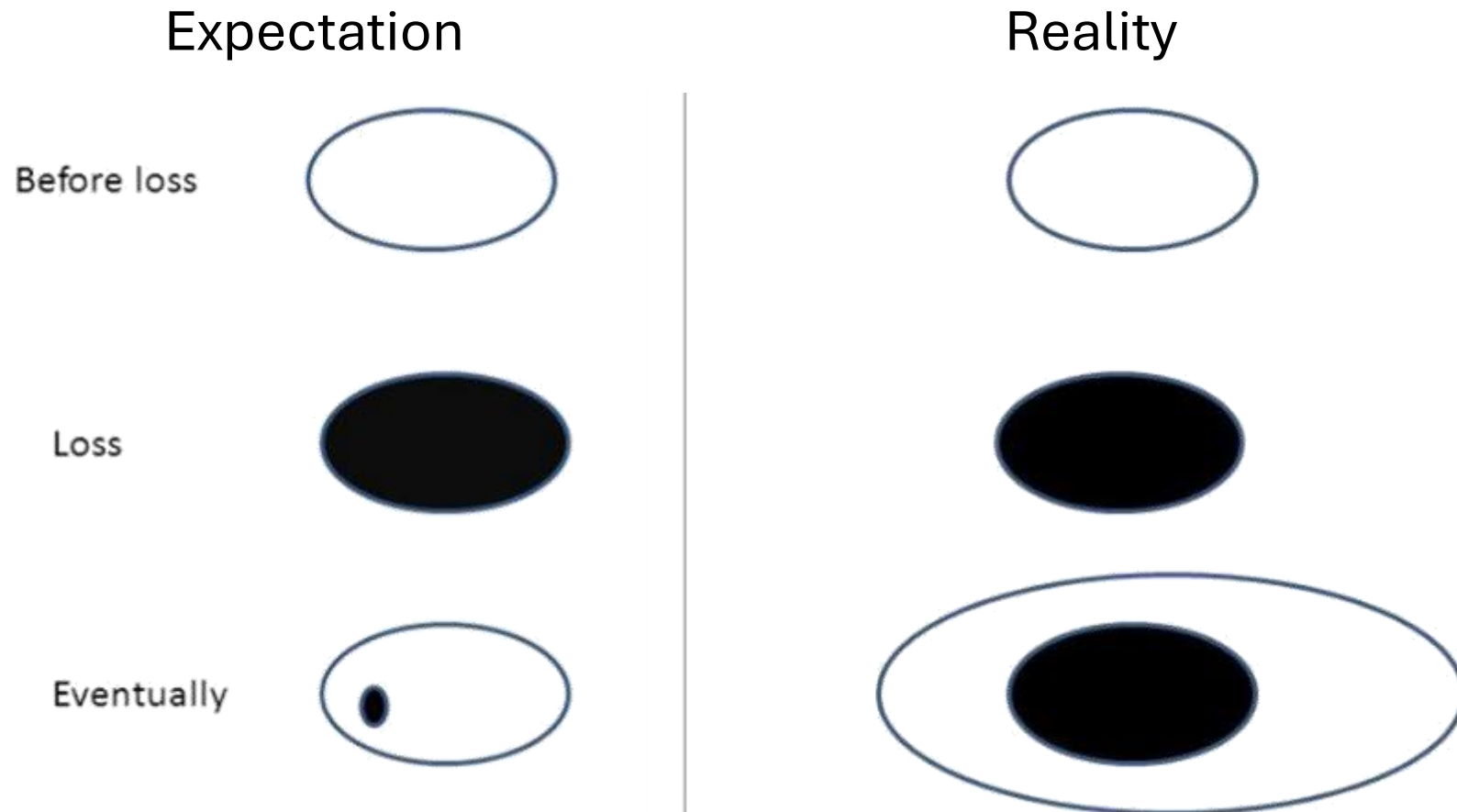
## STAGES OF GRIEF



# The reality of grief



# Grief does not diminish over time



# Grief is unique

*“Your grief is like your fingerprint,  
unique and personal to you”*

Irving and Thompson

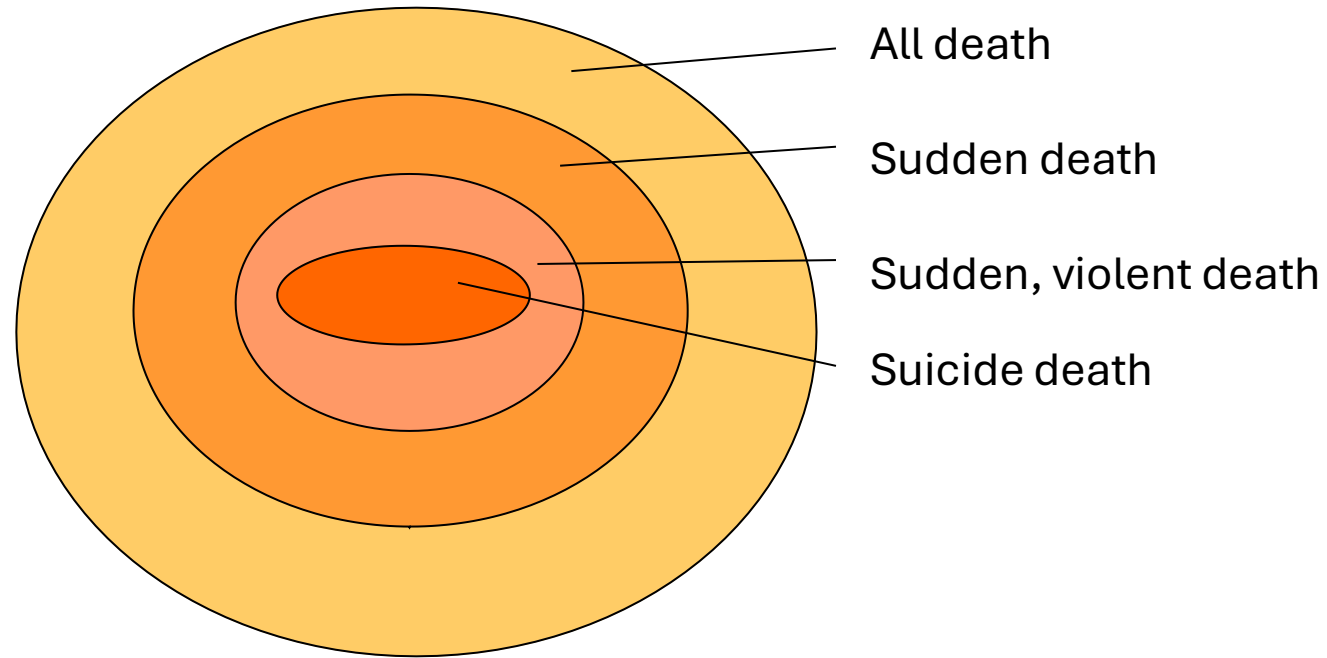
# Suicide bereavement



# Suicide bereavement

*The death of a significant other by suicide is a stressor of unparalleled magnitude in most people's lives, and even the most psychologically mature individual may encounter difficulty in responding to it.*

# Is suicide bereavement different?



Jordan (2009)

# Suicide bereavement

Shock

Crisis of values

**Guilt**

Relief

**Stigma**

**Blame**

Disbelief

Rejection

Anxiety

**Anger**

Horror

**Shame**

Unfinished business

Wasted life

Suicidal thoughts

How?

**Identity**

**Why?**

# Suicide bereavement is complex

**Loss** (grief, bereavement)

+

**Trauma** (witness or imagine)

+

**Suicide** (why? could I have done more? how could they do this to me?)

+

**Stigma** (feeling isolated, misunderstood, meaning in different communities, cultures and religions)

# Risks for the bereaved

**Mental health issues:** anxiety, depression, PTSD

**Substance use**

**Isolation:** disengaging from employment, education, social and community life

**Suicide:** increased risk

# Why does suicide increase risk to others?

Increased risk of suicide. Why?

- ❖ the pain of loss and grief – it's unbearable
- ❖ identification with the deceased - wanting to be with them
- ❖ punishment for perceived self-blame – I don't deserve to keep living
- ❖ modelling within the family – this is how we deal with adversity
- ❖ it is likely to be an interaction among these.

Attending to suicidal thoughts and distress is an essential component of work with those bereaved by suicide

# What does the research show?

- People bereaved by suicide present higher levels of depression, and suicide ideation and behaviour than other bereaved people.
- There is no one-size-fits-all type of support after suicide bereavement.
- People may benefit from different types of support depending on their needs and where they are in their grief process.
- Support groups provide an important sense of belongingness.
- Support is most effective when it is available over time in multiple sessions, whether it's from support groups or individual counselling.

# The Support After Suicide program



# Support After Suicide Program

- Established in 2004 by Jesuit Social Services
- Provides an integrated model of support for people bereaved by suicide
- Support is delivered by specialist counsellors with experience with grief, trauma and suicide
- Program is supported by team of lived experience volunteers
- Funded by Commonwealth Department of Health through three of the six Victorian Primary Health Networks (PHNs)



# How do we take referrals?

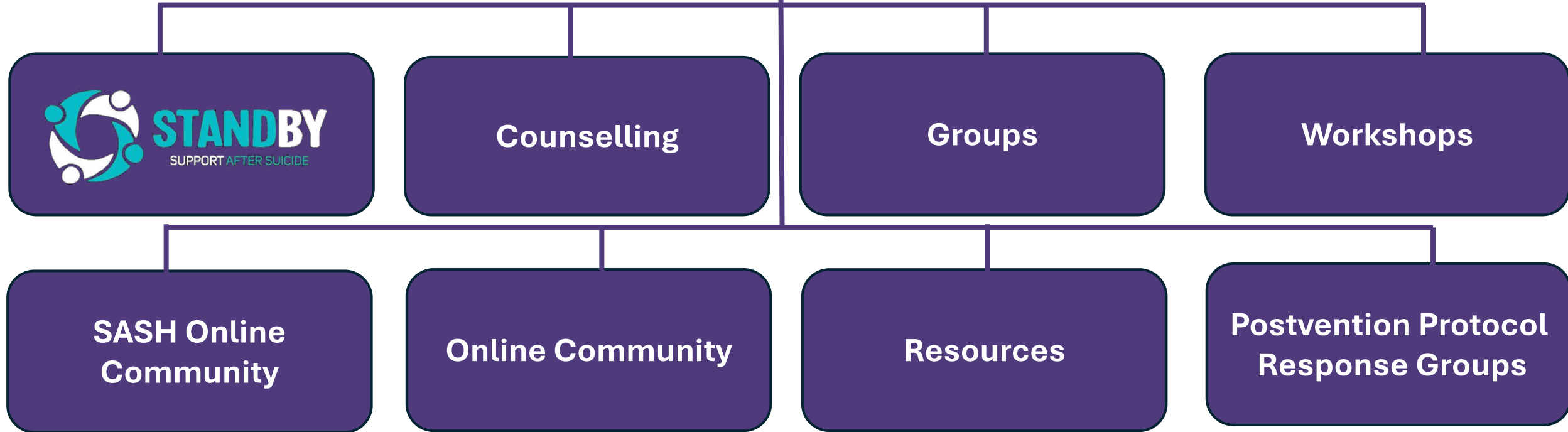
Our Intake Officer manages all initial referrals into our program. Referrals are generally received by:

- VPeR (Victoria Police)
- Coroner's Court of Victoria
- Phone call
- Email
- Warm referral from another service

Scan for our referral form



# Support After Suicide Program



# StandBy

- StandBy program in four PHN regions across Melbourne and Gippsland
- 2- year model of support including outreach, and scheduled follow up phone contacts
- Psycho-ed focus and connecting with local supports
- Community workshops- how to respond to suicide loss (sports clubs, schools, etc)
- Workforce development workshops



# Counselling

- Individuals/families/couples bereaved by suicide
- Specialist and highly experienced counsellors
- Locations in Richmond, Dandenong, Frankston, Lilydale, Brunswick and Sunshine.
- Support is tailored and free of charge
- Offered in person, online and over the phone
- Free of charge and for as long as needed



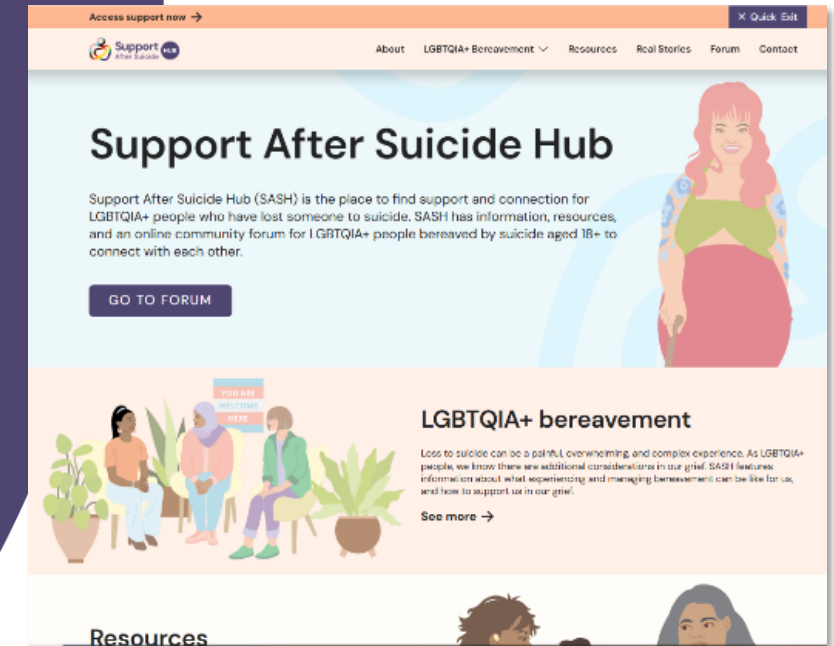
# Groups, Programs and Workshops

- Monthly peer support groups
- Eight-week early bereavement program
- Workshops – art, music, yoga, writing
- Special events – Community Day, Dr Rob Gordon, WSPD
- Lived experience volunteer training



# SASH (Support After Suicide Hub)

- SASH is an online resource and community forum for LGBTQIA+ people bereaved by suicide
- SASH combines the unique expertise of both Support After Suicide and Switchboard Victoria to support the unique and specific needs of navigating both LGBTQIA+ identity and suicide bereavement.
- It was developed under the guidance of a Lived Experience Advisory Group
- National resource, available around Australia



# Risks for communities

**Suicide:** increased risk of **clusters**

**Rumours and misinformation** including on social media

Widespread distress and anxiety

Inability to identify those at risk

# Postvention Protocol Response Groups (PPRGs)

- Support After Suicide coordinates two existing PPRGs in Southern Melbourne, Frankston Mornington Peninsula and Inner South East.
- A PPRG brings a group of local community stakeholders together to provide a coordinated community response after the suspected death of a young person by suicide.
- PPRGs aim to streamline organisational responses to a young person's suicide: both ***minimising the risks*** in the community in the aftermath of a suicide loss, and ensuring that organisations have the support to ***respond effectively*** and with full confidence.



# Community Support

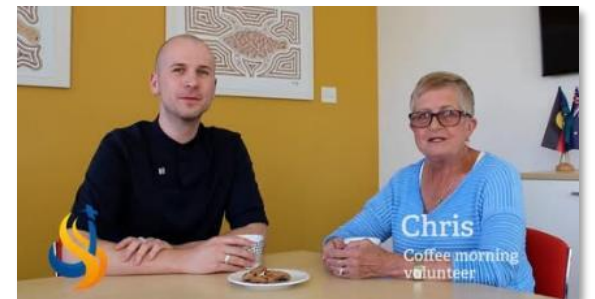


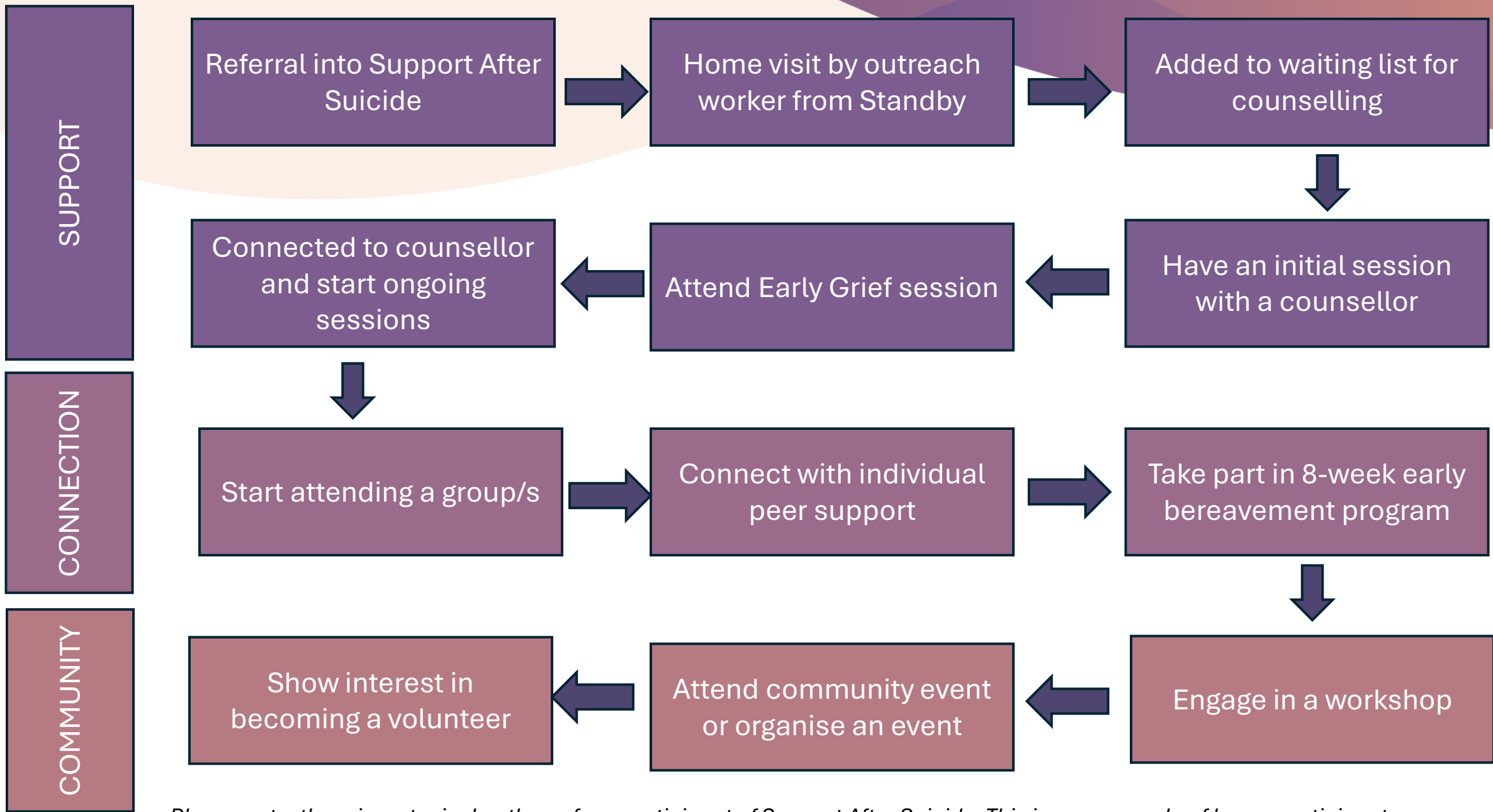
# Lived experience volunteers

Our lived experience volunteers are an integral part of Support After Suicide program.

Our volunteers offer our participants the opportunity to spend time and communicate with others bereaved by suicide, experience being understood and not feel so alone, and learn strategies to help find their way through the grief and trauma.

We currently have over 60 volunteers with our program, assisting with group facilitation, individual peer support, workshop facilitation, development of resources, speaking at information sessions and more.





*Please note, there is no typical pathway for a participant of Support After Suicide. This is one example of how a participant may access our program, and not reflective of the total of our participants. Participants have ongoing engagement with the program.*

“My counsellor has an ability to understand exactly what I am experiencing and having a wide range of resources and ideas to support me”

“...When you find out, oh the lady that was beside me had a daughter almost the same age as my son ... all of a sudden, you feel at home.”

“Our counsellor is amazing, flexible, genuine, supportive, expert and our guide during dealing with suicide. You need that when your world is forever changed.”



One thing is certain,  
and that is the fact that grief never  
leaves you – however it changes  
and evolves.

Your loss stays with you forever.  
It becomes a part of who you are.

A. Kellehear (2001) *'Grief and remembering'*



# Support After Suicide Resources

## **Website**

[www.supportaftersuicide.org.au](http://www.supportaftersuicide.org.au)

## **SASH (Support After Suicide Hub)**

A national online resource hub and community for LGBTQIA+ people bereaved by suicide [www.sash.org.au](http://www.sash.org.au)

## **Standby**

<https://standbysupport.com.au/>

## **Social Media**

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/supportaftersuicide/>

Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/supportaftersuicideau>

Scan for our referral form

