

Horizons

Bereavement support



**Northern
Ireland
Children's
Hospice**

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"A MUCH NEEDED, VITAL SERVICE SUPPORTING FAMILIES BEREAVED BY CHILD LOSS."

(A&E DEPT RBSHC)

Introduction

Child death in the family impacts the integrity of the entire family system and is considered the most traumatic and painful loss for a family.

In Northern Ireland, approximately 150 children die each year. Around 25-30 of these deaths occur in sudden or unexpected circumstances.

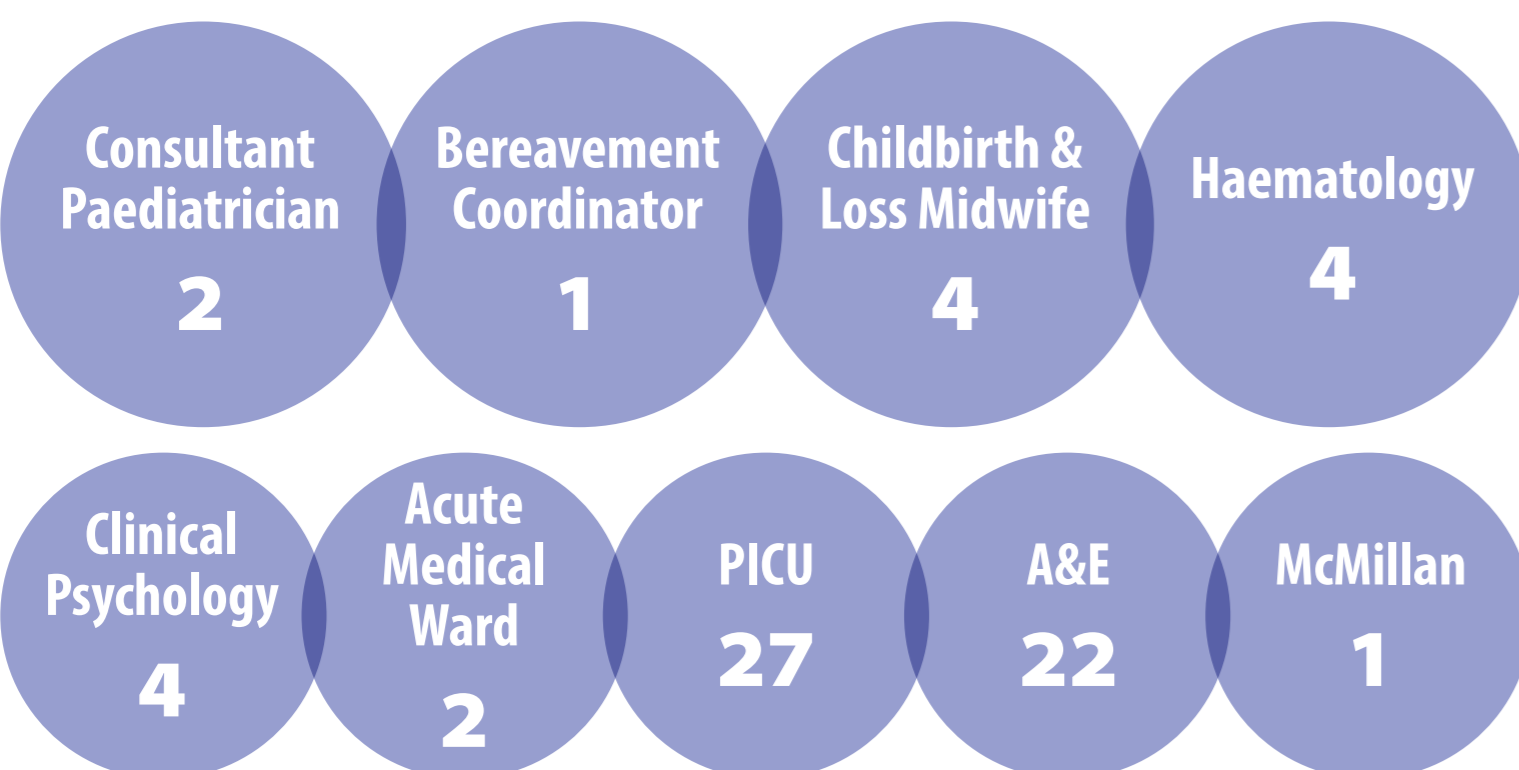
Bereaved parents are more likely to suffer symptoms of traumatic stress and experience severe problems with emotional dysregulation. Yet as a society we tend to distance from grief. **Approximately one child in every classroom has been bereaved of a parent or sibling.** Studies show that bereaved siblings may experience higher rates of behaviour problems, yet they are often referred to as the **'forgotten mourners.'**

Quantitative Stats for Horizon's Bereavement Service

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4 (to 31/05/2025)	TOTAL
We've supported 115 bereaved family members since the start of the project (October 2021 - May 2025).					
Family Members Referred	33	40	24	16	113
Family Members Discharged	2	7	37	22	68
Virtual Contacts	103	240	218	154	715
Face to Face Contacts	91	148	144	110	493
Contacts with professionals	4	11	14	13	42

Bereaved children = 67

Referrals



Cause of Death

SUDI	11	Sudden Event	22
Pre-existing Condition	22	Accidents (including RTA)	7
Still Born	1	Self-injurious	4

Family Feedback

"Being able to talk and feeling understood. Also, the help that they have done for my child losing his sister." – Parent

"Understanding that our worries and emotions are normal for grieving and meeting others in similar situations." – Parent

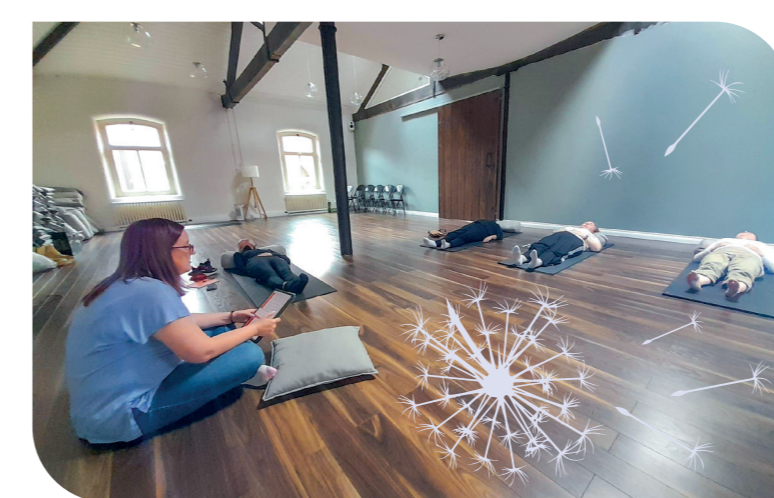
"None of my friends had ever been through this so it was good to have help." – Sibling

Just Breathe Café's Initiative



Our Just Breathe Café's Initiative is an example of co-production with bereaved families engaged with the service. Families suggested the benefit of other therapies for trauma recovery alongside the need for community connection. Hence our Just Breathe Café's Initiative emerged and launched in June 2025.

Research shows that breathwork techniques can be a valuable tool in trauma recovery, helping to process and release trauma-related energy, emotions, and memories.



100% of bereaved parents found the breathwork sessions very helpful or helpful.

"Really calming and helpful with breathing techniques I've never heard of that I can use at home. Girls were brilliant!"

Patient feedback

Community Partners Feedback

92% of staff felt the service was very beneficial for families after the loss of a child.

"Helps families have fuller lives after bereavement I think - and very important for siblings."

Nurse

"Excellent service, It is fantastic to send from the emergency department knowing the families are receiving follow up after such a devastating sudden event."

Doctor

85% of staff would recommend the service to colleagues engaging with patients bereaved family members.

The Horizon team have initiated an excellent working relationship with colleagues in the Coroners Service which we would hope to build on in the future. Support from Horizon team has been invaluable in providing a point of contact and direct assistance to families navigating the procedures required following the sudden death of a child."

(Something the families requested!) – Coroner's Liaison Officer

Evaluation Results

115 family members have received support, 37 have responded to formal feedback surveys over the course of the service representing a 32% response rate.

100% of respondents rated Horizon's Bereavement Service as **extremely helpful** or **very helpful**.

"The support has helped as I feel more able to express my feelings and I can talk to my family more now."

Sibling feedback

"The service helped us manage through the most difficult times. After every session, it gives us courage and strength to move on with life."

Parent feedback

100% felt the service **should continue**.

"I would love to see this service for every family as we did not know where to turn and when your child dies, you just can't think straight."

Parent feedback

64% would **not have accessed support** if it hadn't been offered.

This is a concern as research suggests that bereavement due to the loss of a child is likely to increase isolation and cause problematic symptoms for individuals and the family system that may warrant professional assessment and interventions.

Community Partners Training and Support

A common theme that has continuously arose was that families want to be 'seen' and 'understood' and those encountering bereaved families want to do 'better' and offer more support. Therefore, we felt it was important to co-create training and staff support targeting our community referral professionals. Hence, we have delivered debrief sessions to staff and delivered online training.

What our community partners say?

"The debrief sessions available to staff have had a huge impact on how we process these difficult events, cope on a personal and professional level and how we can be better for the next family we need to support."