

Committee(s)	Dated:
City Bridge Trust Committee	25 th March 2021
Subject: Grief Encounter: Learning Case Study	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	N/A
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of: Chief Grants Officer & Director of City Bridge Trust (CGO)	For Information
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Summary

This paper is a learning case study about Grief Encounter, an independent charity that exists to support children and young people who have suffered the loss of a parent or sibling, and a current grant holder. The case study aims to understand the challenges Grief Encounter has faced during Covid-19, how they have adapted and what City Bridge Trust (CBT) and others can learn from their example.

Recommendation

- a) For Members to read the case study and consider the learning for City Bridge Trust.

Main Report

Introduction

1. This is the fifth learning case study demonstrating the issues faced during Covid-19 by organisations you support and highlighting ways they are adapting their services and approaches. The purpose of these case studies is to identify good practice that CBT, and others, can learn from during this crisis period and as the sector starts to rebuild.
2. This case study focuses on Grief Encounter, which you awarded £132,800 over three years in September 2019 under Bridging Divides' Positive

Transitions Programme. In August 2020 they took up the offer to convert £43,522 project funding to core costs over 12 months.

What made Grief Encounter unique before the crisis?

3. Approximately one in 20 young people experience the death of one or both of their parents before their 16th birthday (Parsons, 2011). Bereaved children are vulnerable to serious mental health problems including depression, addiction and suicidal thoughts. There is no statutory provision of specialist therapeutic support for bereaved children and there is a shortage of mental health support more generally for children, who often have to wait many months before receiving help.
4. Since 2003, Grief Encounter has been providing free early intervention therapeutic services to help children, young people and their families to address their grief and mitigate future problems associated with bereavement. Their uniquely broad range of services includes: one-to-one weekly art and drama therapy sessions delivered by qualified grief counsellors, child-focused workshops, family fun days, group therapy split into age appropriate sets, a residential trip for families, Grief Relief Kits filled with useful tools for children to process bereavement and a telephone helpline.

How has Covid-19 affected Grief Encounter?

5. As a result of the pandemic the need for Grief Encounter's services has both increased and become more complex: lockdown has disrupted funerals, cut children and families off from their usual support networks, intensified the pressure on family relationships, prevented them from spending time with dying loved ones and exposed bereaved children to a constant focus on death in the media and wider conversations. This had led to unprecedented levels of demand for Grief Encounter's helpline and counselling services, and means the difficulties facing each child have become more complex.
6. In addition, the pandemic has been very challenging for Grief Encounter financially; much of its income generation depends on a biannual gala dinner with 900 guests, which had to be cancelled.

How did Grief Encounter adapt its provision?

7. Grief Encounter responded quickly, transferring their counselling services to online almost overnight. They prioritised the most vulnerable children who were suffering from self-harm and suicidal thoughts, and worked with their network of schools, GPs, social services and other charities to ensure children and families received the support they needed. The counsellors developed creative ways to facilitate art and drama therapy online, and also created group discussion sessions for teenagers. Engagement and feedback from children and families has been very positive.
8. The charity has been working to raise awareness of their webchat and telephone helpline, so that more children can access support in that way.

They have also led sessions for teachers on how to help bereaved children return to school after lockdown.

9. To meet the financial challenges, the fundraising team have proactively sought new sources of funding and adapted their relationships with donors, diversifying their income streams to include a patronage programme, corporate partnerships and other grants. This has enabled them to continue providing their services and improved their financial sustainability.

What made Grief Encounter particularly resilient during Covid-19?

10. Recognising the extra challenges they faced, with increased demand, the switch to online and the difficulties of working from home, Grief Encounter invested in their staff: they provided additional training and increased support and supervision for their counsellors. This improved staff's emotional resilience and in turn enabled them to be more creative, try things out and develop a successful online counselling service.
11. Their existing networks and commitment to collaboration – with a range of public and third sector support agencies – meant they were able to meet the increased levels of demand, learn from others and connect those who needed it to additional sources of support. They sought out feedback and advice from the families they help, their counsellors and other organisations to better understand needs and develop their services.
12. Financially, the support of CBT has been pivotal: for providing longer-term security of income over three years, for covering a core salary so the fundraising team can focus on generating income for counselling sessions and for adding credibility to their applications to other funders. Converting the project funding to core costs was also hugely important in enabling them to set up and improve their online services.

What can City Bridge Trust learn from Grief Encounter?

13. Grief Encounter's effectiveness and sustainability has in part been due to their collaboration with other agencies and their investment in staff resilience; CBT could consider supporting other organisations to implement a similar approach. In addition, their recognition of the importance of staff resilience shows the relevance of the work officers are undertaking to develop the Responding to the Resilience Risk 2 (RRR2) initiative. Resilience is a key issue for the organisations CBT supports, and being at the forefront of research in this area positions CBT well to meet the sector's needs in the future.
14. The example of Grief Encounter shows the value of providing funding over a period of at least three years, and of the offer to convert this to core costs during the pandemic. Going forward, CBT should continue to provide multi-year funding security and responsive flexibility for organisations.

15. One of the biggest challenges Grief Encounter faces is that bereaved families are largely unaware of the support available to them, particularly their helpline. CBT could consider if and how it could have a role to play in helping raise awareness of the services that funded organisations provide.

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