

HONEYSUCKLE FC

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY EVALUATION REPORT



MAY 2024



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Thank you to the men who kindly shared their time and views as part of the study.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

In the UK in 2021, 3624 babies were stillborn or died shortly after birth (MBRRACE-UK, 2023). There are a range of bereavement and counselling services offered to families after the death of a baby. However, these services can often focus on support for the woman and bereaved men can be left feeling unsupported. Honeysuckle FC is a group which runs bi weekly for men who have experienced pregnancy loss at any gestation and early neonatal death. The session consists of one hour of talking therapy / peer support with trained professionals who lead an open discussion with prompting questions followed by one hour of football. Honeysuckle FC had been running nearly one year and it was felt important to examine and evaluate the value of the support offered for men following the death of a baby.

Aim of the study

To examine men's experiences of accessing Honeysuckle FC and the self-reported impact of the service on them and their family.

Methods

The study used a sequential mixed method qualitative exploratory design. The data collection was conducted by an external researcher, independent to those delivering Honeysuckle FC. Information was collected using short online open text surveys and a group discussion which explored the insights gained from the survey. The link to the survey and the invitation to join the discussion were sent to all men who had been to a Honeysuckle FC session through the established WhatsApp group.

The data from the online survey were analysed using qualitative content analysis techniques organising the data into codes and themes. These themes underpinned the group discussion. The data from the surveys and discussion were synthesised together.

Findings

Twenty-one men answered the online survey (68% response rate) and ten men took part in the group discussion. Data were organised into four key themes.

“There was nothing out there for me”; a lack of support and a need for, alternative support for men.

Men reported struggling to find bereavement support which met or recognised their need for support. Some men had tried some other types of support such as counselling, but this had not met their need.

“It is a safe space to play football and share with people who understand”; Why Honeysuckle FC works.

The men reported many positive aspects of Honeysuckle FC. The men reported it was a safe space needed which enabled them to share their feelings with men who had “been through the same heartbreak”. The men also reported how football made it easier to build relationships and break down barriers.

“The impacts are astronomical”; the Impact that Honeysuckle FC has.

Men reported multiple positive impacts of attending Honeysuckle FC. These included the positive impacts that they had personally experienced as well as their confidence in discussing their grief, reduced isolation and improved relationships with partners and wider family members.

What worked well and what could be better?

Men reported many positive aspects of attending Honeysuckle FC, including the team approach and the friendly supportive nature of the sessions. They also described a few aspects which could be strengthened such as more support for men attending for the first time and opportunities for partners or wider family members to share the experience.

Conclusion

The study shows that Honeysuckle FC fills a notable gap in the provision of bereavement support to men who have experienced baby loss. The combination of playing football and having a safe space to share feelings with men who had experienced similar life events, made Honeysuckle FC ‘life-saving’ and ‘life-changing’. This sports-based bereavement group offers men unique and valuable connection and support.

Recommendations

Honeysuckle FC has a positive impact on men's physical and mental health and helps support positive relationships with partners and family members. Therefore this initiative needs continuing support and investment.

Honeysuckle FC as a model of provision for supporting men with grief by combining football and supported group discussion could be adapted and adopted at other venues nationally and internationally.

Honeysuckle FC fills an important gap in offering bereavement support, there is a need for increased awareness about the importance of support for men experiencing baby loss and the stereotypes and misconceptions which can persist about men's grief.

There is need for further evaluation, using standardised measures, to evidence the impact of provision like Honeysuckle FC and the benefits of sports-based bereavement support.





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