

Case Study: Speak Their Name Greater Manchester Suicidal Memorial Quilt

By Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership Suicide Prevention Programme

“Don’t rule out running a project online. We have members newly bereaved who have said they weren’t ready to attend a face to face group but found the Facebook group ideal as they could take part when it felt right for them.”

Adele Owen QPM, Suicide Prevention Manager, Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership

Why did you decide to start this project?

At the beginning of 2020, Adele Owen, Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership Suicide Prevention Programme Manager, and Rebecca Jackson, a mother bereaved by suicide and a textile artist, discussed the benefits of crafting when bereaved and the power of peer support. This led to the idea of bringing people together across Greater Manchester who were bereaved or affected by suicide to provide creative peer support while creating a suicide memorial quilt for Greater Manchester.

While the project was for people across Greater Manchester who were bereaved or affected by suicide, we hope it will raise awareness of suicide and the needs of those left behind after suicide loss for years to come.

How did the project begin?

Rebecca Jackson was commissioned to deliver the project by the Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership Suicide Prevention Programme. We booked community meeting rooms across Greater Manchester so those bereaved by suicide didn’t need to travel too far to the planned sessions, with the hope that

relationships would be built locally and might lead to other local peer support groups being established after the completion of the project.

We advertised the project through social media, Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SoBS) and various contacts and asked people to book through Eventbrite.

Initially the idea was for people to commit to attending weekly sessions for five weeks so they would learn new skills to produce their square for the Speak Their Name Quilt.

“This has come about through tragedy, but through tragedy we’ve built a support network, and who knows what we’ll create next?”

Rebecca Jackson, Project Lead

What challenges did you face, including Covid-19, and how did you manage them?

When restrictions were put in place due to Covid-19 we had to cancel all the booked meeting rooms and rethink how we could bring people together in a way that was safe and physically distanced.

We felt the project was too important to delay so we adapted and went online, creating a Facebook group. Rebecca's husband filmed Rebecca as she taught the group how to embroider and shared different quilting techniques. These films were shared with the group to watch at a time convenient to them. Members were encouraged to share their efforts and ask questions online, which encouraged others to participate. Many members found the group a supportive place where they felt less isolated during unprecedented times.

Members were really supportive of each other and gradually a little of everyone's personal story of loss was shared and we got to know the names of the loved ones who had died too young. The quilt was called "Speak Their Name" for this very reason. Those who are suicide bereaved want to talk about their lost loved one and for them to be remembered.

In the final fortnight of the project when Rebecca was going to have the challenging task of sewing all 54 squares into a quilt, she picked up an injury, which meant she couldn't sew the quilt together. Just as we thought we would miss our deadline, an experienced quilt maker and member of the group offered to complete it for us. Heidi McDermott did an amazing job and we couldn't have completed it on time without her.

What impact has the project had?

- The finished Speak Their Name Quilt was revealed at Manchester Art Gallery on 9 September before World Suicide Prevention Day 2020. It received wide coverage on social media and ran on the BBC and ITV.
- More than 100 people joined the Facebook group and got involved in the project, and members of the group have been very positive about the whole experience, believing the

project has helped them as they still work to come to terms with their loss and manage their anxieties while having their loved one remembered through a beautiful piece of art.

- The project provided a positive place to have some respite in the uncertain times of Covid.
- People contacted us from other areas of the country keen to be involved. As it was a Greater Manchester project these offers had to be declined but we are keen to encourage others to run similar projects.
- All those who have contributed a quilt square have written a short piece to accompany a photo of it, which will be published in a booklet about the project. Many have said how important this project has been to them.
- Connecting with people who had been suicide bereaved for longer gave them hope that they could also survive this loss. Watching the group grow to over 100 members reassured others that they were not alone.
- Not all members made a quilt square for the quilt, but they supported those who did, and were happy to be part of a group of people with shared experience.

“ If you are going to engage a group of people bereaved by suicide and offer them the opportunity to be part of a similar project, you need to plan for what will happen on the completion of that project. ”

Adele Owen QPM

Who enabled the project to go ahead?

- Rebecca Jackson had credibility with the members of the group, having lost her own daughter to suicide. Her enthusiasm for crafting was contagious and many have said how it has helped them when they have felt particularly anxious or overwhelmed.

- Heidi McDermott completed the quilt in the final fortnight when Rebecca was advised to have a break from sewing for health reasons.
- Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership for funding the project.
- The Manchester Art Gallery team worked so hard to ensure we got to reveal the quilt in their beautiful exhibition space as they had agreed to many months previously. Covid-19 restrictions meant we could only allow six people in, socially distanced, but this was arranged so we could complete the film we have made about the project. We made sure to involve the group members in the event by live streaming from the gallery. The gallery team hope we will return when safe to do so, when we will exhibit the quilt to the city over a few days.

What would you do differently if you had to do it all again?

- Don't rule out running a project online. We have members newly bereaved who have said they weren't ready to attend a face to face group but found the Facebook group ideal as they could take part when it felt right for them.
- If you are going to engage a group of people bereaved by suicide and offer them the opportunity to be part of a similar project, you need to plan for what will happen on the completion of the project.
- We felt it important to offer creative peer support to the group. These are difficult times for everyone, especially those bereaved who may face further bereavement due to the coronavirus, and it is important we keep people connected, particularly heading into the winter months and Christmas, which can be a difficult for many bereaved people.

How well have you adapted to working in a pandemic?

We feel a big sense of achievement that this was something we could have some control over, and which was positive for so many during very challenging times. Many of those suicide bereaved have felt isolated since their loss.

The story of the quilt, which we will share for years to come, now includes an additional angle as we have lived through lockdown during the project but felt less isolated due to the online community being such a supportive space.

“ There is very little support out there for families bereaved to suicide; we rely on charities for support, and service provision is a postcode lottery. If it wasn't for this group and this project, many individuals would, I believe, still be isolated and trying to get through on their own. ”

Member, The Speak Their Name Suicide Bereavement Group

What are your next steps?

- Rebecca has been commissioned to continue the creative peer support group for suicide bereaved people in Greater Manchester online.
- Different crafts will be explored, while peer support will continue.
- We hope to exhibit some of the pieces made in the future as we continue to raise awareness of suicide.

Contributor to this case study: Ellen Petty, Suicide Prevention Communications and Engagement Manager, GMHSCP

Read more about the Speak Their Name project here:
<https://shininglightonsuicide.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Speak-Their-Name-Booklet-2020.pdf>