



saferlondon

OVERLOOKED & FORGOTTEN

Ensuring adequate bereavement
support for everyone affected by
youth violence and trauma



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INTRODUCTION: OVERLOOKED & FORGOTTEN

The impact of youth violence murder on the network surrounding a young person is profound and far-reaching, touching the lives of many – both directly and indirectly.

Family members, close friends, schoolmates, teachers, and community members all experience a ripple effect of trauma, grief, and loss.

While support is available, it is often primarily only offered to the immediate family, leaving siblings and extended family, friends and community members without the necessary resources to cope with their grief.

These ‘forgotten grievors’ experience many complex feelings, grappling with fear, anger, and devastation. Yet they find themselves overlooked in the support process.

Even those most closely connected with the deceased such as parents, are often overlooked throughout the process with their individual needs and circumstances not addressed appropriately.

The support can feel generic and not tailored to their specific needs, lacking cultural competence and sensitivity. Often they feel let down by the support they receive, expressing that it is not provided at the right time, or delivered by the right person.

As a result, families may struggle to find the solace and understanding they desperately need during such a devastating time.

Too often education professionals, community leaders and the parents of the deceased, are left to address the emotional needs of those impacted while striving to maintain a sense of normalcy.

More needs to be done to ensure that every person impacted by this loss are getting the right support, at the right time, delivered in way that is right for them.

That’s what Overlooked & Forgotten aims to unpick.

By speaking to those directly impacted and listening to their experiences, we hope to understand what is and isn’t working, so that together we can look to inform and develop a culturally competent support model. A model built by the voices of those directly affected.

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YOUTH VIOLENCE: THE NUMBERS

47%

of teens had been a victim or witness of violence in the last 12 months

68%

of children that were victims said they'd experienced violence that led to physical injuries

47%

of children reported that violence and the fear of violence impacted their day-to-day lives

[Children, violence and vulnerability 2023: Youth Endowment Fund report into young people's experiences of violence](#)

THE BEGINNING: PHASE 1 RESEARCH

In 2022 Safer London was introduced to Karen Green Stewart, who lost her son Lamar to youth violence five years prior. Karen shared her experiences of bereavement and how she felt there wasn't the right support model in place for parents whose children had lost their lives to youth violence.

We knew we wanted to work together, to better understand the needs and what could be done to address those needs.

Our initial goal was to carry out a piece of research to inform the development of a new service model supporting parents who have lost a child due to violence. Recognising the complexity of this undertaking, we partnered with the Psychoanalysis Unit at leading research institution UCL.

This partnership was vital to make this work. The team headed up by Professor Peter Fonagy, would bring their expertise, experience and a track record of carrying out research involving distressing and sensitive topics

Safer London would support the safeguarding and aftercare of participants, whilst also bringing our knowledge of how this trauma impacts lives from our work with young Londoners and families affected by violence and exploitation.

Spearheading the entire research was Karen, whose direct experience brought an insight and perspective that neither organisation could bring.

“

We need to not only think about the loss of child to a family but also the loss of a child to a community. That is traumatising.

We can't control what happens in our lives, but we need society and systems to support us to positively move forward.

PROFESSOR PETER FONAGY
HEAD OF THE DIVISION OF PSYCHOLOGY
AND LANGUAGE SCIENCES, UCL

OVERLOOKED
& FORGOTTEN**PHASE 1 RESEARCH: METHODOLOGY**

At this time our partnership with Karen and UCL began with focus groups involving bereaved parents. Though initially focused on parents of children lost to murder, our research included mothers who had experienced various types of loss, from COVID-19 to suicide.

Through these focus groups, we sought to gain insight into the parents' experiences with the current system and their needs for a new support model.

We deeply appreciate the parents who took part and bravely shared their stories. Our priority was to ensure that the voices of these parents were central to the project, whilst also ensuring that they were safe and supported whilst sharing experiences rooted in deep trauma.

**PILOT RESEARCH
METHODS****2**

Focus Groups

5mothers took
part in the kick
off focus group**4**mothers returned
for the second
focus group**FOCUS GROUP ONE**

The initial focus group included five mothers and aimed to understand the type of support they received, what they found helpful and areas for improvement.

FOCUS GROUP TWO

A second focus group involved four returning mothers to explore what a more supportive and effective service could look like.

We understand that discussing the loss of a child is incredibly difficult.

To support the participants, we established a wellbeing process, whereby one of Safer London's Emotional Wellbeing Advocates was available to provide immediate support during the focus groups if required.

Following the focus group sessions, wellbeing checks were carried out over the phone with participants to ensure appropriate aftercare.

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PHASE 1 RESEARCH: FINDINGS

UCL used thematic analysis to explore the data collected from these focus groups.

The analysis helped to identify themes across the dataset about how mothers experience child bereavement and loss, as well as the support they were able to access. It also revealed the type of bereavement support that families would find most beneficial.

WHAT'S MISSING?

❶ UNSATISFACTORY LEVEL OF CARE

No support and wrong type of support

- No aftercare
- Not offered anything
- Counselling is wrong support

Parental support

- Mothers responsible for supporting entire families
- No bereavement help

Wider family and friends

- Victim net is wide
- No help for extended family and friends
- No specialist support for children

❷ NOT WHEN THEY NEED IT, WHEN YOU NEED IT

Barriers to accessing support

- Many emotional barriers after loss
- Self-referring through GP takes too long

Ingenuine and inflexible support

- One glove doesn't fit all
- Only accessible on their terms
- Feels like ticking boxes
- Scripted
- Not asking the right questions

WHAT'S NEEDED?

❶ COMPREHENSIVE TRAINING AND SKILLS

Training and skills needed

- Professional counsellors
- Specialist training

The person who helps

- Past experience
- Empathy
- Understanding
- Patience

❷ TAILORED APPROACHES TO BEREAVEMENT

Tailored support needed

- Each loss is different
- More options
- Tailored to each individual
- Groups sessions

Religion and faith

- Faith help should be an option

Ongoing support for families

- Support should not expire

❸ EXPANDING THE SUPPORT MODEL

Support model to match needs

- System is not built right
- Too bureaucratic
- Outdated model

Wider team and signposting

- Provide more information and signposting
- Different people with different specialties
- More authority

Support in legal proceedings

- Explain the processes
- Emotional support
- Advocacy

PHASE 1 RESEARCH: RECOMMENDATIONS

Through analysis of the focus group discussions, the research team determined that a newly designed and more effective bereavement support model for mothers and immediate family members should include:

➔ SPECIALISED COMMUNITY-BASED SUPPORT

Support from a trained and skilled individual who provides ongoing support to parents and families. This individual should have access to a wider team for advice on areas such as emotional health and wellbeing, legal issues and immigration.

“ A practitioner that was good at being a people person, and can adapt to many different people, but they had a team behind them with all the expertise that they needed.

PHASE 1 RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

➔ TAILORED SUPPORT FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY

Support should be personalised to meet the unique needs of each individual and family. This might include specialised support for siblings, options for group sessions, or incorporation of religion and faith.

“ This is how professionals need to deal, step back, ‘How can I support her? What kind of support does she need?’

PHASE 1 RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

➔ SUPPORT FREE FROM TIMEFRAMES OR CONSTRAINTS

Support should be available based on the needs of the individual or family, not on predetermined timeframes.

“ I think, for any bereavement model, it shouldn't have timeframes.

PHASE 1 RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

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“

I think one of the key things is their approach would have to be flexible, because you'd have to – every situation that you're going to walk into with a grieving family of a loved one is going to be very different...every single family are going to have different expectations of what they want, and they're going to have different needs.

PHASE 1 RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

PHASE 1 RESEARCH: NEXT STEPS

This first phase of the research was only the beginning. We knew more needed to be done.

We wanted to build on this initial research, to broaden our understanding of this issue. Our main goal heading into the next phase was to expand our research to include not just parents, but also the wider family, friends, and peers of those who had tragically lost their lives.

Moving forward, we continued working with our academic partners at UCL, but we also wanted to forge new partnerships with bereavement specialists.

WIDENING THE NET: COLLABORATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

When Karen lost her son Lamar to youth violence she was shocked to discover layers of red tape in accessing support for those outside Lamar's immediate family.

His best friend, his cousins and the shopkeeper who saw him every day – all of whom had strong and unique relationships with Lamar – were never offered any kind of bereavement support. When Karen advocated for access, she was shut down. This was something that was echoed in the first phase of our research



↑ Lamar (right) with his best friend Nathenial

When a person dies it's not just the immediate family who are deeply impacted by the loss. These individuals were often excluded from support, and that's why it was important for them not to be excluded from our research.

Building on the findings from the first phase of our research we wanted to cast a wider net and involve more voices in our research. We opened up participation to anyone who had a connection to someone who had lost their life to youth violence related murder.

We wanted to hear not just from bereaved mothers, so we encouraged participation from fathers, siblings, other family members, friends, classmates and colleagues. Recognising that the loss of a young person profoundly impacts everyone around them, it was crucial for us to understand everyone's experiences.

Our aim – to assess the existing support systems in place for anyone impacted by this type of tragedy, and whether that support is adequate for those who need it. Our goal – to inform a culturally competent model of support, one that is shaped by the authentic voices, experiences, and opinions of those directly impacted.

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It was at this point we forged a partnership with Child Bereavement UK. As experts in delivering bereavement services, their insight was essential to advancing our work. This collaboration enabled Safer London to create a new role dedicated to supporting this segment of the project – a Specialist Loss & Bereavement Advocate.



↑ Pictured Lamar's twin sister Lashawna

Experienced bereavement practitioner Nneka Okafor was seconded from Child Bereavement UK for 18 months, working as Safer London's Specialist Loss & Bereavement Advocate. This secondment agreement ensured the highest level of support, with Nneka bringing with her expertise and understanding of the complex issues faced by those affected by grief.

Her role was instrumental in the second phase of the research, shaping its direction and methodology, as well as serving as the main point of contact for research participants throughout the process, fostering the trust necessary to create safe spaces for sharing traumatic experiences.

“

Child Bereavement UK is proud to have been involved in this research which crucially is rooted in lived experience, relying on the testimony of families who are the real experts. Those taking part have experienced bereavement through homicide themselves.

There's so much that the research findings teach us in terms of the enduring nature of this type of loss, the uniqueness of each family member's experience, and the ripple effect that goes way beyond what people would imagine in terms of the wider community that's affected.

ANN CHALMERS,
CEO, CHILD BEREAVEMENT UK

OVERLOOKED
& FORGOTTEN**“ THERE WAS NOTHING FOR THEM**

The passing of my son Lamar was and still is the most difficult heartbreaking senseless feeling of grief that I and my family have ever endured.

I know there are many other families and friends in the community that have also experienced these feelings as a result of youth violence.

In the early stages, bereavement services offered to my family seemed unconnected, bias and only targeted towards the immediate family.

In the case of my son Lamar there was no bereavement support offered to extended members of the family such as his cousins, as well as his friends, neighbours, or the shopkeeper that saw him almost every day. All these people had a relationship with him for his whole life, but there was nothing.

I ask myself the question – are these individuals not impacted by his death? A death so sudden, in such a way. The death of someone they loved and cared for. The death of their friend.

After exploring myself I realised that there was nothing for them. What was there was full of biasness and behind layers of red tape. It was challenging, particularly for young people, who needed support to access it.

What I want to see in the future is for services to educate themselves on the impact a death has not just on the immediate family, but the wider community.

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Services must remember that they're dealing with human beings and human beings have a much wider circle than just their parents. Especially young people.

They go to school, they have friends. They are so many different people in their lives and those people are all equally just as affected by the loss.



These people are crying out for help. It has such a negative impact on their life and because there was nobody there to talk to or guide them, they can go on to live a negative life, with the root cause traced back to the incident.

There needs to be support in place within our current bereavement services, so they can be equipped to work with anyone who has experienced great loss and trauma. So, people can make some sense of their loss and trauma and manage it in a more positive way as they move forward in life.

KAREN GREEN STEWART,
LAMAR STEWART'S MOTHER
OVERLOOKED & FORGOTTEN STEERING GROUP MEMBER

OVERLOOKED
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To help promote the research and encourage people to take part we commissioned Neck of the Woods Films to develop and produce a [ten minute campaign film](#).

At the heart of this film is Karen and Lamar's twin sister Lashawna Stewart. Our goal was to provide a platform for them both to share their story, in a way that was safe and supportive. On the day of filming we were joined by Safer London's Loss & Bereavement Advocate who was there to provide support if necessary.

The film was steered and shaped by Karen from the outset. Through collaborative discussions with the production team she was provided the space to share her story in a way that she wanted it to be told.

“

These projects are the most difficult to work on. Undoubtedly, the film created will make an impact, but the human cost for storytellers is always a concern.

How much Safer London wanted to protect Lamar's family instantly put me at ease. They facilitated a process where we could work slowly with the family to find a story that captured what Lamar was like as a person and what happened to him. Going through that process made me feel so confident that this film would make a real difference and I was so excited to work on it.

Overlooked and Forgotten is the film that I'm most proud of. I am so grateful to Safer London, Karen and Lashawna for letting us be a part of it. It's changed the way that I look at work, it's shaped how I do things going forward and it's served as a reminder of why it's important to always push for change.

Project aside, getting to meet Karen and Lashawna and hear their story was a privilege. Their grace and strength is something that will stay with me forever.

CRAIG MCDUGALL
CREATIVE DIRECTOR, NECK OF THE WOODS FILMS

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↑ Karen Green Stewart and Lashawna Stewart filming with Neck of the Woods Films

Prior to the public dissemination of the film, a private screening was hosted for Lamar's friends and family. It was important to us that the people who meant the most to Lamar got to see it first.



↑ Karen Green Stewart and Nneka Okafor introducing the private screening of the film

The film was subsequently shortlisted for an award at the Smilely Charity Film Awards 2024.

RESEARCH LEARNING EVENT

On Tuesday, April 9th, 2024, Safer London, UCL and Child Bereavement UK hosted an event to share the preliminary findings from two years of research.

The event featured presentations from key members of the research and project team, including Safer London CEO Sherry Peck, Karen Green Stewart, and Professor Peter Fonagy.

On the day, Dr Chloe Campbell and Sophie Wallace-Hanlon from the UCL research team shared early themes from their thematic analysis, highlighting issues such as difficulties accessing support, gaps in existing services, and considerations around culture, gender and family.

“

I believe it is hard to overstate the importance of this piece of research. There is a major problem that is growing.

The services that we offer to families and the neighborhoods who've lost children to violent crime are inadequate because we know too little about what they need. We need to find out more, and this research will help us learn more

PROFESSOR PETER FONAGY
HEAD OF THE DIVISION OF PSYCHOLOGY
AND LANGUAGE SCIENCES, UCL



↑ Event speakers Dr Chloe Campbell, John Moore, Sophie Wallace-Hanlon, Karen Green Stewart, Sherry Peck and Professor Peter Fonagy.

KEY THEMES SHARED AT THE EVENT INCLUDED:

- Issues accessing support, including inadequate availability and accessibility of services.
- Significant gaps in support for siblings, extended family, friends, and young people.
- A lack of understanding regarding the role of culture and family ties in the grieving process.
- Gender differences in grieving, with men less likely to discuss their emotions.
- A strong need for a keyworker to offer flexible, ongoing, and multifaceted support.
- Support should be adaptable, offering one-on-one, group, in-person, online, and community-based options.



↑ Event speakers Karen Green Stewart and Professor Peter Fonagy.

RESEARCH LEARNING EVENT NEXT STEPS: TURNING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

These initial themes and findings reinforced the issues identified in the first phase of the research. Participants, drawing from their own experiences, expressed concerns about the lack of support and services available for extended family members, friends, peers, and other community members.



↑ Over 70 attendees joined us the learning research event in April 2024

Through this more in-depth second phase of research, new themes also emerged. These include the ways in which identity and culture can influence the grieving process and act as barriers to accessing support.

Whether this be due to racial or cultural stigma around mental health, or the tendency of existing services to overlook the family and community dynamics in certain communities, both of which can prevent people from getting the help they need.

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Safer London remains dedicated to practical research that directly enhances services and to sharing the insights we gain. From the outset, learning in partnership has been our foundation. We know that the successful implementation of these findings will rely heavily on strong partnerships.

At the event, the team at Safer London talked through our next steps, emphasising the need for a collaborative approach moving forward. Both phases of the research were deeply rooted in collaboration, with multiple partners contributing their unique expertise, experience, and knowledge.

As we move forward, maintaining these partnerships will be key to ensuring the successful implementation of the findings. Safer London is fully committed to continuing this journey with our partners, driven by our belief in generous leadership and our dedication to empowering communities.



↑ Over 70 attendees joined us the learning research event in April 2024

After the event, the UCL research team spent several months conducting a deeper analysis of the data and compiled a comprehensive report. You can explore their findings in the next section.

Discover the full research findings and
recommendations





UCL RESEARCH AND FINDINGS

Prepared by Dr Chloe Campbell, Dr Elizabeth Simes and
Sophie Wallace-Hanlon

BACKGROUND

The quality and consistency of support provided to individuals affected by bereavement by homicide is a matter of particular concern given evidence this group is at greater risk of severe and long-term distress when compared to individuals bereaved through non-violent loss (Boelen, de Keijser, van den Hout, & van den Bout, 2007; van Denderen, de Keijser, Huisman, & Boelen, 2016).

Individuals affected by homicide have described the uniqueness of the experience, how the event fundamentally changes the individual's sense of self and of the wider world, and experiences of uneven access to appropriate support (Alves-Costa, Hamilton-Giachritsis, & Halligan, 2021).

However, a recent systematic review has found evidence that the provision of support can significantly reduce symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and complicated grief (Alves-Costa, Hamilton-Giachritsis, Christie, van Denderen, & Halligan, 2021).

INTRODUCTION TO STUDY

The current study focuses on the impact of youth victims of homicide. In the year ending March 2023, there were 51 homicides where the victim was a teenager in England and Wales – 80% of these were homicide by knife or sharp instrument ((ONS), 2024).

The impact of bereavement following such a traumatic death is devastating, leaving long-lasting and wide-ranging impact on individuals, families and communities (Andriessen, Krynska, Rickwood, & Pirkis, 2020).

The aim of the current study was to listen to the experiences of those affected by the homicidal bereavement of a young person, in particular the study sought to ascertain what forms of bereavement support was provided, where there are gaps or inadequate forms of support, and what a potentially improved model of support might involve.

This study was co-designed and co-produced with a mother, Karen Green Stewart, whose son Lamar Stewart was murdered in a violent attack in September 2017. The study was initiated in response to Karen Green Stewart's concern about the quality and scope of support provided following the murder.

The current study is a collaboration between UCL and the charity Safer London, whom Karen Green Stewart approached with her concerns. The lack of provision for wider social networks affected by homicide – in particular young people – was highlighted by Ms Green Stewart and in an initial pilot focus group with bereaved mothers.

This view echoes a recent qualitative interview study which reported that bereaved individuals felt that the support provided was often not enough (Alves-Costa, Hamilton-Giachritsis, & Halligan, 2021), and the gaps in support for young people affected by such a traumatic event (Johnsen & Dyregrov, 2016) (Andriessen et al., 2020).

METHODS

STUDY DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

The current study involved individual, semi-structured interviews that lasted approximately 60 minutes, ranging between 18 mins – 1hr 17mins.

The study was conducted in collaboration with the charity Safer London. Safer London assisted with recruitment via their website, social media and community networks of affected individuals.

Individuals interested in participating registered their interest via an online referral form on the Safer London website, these possible interviewees were screened and contacted by a specialist bereavement support therapist seconded to Safer London from the charity Child Bereavement UK. Following this screening process, participants were sent a copy of the Participant Information form by email. If they wished to proceed, participants were emailed a link to an online database containing the consent forms.

All participants received support at the beginning and end of the interview from the specialist bereavement support therapist. All participants were also offered longer-term support from the bereavement support specialist following the interview.

Ethical approval for the research was obtained from UCL Research Ethics Committee (ethics ID number: 20129/004).

PARTICIPANTS

A total of 24 participants were interviewed between May 2023 and March 2024. Of these, three participants were mothers, two were fathers, four were siblings, fourteen were extended family (cousins, aunts, uncles, godparents and close family friend) and one peer.

A total of 32 referrals for research participation were received. However, eight referrals were not accepted. The reasons for this included participants' disengagement or a determination, made during an exploratory conversation, that the individual was not at the appropriate stage in their bereavement journey to take part.

DATA ANALYSIS

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The data was analysed using Thematic Analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2013), using NVivo software package.

One researcher initially coded the data, reading and rereading the transcripts, and drawing up an extensive list of codes. A second researcher then revised and reviewed the codes using an inductive approach. In discussion with a third researcher, the first and second coders reviewed the codes, which involved collapsing some codes, deleting some codes and recoding some of the data, and creating new codes.

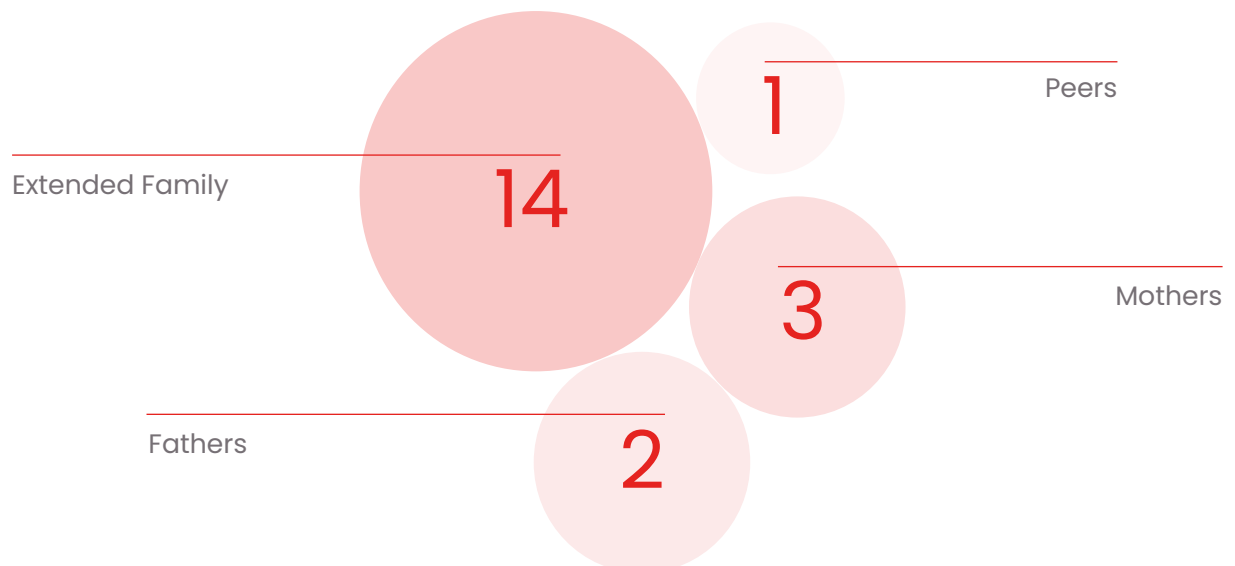
In addition, three themes and additional subthemes were agreed upon, and the codes arranged within the sub-themes. Theme and subtheme names were developed from the results to reflect the content of the findings.

DISCUSSION & FINDINGS

This study aimed to explore the experiences of individuals who have experienced bereavement in the form of the loss of a young person by homicide. We interviewed 24 participants in semi-structured interviews.

The interviewees fell into four categories: mothers (n=3), fathers (n=2), siblings (n=4), extended family (n=14) (cousins: 8, aunt/uncle/godparent: 5, close family friend: 1), peers (n=1).

By using a qualitative approach, we sought to develop an understanding of the experiences of affected individuals in the aftermath of a violent homicide, in terms of support received (both for themselves and perceptions of the support received by others) and their views about how a more supportive and effective form of help might be developed.



We arranged our findings into three themes:

- Experiences of support received
- Suggestions for a new service
- Reaction to the interview

EXPERIENCES OF SUPPORT RECEIVED

In relation to the first theme, **experiences of support received**, one of our initial and over-riding findings was the overwhelming complexity and devastating pain associated with homicidal bereavement. In response to such intense distress, participants recognised the wide-ranging, complex and ongoing needs of affected individuals.

Many interviewees were unaware of the possibility of bereavement support. One participant stated that the experience was like being: *“left in the wilderness”*.

“

There’s a lack of information. So those services might be out there already, but I don’t know.

PHASE 2 PARTICIPANT

Parents tended to be aware of existing formal services such as Victim Support, but some participants reported finding Victim Support unhelpful or insufficient; two mothers did report positive experiences from Victim Support’s services.

Out of the 24 people who shared their experiences, only two had a positive experience with Victim Support.

“ Victim Support has been one of the most... consistent agency that has been with me
PARTICIPANT

The remaining participants had either no contact with Victim Support and so were not offered any support from them, or had contact with their service but had a negative experience with them.

“ I felt that it was an assessment, there’s other victims that have felt like, it’s an assessment, and you shouldn’t feel like that
PARTICIPANT

However, even positive experiences were tempered by an awareness that it tended to be short term and limited in scope.

It was particularly noted that Victim Support was not provided to siblings, wider family, or peers. Interviewees felt there was a lack of support for affected young people, especially those who had witnessed the homicide.

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Many participants gave accounts of their help-seeking following bereavement, and a primary port of call for many was their local GP, with mixed results. Participants appreciated their GP's kindness and the referrals that were made as a result: *"It was straight forward and he was kind of understanding"*.

However, some GPs were unable to refer participants to appropriate care and these referrals sometimes lacked follow up and involved long waiting lists.

“

You expect a bit more proactive support from the GP, which wasn't necessarily the case. They kind of just gave me just this website.

PHASE 2 PARTICIPANT

Barriers to accessing support meant some turned to private support services, which were described as helpful, although an added expense with no guarantee of experience in dealing with homicide related grief.

Given how frequently participants described turning to their local GP, it would be crucial for any new service to develop relationships with and raise awareness of their offer within GP practices.

For participants who did receive some form of therapeutic support, experiences were, inevitably mixed. Two participants gave negative accounts of receiving Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) when dealing with complex bereavement. Others experienced the therapeutic help they received as either too short in duration, or insufficiently specialist.

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I didn't really feel there was anyone who could understand the vacuum that I felt inside. I didn't really feel anyone was gonna understand the effect the death of my younger brother had on my mental health.

PHASE 2 PARTICIPANT

Participants noted particular gaps in support for siblings of victims, the wider family, and peers within the community. In the face of the lack of provision of support, bereaved parents reported having to provide support or advocate for others, particularly for young people, whether siblings or friends of the victim

The impact on peers is significant, devastating and ongoing, but yet there is no support being offered: *“I see how his friends kind of fell apart and there wasn't anything for them. You know, these were also very young, very young adults...that had nowhere to put their grief.”*



↑ Pictured Lamar's brother Dwayne.

OVERLOOKED
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Many participants discussed the role of family in providing support, and provided poignant accounts of family members' care and concern for one another. In particular, it was noted that wide but close family ties are a feature of Afro-Caribbean culture, bringing family support and care – but also meaning that victim support services might not recognise the extent of the impact on wider family members such as cousins, or individuals closely connected with the immediate family, such as godparents and old family friends.

A further point made by some participants is that men were less help-seeking, and it was notable that some male participants reported that they had barely discussed their bereavement prior to the interview. It was suggested by some participants that this may be associated with typical gender roles in Afro-Caribbean families: *"We're a West Indian family, so therapy isn't something that comes naturally, especially if you're male, can't talk about things, not supposed to, not supposed to cry."*



↑ Pictured: Lamar's father Lesley.

Some participants noted that difficulties emerge for family in the aftermath of complex bereavement, leading to strains in family relationships: *"I was apprehensive to speak with them, because I don't know by me bringing the subject up, if I'm now going to trigger something in them so I've just left it."*

Many participants did report positive experiences in relation to the support they received, with talking therapies seen as helpful in navigating the highly challenging path of complex bereavement, and found it useful to talk to someone outside the family, particularly as there was often an awareness of not wanting to place additional burden on relatives.

Others, however, reported stigma around seeking mental health support, or that they found the idea of talking therapies unhelpful. Others noted that while therapy was painful, they felt that the challenging process was ultimately worth undertaking.

SUGGESTIONS FOR A NEW SERVICE

When discussing suggestions for a new service the consensus was that *“the bereavement process is a journey”*.

The long-term and multifaceted nature of homicidal bereavement means that a more effective bereavement support model would be on-going and flexible, with consistent availability of care that individuals can access as they need it.

It was emphasised by several participants that support should be brought to families, rather than requiring them to seek out help: *“what would have made it more useful was if someone, if an organisation reached out to us”*, and specific stages were highlighted as potentially significant – immediate support after the bereavement, in the run-up to and after the funeral, and during court proceedings.

These stages also bring different challenges with them, that may require specialist knowledge. Therefore, it was suggested by some participants that a keyworker model might be of value, with the keyworker being able to help manage the network of support the victims might need and help with liaising with different specialist services as needed, for example in relation to legal proceedings.

In discussing the interpersonal qualities required by individuals working to provide bereavement support, participants put a strong emphasis on the need for warmth, compassion and empathy *“I think you need that warmth with people. You’ve got to be able to show that compassion”*, and the capacity to build a trusting relationship.

Individuals reported feeling existing bereavement support services are somewhat impersonal – a box-ticking exercise as a phrase used by one interviewee. Another participant mentioned feeling judged by the bereavement support worker and how that awareness of being assessed undermines the feeling of trust.

“

Therapeutic trust is the key. That's the key to relationships. You don't trust someone you're not going to open up, you're not going to say anything.

PHASE 2 PARTICIPANT

OVERLOOKED
& FORGOTTEN

Some interviewees mentioned the importance of specialist bereavement support, with workers trained and experienced in working with those affected by youth murder.

The shocking violence and suddenness of knife crime was described as requiring professionals who has experience in this field. In addition, interviewees mentioned the importance of training and specialisation in working with children and young people affected by homicidal bereavement, an area where a particular gap in provision here was frequently mentioned.

“

When it's a knife crime it's the injustice and the unfairness and everything that's been taken away from you and in such a violent way. In such a in such a violent way. It's very very different.

PHASE 2 PARTICIPANT

In line with the idea of the importance of flexible and ongoing support, participants viewed a tailored form of support to meet service user needs as essential. Some interviewees, for example, found the idea of a group-based form of support beneficial as it might reduce feeling of isolation, whereas others preferred the idea of individual support. Similarly, some participants were open to the idea of online support being provided to some degree, with others were more comfortable with the idea of face-to-face support.

In addition, some interviewees emphasised the value of family-based support, and in particular, within that, ensuring that siblings and young people do not get overlooked. The differing ideas about what support might look like suggests that, where practical, a tailored approach to the provision of care is indicated.

An additional idea raised by some interviewees was the need for cultural understanding and sensitivity built into bereavement support provision, with interviewees pointing to different cultural practices in relation to mourning and funerals, as well as awareness that family structures may differ.

“

It would be nice if the people have researched grief as a whole, and when I say grief as a whole, understand that for some people there may be some cultural nuances in how we deal with grief. So, they should explore how grief is processed in different cultures, in different demographics.

PHASE 2 PARTICIPANT

OVERLOOKED
& FORGOTTEN

One of the key sub-themes within suggestions for a new service was the need for accessible and available services: *“something more accessible or more – advertised more like, just so that we could see that the help’s there.”* The importance of awareness, and the ability to access support within the community, perhaps via GPs, was emphasised.

Several participants raised the issue of availability to young people, with school-based support within affected communities suggested to meet the needs of young people who are often overlooked as friends or peers of the victim.

“

The schools are crucial... Young people at school and colleges are losing their friends to murder or violent death. They then have to face that and go back to school. They're not getting any support, and the school is not really offering any support.

PHASE 2 PARTICIPANT

And just as participants described the desired interpersonal qualities of professionals as warm and compassionate, the desired setting for help was described as welcoming, warm and unintimidating.

Many interviewees suggested that the setting should be separate from police or judicial institutions, others felt that home-based support should be offered according to needs.

REACTION TO THE INTERVIEW

Our final theme was related to how participants experienced the interview process.

Some participants clearly found the interview process emotional and indeed two participants reported that the interview was the first time they had spoken in detail about their experiences of bereavement.

Participants often clearly expressed that the subject matter was difficult at times, but also mentioned that they were glad to have the opportunity to express some of their feelings and to have the opportunity to contribute to thinking about what an improved model of support would involve.

“

Thank you for taking the time to speak to me. And I just really do hope that this research can generate some funding for families that really need the support, that we didn't get. Yeah, thank you really.

PHASE 2 PARTICIPANT

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A SERVICE

Analysis has indicated that a bereavement service or support should:

→ Be consistent, transparent, and flexible



→ Adopt a proactive outreach approach



→ Provide support at the right time with sensitivity



→ Assign a dedicated keyworker for comprehensive trust based support



→ Provide specialist support for youth violence-related deaths



→ Be tailored to support to individual needs



→ Ensure independence and neutrality



→ Enhance local and community-based support



As well of these core areas, research participants provided opinions and thoughts around the detail of how the support should be delivered, putting forward suggestions around support session content, location and length.



Consistent, transparent, and flexible bereavement support

A bereavement support service for those affected by youth violence must be consistent, transparent, and flexible to accommodate the complex and often lengthy grieving process. Consistency in support includes being easily accessible and available whenever needed. The service should be transparent about what it can offer, ensuring those in need can readily contact and communicate with the support team.

Given the profound impact of youth violence-related deaths, continuous, long-term support is essential. This support should extend well beyond just a few weeks, remaining available for as long as necessary, particularly during the first year, which is often the hardest. Regular check-ins during this period are crucial, and services should be mindful that anniversaries and birthdays can remain painful for many years.

Support should not be constrained by time limits, recognising that grief doesn't adhere to a fixed timeline. Building long-term relationships is vital for genuine support, especially for young people who may require extended care due to the deep trauma they experience.

Flexibility is key in bereavement support services. People should have the freedom to access support when they are ready, without feeling pressured or fearing that the offer will expire. Services must be adaptable to the unique needs of each person, rather than relying on a one-size-fits-all approach. This flexibility should also include availability outside the typical 9-to-5 workday, as grief does not pause on weekends or holidays.



A proactive outreach approach

After a youth violence-related murder, families often find it challenging to seek out support while coping with overwhelming pain.

It is crucial for bereavement services to take a proactive approach by reaching out directly to the affected families. Support should be extended to the entire family network, not just the parents, ensuring that everyone is aware of the available resources.

Even if families do not immediately accept support, services should continue to offer and remind them that help is available. This persistent outreach will ensure that when families are ready to seek help, they know where to turn.



Support at the right time with sensitivity

Support offered immediately after loss can be too soon, as time is needed to grieve before being receptive to help. However, others many value early support, recognising that while it may not be for everyone, it can be beneficial for those who are ready. Early support can also help family members better assist one another during the difficult period.

Even if support isn't accepted right away, it's important for services to make themselves known early on. Providing families with information they can refer to later is crucial, ensuring they have a point of contact when they are ready to seek help.

Support immediately after the funeral is particularly important, as grief can intensify during this time. Services should be especially attentive during this period, as the reality of the loss becomes more profound.

Additionally, court proceedings following a murder are often traumatic for families, highlighting the need for ongoing counselling and therapeutic support throughout this time.



A dedicated keyworker for comprehensive, trust-based bereavement support

A dedicated keyworker should be assigned to support families throughout their bereavement journey.

This keyworker should build a trusting, informal relationship with the entire family, not just the parents, offering consistent empathy during this difficult time. The keyworker would also be responsible for mapping the network surrounding the deceased, identifying those who might need extra support, and reaching out to them directly. They would connect people to appropriate services based on their needs and help navigate complex situations.

The personal qualities of the keyworker are crucial, with a strong emphasis on warmth, compassion, and genuine care. Empathy is vital, as it fosters trust, which is the foundation for effective support, enabling people to open up and express their grief.

Given the complex challenges that accompany bereavement, such as alcohol dependence, housing issues, and legal proceedings, the keyworker should help families navigate these issues by connecting them to a range of services.



Specialist support for youth violence-related deaths

There are unique challenges of grief resulting from youth violence-related deaths, underscoring the need for specialist bereavement support. The traumatic and violent nature of these losses adds significant complexity, making it essential for practitioners to have in-depth experience in handling grief, particularly around bereavement.

There is a clear need for practitioners to receive specialised training in youth violence-related grief, recognising that it involves different emotions, thoughts, and feelings compared to other forms of bereavement. This training should include an understanding of mental health issues that can arise, such as PTSD and nightmares. An understanding of how neurodivergence affects the grieving process is also crucial, as it can significantly impact how people process and deal with heavy emotions.

Specialist support must be tailored to different age groups, with age-appropriate approaches that consider how grief affects people at various stages of life. For young people, it is particularly important to have practitioners who can connect with them on their level, as this can make the support more effective and meaningful.



Tailored to support Individual needs

Bereavement support should be highly flexible and tailored to individual needs, allowing people to actively choose their preferred type of support.

It's crucial to offer a variety of options, including individual counselling, support groups, helplines, and a combination of one-on-one and group sessions. Peer support can be valuable for reducing isolation, while family-based support may work for some, others prefer to address grief outside the family dynamic.

Some may benefit from receiving support in their own homes, while others might prefer different settings for greater comfort. Online support should be available but supplemented with in-person options to address diverse needs. A hybrid model, including a 24-hour helpline and flexible phone or video support, is recommended.

Specialised support for young people should be creative and adaptable, with involvement in choosing support options and access to safe, informal environments like youth clubs. Overall, providing a range of tailored support options in various settings is essential for effective bereavement care.

OVERLOOKED
& FORGOTTEN**Independent and neutral from other services and institutions**

Bereavement support services should be independent from police and other institutional influences to ensure that families feel comfortable seeking help. Concerns about police involvement potentially deterring families highlight the need for a clear separation between support services and the criminal justice sector.

To foster a welcoming and effective environment, bereavement services must be perceived as neutral and unbiased, free from affiliations that could influence or pressure those who need to access it. The location and nature of support sessions should be designed to make individuals feel comfortable and avoid any authoritative or judgmental settings.

**Enhance local and community-based support**

Bereavement support services should be available locally to ease the burden of travel and reduce the emotional strain associated with accessing support. Integrating these services into existing community resources like pharmacies, GP practices, schools, and community spaces can enhance accessibility and convenience.

Community engagement is vital, particularly after incidents of youth violence. Involving the broader community can foster lasting connections and help people find ongoing support through various local networks, such as faith groups or social clubs. While some people benefit from religious support, it is important to respect personal preferences and offer options based on individual needs rather than default assumptions.

Schools play a crucial role in supporting students affected by bereavement, particularly after violent incidents. To address current gaps, schools should be better equipped with support plans and external services to manage traumatic events effectively.

Integrating counsellors into the school environment is essential, with therapeutic support becoming a regular part of the school day. This approach ensures that students receive timely and adequate support, addressing mental health needs and supporting their overall development and wellbeing.



REFLECTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

This research highlighted the profound complexity and pain experienced by those affected by youth violence homicide bereavement. It was also apparent through the findings that families, friends and communities often felt unsupported, with support either not accessible or not fit for purpose.

Many of those who took part were unaware of the support available to them, and existing services were often found inadequate, particularly for siblings and peers. There is also a significant gap in support for young people and men, who often struggle silently.

Often families themselves were left to address the gaps, providing emotional and informal bereavement support to not just family members, but the wider network. Whilst family support is crucial, especially in Black communities, it can sometimes strain relationships.

OVERLOOKED
& FORGOTTEN**“ IT’S CRUCIAL FOR SUPPORT WORKERS
TO PRIORITISE EMPATHY AND TRUST**

The recommendations for services as set out in UCL’s research and findings are supported by Safer London.

It is clear that in order to address these challenges, support must be ongoing, flexible, and tailored to individual needs, with proactive outreach during critical moments. It’s crucial for support workers to prioritise empathy and trust, moving away from impersonal approaches.

Additionally, support needs to be:

- Tailored to individual circumstances
- Specialised to address the unique aspects of youth violence homicidal bereavement
- Accessible to all who need it
- Culturally competent, particularly in relation to community stigma
- Recognise the intricacies of intersecting identities
- Considerate of the wider network, including siblings, peers, and extended family

By recognising these needs we can create a more responsive and compassionate support system for those affected by youth violence homicidal bereavement.

CARLY ADAMS ELIAS,
SAFER LONDON DIRECTOR OF PRACTICE



↑ Safer London Director of Practice Carly Adams Elias

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

At Safer London, we specialise in providing intensive one-on-one support to young Londoners and families affected by violence and exploitation. While some of those we work alongside have experienced bereavement, and our caseworkers often provide support in these situations, our expertise in delivering bereavement services is limited.

Over the course of this project Safer London's Specialist Loss & Bereavement Advocate developed bespoke training to help our team navigate these challenging cases more effectively. Even with this positive step, we still recognise that creating and delivering tailored bereavement services is outside our core expertise.

Looking to the future we are committed to collaborating with others to develop a new model or approach for supporting those affected by this type of bereavement.

Our goal is to establish a set of standards that will guide and inform professionals on how to engage with the broad network of people impacted by youth violence related homicide, in a way that is meaningful and impactful. This can only be achieved through collaboration with those directly impacted by the issue and the professionals seeking to support them.

Safer London is dedicated to working with both of these groups, facilitating discussions that will shape these practice standards. Once developed, these standards will be shared with the wider sector who can work to ensure they are implemented across their services and support.

What is clear to us that any model or approach needs to be led by and embedded within the communities of those affected, and we will ensure that their voices, experiences and opinions continue to be central to this work as we move forward.

If you think you can join with us to continue this work, get in touch bd@saferlondon.org.uk



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Safer London

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- Maninder Hayre, Director of Services and Partnerships

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GET IN TOUCH

To discuss potential partnerships or to commission our services, please email bd@saferlondon.org.uk.

For general enquiries please email info@saferlondon.org.uk

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“ SHARING EXPERIENCES OF LOSS AND GRIEF IS NOT EASY

Reflecting back over the course of this project, I can say that it has been a privilege to work alongside such an incredible and deeply passionate group of people.

Every single professional that has worked across this project past and present, has been fully committed to creating meaningful change. However, it is those who shared their stories and gave their time to share those stories that deserve our deepest gratitude and I'd personally like to thank every single person who took part in both phases of the research. Sharing experiences of loss and grief, particularly in the tragic circumstances, is not easy. Thank you.

I am particularly honored to have met and worked alongside some of Lamar's family, friends and community members as part of this important piece of work, and I would like to extend my thanks to them for their honesty, integrity and guidance.



↑ Karen Green Stewart and Lashawna Stewart

I would like to start by saying thank you to Alison for connecting Safer London to Karen and her continuous support of the project and research.

Thank you to Lamar's twin sister Lashawna, who courageously shared her experience so articulately and with such sincerity and intelligence. To Les, Dwayne, Sam and Mukesh – thank you for taking the time to feature in the campaign film. I'd also like to thank every person whose image was used in the film, including Keiron, Davina and Nathaniel, as well as everyone who attended the private screening of the film.

OVERLOOKED
& FORGOTTEN

Thank you Craig, Emma and Joe, as well as the rest of the team at Neck of the Woods Films, for treating this family with such care and dignity, and creating such a powerful film that told their story how they wanted it told.

I'd also like to thank everyone who attended the research learning event in April 2024, particularly to those who bravely shared their own stories of grief and loss on the day. Your experiences provided further insight and justification as to why this research is so important.

The biggest thank you of course goes to Karen for her unwavering dedication and commitment to creating better futures for families, friends and communities impacted by loss and grief. Karen has been the driving force behind this project, spearheading the research from the start.

Creating change is not easy, it requires courage, tenacity and dedication, all of which Karen has in abundance. Karen's ability to set her mind to something and make it happen, is unrivalled.

Lastly we can't not mention Lamar himself. It is so sad and heart breaking that this piece of research would not have happened if it was not for the loss of Lamar. I never met Lamar, but from what I have heard from his family, his friends and his community, he was an amazing young person who was on his journey to becoming an incredible man.

This project has been deeply meaningful to everyone involved, and I am excited to see the findings transformed into practical recommendations and solutions for better supporting those affected by this type of loss in the future.

HELEN GREEN,
SAFER LONDON MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

REPORT CREDITS

Report Design: Safer London

Report images:

- [Neck of the Woods Films](#)
- [We Are Photography](#)
- Additional images courtesy of the family

CAMPAIGN FILM CREDITS

- Craig McDougall, Director
- Emma Lieghio, Producer
- Joe Potts, Camera

This report is dedicated to the memory of Lamar Stewart



ABOUT SAFER LONDON

Safer London works with young Londoners and families affected by violence and exploitation.

Through specialist one-to-one interventions, we are supporting young Londoners to move onto the positive futures they deserve. We put young Londoners at the centre of their support, focusing on them and their needs. By building strong, trusting relationships we gain an insight into their world, begin to understand what they need and together we find the best ways to keep them safe.

With a footprint in every borough in London, we build trusting, professional partnerships to embed our approaches and work towards achieving our vision of a city that is safer for all young Londoners who live here.

Information on our services, including criteria and how to make a referral, can be found on our website www.saferlondon.org.uk

ABOUT DEPARTMENT OF CLINICAL, EDUCATIONAL AND HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY – UCL

The Research department of Clinical, Educational and Health Psychology at University College London undertakes world-leading research and teaching in mind, behaviour, and language.

It brings together researchers in a range of disciplines such as psychoanalysis, neuroscience, health, education, communication, medicine, behaviour and development.

UCL is the top-ranked university in the UK for research in Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience.
www.ucl.ac.uk/pals/research/clinical-educational-and-health-psychology

ABOUT CHILD BEREAVEMENT UK

Child Bereavement UK helps families to rebuild their lives when a child grieves or when a child dies. We support children and young people (up to the age of 25) when someone important to them has died or is not expected to live, and parents and the wider family when a baby or child of any age dies or is dying.

We provide training to professionals in health and social care, education, and the voluntary and corporate sectors, equipping them to provide the best possible care to bereaved families.

For more information or to support the work of the charity, please email: enquiries@childbereavementuk.org
Visit our website: www.childbereavementuk.org
National Helpline: 0800 02 888 40

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ACCESSIBLE SUPPORT

Child Bereavement UK – Supports families to rebuild their lives when a child grieves or when a child dies. We support when someone important to them has died or is not expected to live, and parents and the wider family when a baby or child of any age dies or is dying.

www.childbereavementuk.org | 0800 02 888 40

ASSIST Trauma Care – Specialist third sector organisation offering therapeutic help to adults and children, individuals and families, affected by a wide range of traumatic occurrences.

www.assisttraumacare.org.uk

Child Death Helpline – Dedicated helpline offering support to anyone affected by the death of a child of any age, under any circumstances, however recent or long ago.

www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk | 0808 800 6019

The Coroners' Courts Support Service (CCSS) – Emotional support and practical help for bereaved families, witnesses and others when they attend an inquest at the coroner's court.

www.coronerscourtsupportservice.org.uk

Embrace Child Victims of Crime – Supporting children, young people and families who are victims of crime.

www.embracecvoc.org.uk

Escaping Victimhood – Providing residential workshop programmes for those still suffering the traumatic effects of serious crime sometime after any court process is completed.

www.escapingvictimhood.com

SAMM National – Provides a range of peer support services to people bereaved by murder and manslaughter.

www.samm.org.uk

Winston's Wish – Provides bereavement information, advice and support for young people across the UK, as well as provides advice to the adults who are caring for young grieving people including parents, school staff and healthcare professionals.

www.winstonswish.org | 0808 802 0021



OVERLOOKED & FORGOTTEN

Ensuring adequate bereavement support for everyone affected by youth violence and trauma

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