

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering **28 February 2025**

SOS Survivors of Suicide Bereavement Support Association Inc. (SOSBSA) is a DGR registered charity based in Queensland that has been in continuous operation for 27 years (including during COVID). SOSBSA is run entirely by volunteers who all have a lived experience of suicide loss.

According to a report published by the Queensland Mental Health Commission in 2024 (Suicide in Queensland) 782 people died by suspected suicide.^[i] **The Report of the Chief Health Officer of Queensland** acknowledged that suicide is devastating to family, friends and the community—it is estimated that an additional 135 people are affected by each death.^[ii]

We estimate that over 100 000 people in Queensland are affected by suicide loss every year. Our Association is committed to providing support to people who have lost a family member or friend. Current research and the SOSBSA experience highlight the value of peer led support groups for the suicide bereaved.

Our volunteers offer the following services:

- Peer support groups run by two facilitators with a lived experience of suicide loss.
 - o A group is run in Brisbane each fortnight at the Drug Arm premises in Annerley (Inner South Brisbane). Group attendance fluctuates, but venue requirements cap the number at ten.
 - o Facilitators in Townsville run a group each month as well as an informal coffee get together for survivors. Average attendance rates are between six to ten at each event.
 - o An online group is newly offered for people who live in regional areas in Queensland.
- Maintain currency of the SOSBSA Facebook page and website which provide online support, as well as access to resources and information about suicide bereavement and services.
- Participation in awareness raising events such as the annual Out of the Shadows Walk that takes place on World Suicide Prevention Day.

To offer these services SOSBSA works to maintain relationships with a range of other organisations that provide suicide prevention and postvention services, as well as mental health and alcohol and other drug services (including Drug Arm in Brisbane, Townsville Suicide Network, Standby and Lifeline.)

The Association consists of subscribed members and is managed by a committee of six volunteers with a lived experience of suicide loss. Our volunteer committee members and group facilitators all commit regular time on an ongoing basis to support Queenslanders who are suicide bereaved. And each of the volunteers describe a similar motivation.



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I went to a support group six months after my adult son died by suicide, following a brief and tumultuous mental illness and substance use problem. By this time, many of my friends and family had melted away. Those still in touch with me seemed surprised that I still felt completely overwhelmed by grief and trauma. Despite being linked in with a good psychiatrist and therapist I was isolated and struggled to get back to meaningful work and social connections. Attending a group with similarly bereaved parents, children, spouses, siblings, and friends was invaluable. I cannot begin to highlight the positive impact on my wellbeing.

For me the value lay in meeting people with similar experiences. It was such a relief to be able to share my thoughts and feelings with people who truly understood. It was also a relief to meet people who had survived as my biggest fear was that I wouldn't.

I have attended the group frequently over the last six years and met hundreds of bereaved people, some who attend once only, and others who attend regularly for many months. The consistent feedback is that the experience of peer support is very helpful.

Rewards of volunteering

- Giving back to others the peer support that helped in the early days of our bereavement.
- The opportunity to experience a sense of supportive community.
- The opportunity to remember and pay tribute to those lost to suicide.
- SOSBSA has a well-functioning small committee of resolute volunteers but issues around succession planning are present.
- SOSBSA fosters good interpersonal relationships between volunteers, including opportunities for debriefing and support to volunteers and visitors after stressful sessions.
- Being part of the voice representing those who we have lost.

Barriers and challenges to volunteering

As volunteers we all have jobs and/or family commitments.

- The time cost of volunteering can impact on earning capacity, health and personal relationships.
- The emotional cost of volunteering in the suicide postvention space can impact on earning capacity, personal relationships, physical health and emotional wellbeing.
- When volunteer group facilitators are sick or on vacation there can be an impact on the capacity to continue to offer the groups. There is no sick leave or holiday leave.



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- There is limited capacity to account for the impact of an injury or psychological harm related to carrying out the duties of a support group facilitator.
- While SOSBSA has insurance this may not provide the coverage to address potential impacts i.e. vicarious and/or relived trauma.

What would help?

- Recognition of the value of volunteering through initiatives such as:
 - The inclusion of volunteer leave into the package of leave entitlements by employers
 - An additional allowance for those on a pension
 - Tax concessions for volunteering, not just donations
- Easy access to the equivalent of an Employee Assistance Program for volunteers.

^[i] [Queensland Suicide Data](#)

^[ii] [Suicide and self-harm | Report of the Chief Health Officer Queensland](#)