**Cumas New Ross**

**Bereavement Procedure**

**Purpose**:

To set out guidelines on working with individuals we support and their families prior to, during and following a bereavement.

**Background:**

We have a number of individuals we support who have experienced losses of close family members and extended family members in the past number of years. The individual’s involvement has been determined by, in most instances, the family. However, in the vast majority of cases, this has resulted in the exclusion of the individual from the planning process of the funerals, the active participation within the funeral and the decision making regarding the estate and/or their own living arrangements following the funeral and reading of the will. This exclusion process usually begins well before the death occurs through lack of consultation during an illness.

It is very rare that any exclusion is deliberate, more accurately it is an attempt by the other family members to protect the individual and lessen the impact of the death on her/him. It also regularly demonstrates the lack of understanding of the individual’s abilities and the inability of the rest of the family to ‘cope’ with the individual. This is particularly true if it is the primary carer of the individual who has passed away. However, as we are aware, there is nothing that can lessen the impact of the death of a loved one except to be given the opportunity to grieve in a manner that is appropriate for the individual.

**Procedure:**

1. As soon as you are made aware that a family member is either:
   1. Seriously ill or
   2. Passed away

Pass all relevant information to the Family Liaison Officer (FLO).

1. Family Liaison Officer will make contact with the documented next of kin to:
   1. Establish exactly the nature of the illness and who is affected
   2. What information the individual knows and/or the family wish to have passed on, always encouraging full disclosure
   3. Establish rapport and offer support
   4. Ensure that the next of kin have the relevant contact numbers for the FLO in case of emergency
2. If the family member is seriously ill the FLO will:
   1. Establish how close the individual is to that family member
   2. Establish if the family/the individual wish to visit
      1. In the event that the individual wishes to visit but the family do not wish it, the family’s wishes must be respected. It is the FLO’s responsibility to work as an advocate for the individual but not to create a rift or undue stress to the family in a very difficult time. The FLO will discuss with the family how they wish the situation to be addressed and who they wish to address it with the individual. In most cases the family will opt for the FLO to discuss it with the individual but if it is a family member that will discuss it then the FLO will need to offer his/her self as a support/advocate for the individual.
      2. In the event that the family wish the individual to visit the family member but the individual does not wish to, it is up to the FLO to establish the reasons why the individual is reluctant and offer reassurance. As in i above it is up to the FLO to be an advocate for the Individual we support and to negotiate on their behalf whilst respecting the family wishes and dynamics.
   3. If visiting is agreed, establish a visiting schedule and who is responsible for ensuring the individual can access it.
   4. Establish with the family the next steps should the family member pass away.

1. If the family member has passed away the FLO will:
   1. Establish if the Individual we support is in or out of the Service
      1. If individual is in the Service, check if the family wish for him/her to be brought home
      2. If individual is out of the Service, check if the family wish for him/her to be collected and brought into the Service, reinforcing the importance of routine etc
   2. Establish if the family wish to inform the individual themselves or if they would like the FLO to inform her/him with the support of the keyworker.
      1. If the family wish to inform the individual, the FLO will organise to accompany her/him to the designated meeting place.
      2. Once the FLO and the Individual arrive, the FLO will offer to remain as a support if the family so wishes.
   3. Establish what the funeral arrangements are and what support may be required for the duration of the proceedings.
   4. Encourage the family to involve the individual in all aspects of the funeral arrangements and the funeral itself.
   5. If the bereavement occurs during the working week, encourage the family to have the individual to continue with their routine as it has been determined that this minimises the impact on the individual and gives them the facility to discuss their feelings etc with their keyworker without having to worry about upsetting anyone.
   6. If the bereavement is of the primary carer of the individual, establish a link with a senior family member to discuss the individual’s future once the funeral has occurred and a period of mourning has been observed (this can be between 2 weeks and a month depending on the circumstances).
      1. The FLO will also inform the HSE that the individual’s primary carer has deceased thereby alerting Social Services.
2. Following the funeral, the FLO will meet the family with the Individual we supports agreement to discuss the impact of the bereavement on the Individual we support.
   1. Information on counselling services will be given
3. If the primary carer is the deceased, the FLO will, with agreement from the individual:
   1. Meet with the family to discuss the living arrangements for her/him
   2. Establish the facts regarding next of kin etc
   3. Refer the family to Social Services if appropriate
   4. Work with the keyworker and the individual to establish a training plan to address any deficits.