

How does choosing to fundraise in memory impact the bereavement journey?

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Contents

Summary and recommendations	3
Introduction	5
Methods	8
What did we learn about experiences of fundraising in memory?	11
Reflections	20
Funding	24
Acknowledgements	25
References	26

Summary and recommendations

WE spoke to eighteen people about their experiences of fundraising in memory, raising money for a charity that they or their family member was a beneficiary of. Each person's bereavement journey was unique. The findings from this research have shown that fundraising in memory helped people to make meaning after loss in a variety of ways. Most people wanted to take part in fundraising to honour the memory of their family member; to give back to the people that had helped them; and out of a sense of duty and gratitude. Fundraising in memory helped people to strengthen their current social connections with friends and family, and develop new connections

with other fundraisers. This is crucial for reducing loneliness which many people experience after bereavement.

All participants reported feeling an improvement in their subjective wellbeing after taking part in fundraising, this included physical and emotional changes over the long and short term. For some, fundraising in memory provided a focus for their attention, or a distraction from grief. Many participants reported experiencing emotional, practical and or physical challenges while completing fundraising in memory. However, many welcomed these challenges and wanted to take them on as deeply meaningful activities.



There can be reluctance within charitable organisations to talk to beneficiaries about fundraising. This may be due to it not being the appropriate time, societal taboos around talking about money, or the fear of implying that beneficiaries owe something for the care they have received. In some instances, this may lead to fundraising being seen as a separate ‘necessary evil’, rather than being harmonious with the charity’s goals. We hope that the positive experiences people shared in this research can help to break down those barriers and start a conversation around the holistic benefits of fundraising.

Recommendations for fundraising organisations

1. Fundraising teams should acknowledge, respect, and take into consideration each person’s unique circumstances and motivations for taking part in fundraising in memory.
2. The support fundraisers provide should be personalised and where possible be from the same person to enable relationships to form.
3. Fundraising organisations could enhance the acknowledgment provided after fundraising events to ensure people feel appreciated and valued.
4. Fundraising organisations could enhance people’s improved social connections developed through fundraising in memory.

Recommendations for research

5. More research is required to examine the impacts of fundraising for people with different experiences of bereavement, not just those related to terminal illness.
6. Future research should explore the thoughts, opinions and experiences of people from diverse ethnic communities with fundraising in memory, and how fundraising organisations could better support people from these communities.

Introduction

BEREAVEMENT is the experience of the death of a person who is important to us.¹ Bereavement is usually accompanied by grief, which is the process and range of emotions experienced after a loss.¹

Bereavement can have a significant emotional and psychological impact, especially in the initial months after losing someone.² It can increase a person's risk of experiencing physical and mental health issues.³

Experiencing bereavement

Many different factors can contribute to someone's response to bereavement, including their relationship to the person who died, their age or what support they may have received. Bereavement can impact people socially as well as emotionally, affecting people's relationships, work and daily activities.

It can cause people to reduce their social circle, interacting less with others and becoming more insular.⁷ After a bereavement many people re-evaluate their sense of purpose and meaning in life.^{8,9} It can affect people in different ways, and a number of emotions can be felt at the same time.

One model of grief developed by Lois Tonkin in 1996 suggests that grief does not become smaller over time, but that life grows around the grief.¹⁰ In this model, people's feelings of grief stay just as intense and 'big', but their coping and life skills increase.

The widely popular Kübler-Ross model of grief, states that there are five stages within the grief journey.¹² The five stages are: denial – feelings of shock and disbelief that this could happen; anger – blaming yourself and others; bargaining – feelings of guilt that there is something you could

Figure 1. Illustration of the 'Growing around grief' model by Lois Tonkin¹⁰



Source: whatsyourgrief.com/growing-around-grief.¹¹

have done; depression – feeling tired, like you have lost everything and nothing makes sense; acceptance – acknowledging the situation, although you may not like it and being able to move on.¹² However, it is common to move backwards and forwards throughout these stages, and to acknowledge that these may not appear the same for everyone.

Stroebe and Schut theorise that there is a dual process of coping with bereavement, in that the individual moves between confronting and avoiding the loss.¹³ This theory describes a duality of feeling a range of emotional reactions ‘from pleasurable reminiscing to painful longing, from happiness that the deceased is no longer suffering to despair that one is left alone.’¹³

Silverman and Klass’s continuing bonds theory expands on this further, describing the impact of bereavement as a transformational ongoing process rather than one with a finite end.¹⁵ They explain the need for people to continue

relationships with the deceased, which may involve memorialising and sharing memories with others.¹⁵

Fundraising in memory

Many people decide to donate or fundraise for charity after experiencing a loss. Legacy Foresight research found that one third of adults have given money in memory over the past 12 months, and giving totals are over £2 billion a year.¹⁶ Across the fundraising sector there is a greater emphasis on in-memory giving, which has been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and the increase in people who have been bereaved. As during the pandemic, nearly 200,000 people in the UK faced the loss of someone they knew on top of the usual 600,000 annual deaths from other causes.¹⁷

Fundraising in memory can take many forms, including collecting donations in lieu of flowers at a funeral, organising an event, such as a coffee morning or



a pamper day, or taking on a physical challenge, like running a marathon, or doing a trek. Often people may start by an initial funeral donation and over years will continue to do other activities in the memory of their loved one.

Charities, such as Marie Curie, that provide direct care often find beneficiaries want to 'give back' by donating, fundraising or volunteering. Many people choose to support the charity that cared for loved ones in their final days. However, despite what we know about fundraising in memory, the Chartered Institute of Fundraising is quoted as saying 'Whilst in-memory giving has grown rapidly in recent years, charities still struggle with this sensitive subject.'¹⁸ There is a lack of evidence and research on these issues.

Bereavement and fundraising research

There has been little previous research into fundraising and the experience of bereavement. One study found that a permanent memorial was an important way for people to create continuing bonds with the person who died.¹⁹ However, the author highlighted the lack of research into people's motivations for fundraising when there is no physical memorial involved.¹⁹ The findings of the Legacy Foresight's research in 2020 'Understanding In-Memory Stewardship' provided fundraising teams with insight into how best to support people fundraising in memory, but the focus was on the supervision and management of donors rather than determining what, if any, impact fundraising had on the person's bereavement experience.²⁰

Methods

THIS report describes a research project which aimed to explore people's experiences of fundraising in memory after experiencing bereavement from a relative or friend who had utilised specialist palliative care services. The study was ethically approved by the University of Leeds SoMREC (School of Medicine Research Ethics Committee) (Ref: MREC 21-058, Date: 22/09/2022.)

Who did we invite to take part?

We invited people to take part who:

- Had experienced bereavement after the death of a close relative or family friend, and that person had used Marie Curie specialist palliative care services before they passed
- Had completed at least one fundraising in memory activity for Marie Curie
- Had given consent to be contacted for research purposes
- Were at least 18 years old, and had capacity

We did not interview people who had experienced a bereavement within the last six months. This was because the interviews involved potentially emotive questions. We also excluded people who worked professionally in fundraising with Marie Curie due to bias and a conflict of interest. We aimed to invite people from all four UK nations, who had undertaken different types of fundraising activities.

What did we do?

We undertook telephone interviews with 18 people. The interviews lasted around 45 minutes. The interviews were based upon a specially designed semi-structured interview guide, which explored topics such as: motivations and challenges in fundraising, and experience of the different types of fundraising activities. The telephone interview recordings were transcribed, and all identifying details from participants were removed. As a research team, we analysed the data to understand the key themes and messages using a qualitative data analysis software program called NVivo.

When and where did the research take place?

The interviews took place between March-September 2023. The interviews were over the telephone with people from across the UK.

Who took part in the interviews?

Eighteen people took part in interviews, as shown in Table 1 on page 9. People fundraised for a variety of different people in their lives, including their parents, siblings, grandparents, godparents and other relatives. Most people fundraised for a person who had cancer.

Table 1. Participants in the interviews



Diversity and public consultation

We wanted to make this research relevant and impactful to the people with lived experience of bereavement and to more diverse communities. To help the research team understand the findings further we spoke with members of the Marie Curie Research Voices group. The Marie Curie Research Voices group is a group of people with lived experience of palliative care, who help guide research, changes in service delivery and policy across the four nations of the United Kingdom.²¹ These representatives from the Research Voice group looked at early versions of the findings and offered suggestions to make the findings more easily understandable.

We also wanted to make the findings relevant to people from diverse ethnic groups, and explore different perspectives on fundraising and bereavement. The people who took part in our study were all from White ethnic groups. We spoke with Dr Yansie Rolston from the Ubele Initiative to reflect upon some of these issues from the perspective of people from Black and racially minoritised communities. The Ubele Initiative is a social enterprise with a mission to contribute to the sustainability of the African Diaspora community.²² Dr Rolston has provided some comments for this report which are presented below within the Reflections section.



What did we learn about experiences of fundraising in memory?

People reported a diverse range of experiences. Four key themes emerged from the interviews:

1. Making meaning after loss;
2. Challenges and burdens of fundraising;
3. Fundraising support needs;
4. Looking to the future, remembering the past.

1. Making meaning after loss

Honouring memory

Participating in fundraising activities represented a chance for people to make meaning out of their experiences of bereavement. Most participants reported wanting to take part in fundraising activities to remember the person they had lost, and to honour their memory.

“It was two very good motivating factors to do something to kind of honour my Mum’s memory and to pay my respects to her and to do something which I felt could hopefully raise a sort of half decent amount of money.”

Fundraiser age 40–49 years, running event in memory of their mother

Honouring the memory of their friend or relative, it was this that gave them the motivation to take part, and keep on going, even when it was emotional.

“I knew what I was doing it for and who I was doing it for and who I had in mind. You know, it is just a

very emotional thing but it’s also like enthralling.”

Fundraiser age 20–29 years, running event in memory of their father

A sense of duty and gratitude

Many felt a sense of duty to undertake the fundraising, this motivation occurred naturally without anyone encouraging them to fundraise, or promoting fundraising to them. Participants felt it was a way they could ‘give back’ to specialist palliative care, whilst ensuring that other people in the future could receive the same support.

“It was a combination of Mum and Dad and thinking of the support they had during that time. [...] and appreciation really of the support that they had both received.”

Fundraiser age 60–69 years, multiple events in memory of their mother and father

Some used the fundraising as a way to say ‘thank you’ because they felt an immense sense of gratitude for the support they received. The fundraising signified a way to say thank you to services as well as individual staff members. Because the service was free to access and funded by public donations, for some fundraising was a way of ‘paying’ for something they felt was invaluable.

“Honest to God, I think I owe them a debt forever more...No matter how much I could ever raise for them, it wouldn’t be enough you know?”

Fundraiser age 40–49 years, running event in memory of their mother

Distraction from grief

Conversely, some people chose to take part in fundraising activities as way to distract themselves from feelings of grief.

“It [taking part in fundraising] was just a massive distraction, I then felt it was like going to be a massive like just distraction for me to do something, just to be able to focus on, because I was[...] finding it very, very difficult and that was like a reason for me to then, you know, have to actually get off out of bed every day.”

Fundraiser 30–39, walking event in memory of their mother

For some, they initially took part in fundraising activities as a distraction, but as they progressed, they were able to turn the activity into a positive and meaningful driver in their life. It enabled them to find something positive in the midst of a negative experience.

“I think it helped to kind of like focus on something else [...] rather than I guess always just kind of sitting and being sad. It kind of gives you like a drive to get out and do something positive.”

Fundraiser age 20–29 years, running event in memory of their grandfather

2. Challenges and burdens of fundraising

Personal circumstances and busy lives

During the process of fundraising, participants reported experiencing a range of challenges and burdens. For some people, their individual circumstances and busy lives meant that completing the fundraising was harder than they had anticipated. This was particularly the case for people who were fundraising alongside their caring responsibilities.

“I’m just knackered by the end of the week[...]. I’m doing what I can do when I can do it.”

Fundraiser age 50–59 years, bake sale events in memory of their husband

Other people had medical conditions which made physical training for a fitness challenge more difficult:

“I didn’t quite finish it, but that was because I’ve got, I suffer with [medical condition], so I ended up being about two miles short at the end of the day.”

Fundraiser age 50–55 years, running events in memory of their mother

Emotional challenges

Some people faced unexpected emotional challenges with fundraising. Several people spoke of feeling guilty or embarrassed about asking people for money, particularly at a time when many were under financial pressure.

“I think everybody’s in the same boat at the minute where everybody’s struggling. You see it all over the news, speaking to

your friends and family. And then you feel guilty – not guilty but you don't like to ask people to sponsor you, especially if you know that they're struggling as well. So it is a bit harder at the minute I think."

Fundraiser age 30–39 years, sky dive in memory of their mother

One person felt some negative emotions about not being able to complete as much of a race as they would have liked to.

"I really struggled in that because I mentally just wasn't prepared for the run. And unfortunately halfway through I like, at about 11K I just couldn't go on because I was just – my mind I guess was just beating me up a little bit."

Fundraiser age 20–29 years, running event in memory of their father

Other participants found the initial vulnerability of letting friends and family know they were fundraising, emotionally challenging:

"The slightly unusual nature of it [fundraising] made me a wee bit maybe embarrassed to maybe tell loads of people, but then when the fundraising came round I was like, wait, no. This is a very good opportunity to get people involved."

Fundraiser age 30–39 years, walking event in memory of their father

One participant found these emotions so challenging, it made them reflect upon whether they would fundraise again:

"I'm not against doing it again, I am just very conscious of every, there's always somebody asking

for money for something, and I'm a bit conscious of that...But I'm not saying I wouldn't do something again, because I probably will, but I'd like to leave a reasonable gap, so I don't feel like I'm hounding people."

Fundraiser age unknown, running event in memory of their father

A few people also reported experiencing feelings of obligation to complete the fundraising activity, once people had donated money.

"Fundraising definitely gave me some motivation to work a bit harder. You feel in a good way, like a responsibility to people who are donating their money. You feel you should work hard and so I did."

Fundraiser age 20–29 years, running event in memory of their grandfather

However, they were able to use these potentially challenging feelings of obligation as a positive source of motivation and accountability. This links back to the theme above of making positive meaning out of negative circumstances.

"So you know once the first person puts a pound down, that's it. You're in, you're doing it....I'm doing this and I'm going to train and I'm going to turn down a few drinks on a Saturday night."

Fundraiser age 40–49 years, running event in memory of their mother

A worthy challenge

Many people embraced the burdens and challenges of fundraising. They described choosing a difficult challenge at this difficult time in their lives, linking back to the making meaning theme above. One participant described their motivation behind taking on a 'a proper worthy challenge', implying the difficulty of the challenge correlated with the love they felt for their mother.

“The more I thought about it the more I, the more I felt that if I really believed that running a marathon is impossible or not impossible but very hard then there’s your challenge. You know there’s, there’s your worthy challenge isn’t it? You know it had to be something for my Mum who was just the most amazing person ever so it had to be something, you know it had to be a proper worthy challenge”.

Fundraiser age 40–49 years, running event in memory of their mother

The difficulty of the challenge was a motivator in itself for many people. With some people choosing to sky dive or run a full marathon, or other things that they considered to be on their 'bucket list'.

“I just thought it was something big and people would sponsor us to do it. And obviously I’ve always wanted – it’s like off your bucket list kind of thing isn’t it? It’s always been in my head that I wanted to do it, but I think doing it for charity kind of gives you that push to do it.”

Fundraiser age 30–39 years, sky dive in memory of their mother

One person reflected on the difficulty of their challenge in relation to what their loved one went through. In doing this

challenge they may have felt closer to their loved one as they pushed themselves through pain and discomfort.

“Well actually this is hard but what they’ve been through is so much harder, so it sort of puts things into perspective really.”

Fundraiser age 40–49 years, running event in memory of three relatives

However, a few people preferred to do something they considered achievable and emphasised their personal strengths.

“You know, it’s you work to your strengths, isn’t it? And I don’t want to have to do anything that is too much effort over and above really.”

Fundraiser age 50–59, bake sale events in memory of their husband

3. Fundraising support needs

The importance of support

The support that participants received during the fundraising process was important to their experience. Most people interviewed were very happy with the level of support they received. They particularly valued the communications from the fundraising team, both by emails and over the phone.

“So there was that wee bit of connection where you weren’t really just given the money off in to the ether without much response. You’re kind of going, well it actually is going to someone and someone’s very glad to receive it and very thankful. So that was quite good.”

Fundraiser age 30–39 years, walking event in memory of their father

Small touches like handwritten notes were particularly valued and helped the fundraiser to feel a connection with the organisation.

“I did the [city] half marathon and they sent me loads of stuff for my friends to cheer on with and they always send me like a handwritten card. And they’re always very sweet because it feels like you’re not just raising money through [website], through an app and just giving them money, but they actually care and they actually notice that you are helping them out.”

Fundraiser age 20–29 years, running event in memory of their father

People also spoke positively about the importance of support from the charity on the day of their event or activity.

“Probably just seeing them [the charity support team] on the day running past them probably helped quite, quite a bit.”

Fundraiser age 40–49 years, running event in memory of their father

Others described the importance of the support striking the right balance and not being overwhelming or pressurised. This would be particularly important at a time when someone may have a lot of additional admin or communication to manage after someone has died.

“The support along the way I just sort of felt was just about right. It wasn’t overbearing, it wasn’t too much, it was just sort of at the, it seemed to kind pop up at the right times if that makes sense. [...] you could kind of choose to be as involved or not as you wanted.”

Fundraiser age 40–49 years, running event in memory of their mother

Improvements in support

A small number of people highlighted areas for improvements in support. Some people felt they could have received more support or information after the fundraising event.

“I don’t remember speaking to anybody else after that [the fundraising] other than me reaching out to get the bereavement services and I did that myself, I didn’t have – I didn’t hear from anybody else from [the charity] after that, no.”

Fundraiser age 30–39 years, walking event in memory of their mother

One person felt they waited a long time for official acknowledgement after the fundraising, this was only in one person’s experience.

“I think [the acknowledgement took] eight months.”

Fundraiser age 20–29 years, running event in memory of their father

For running and sporting events, a few people felt the positioning and visibility of cheering stations on the day of their fundraising event could be improved.

“The cheering stations seemed to be in the places where there were loads of people, but they weren’t in – there was no like sort of supporters in the[...] last sort of I would say four or five miles, where you get a bit demotivated, you think, actually I just want someone there to you know, help, you know, support me.”

Fundraiser age 40–49 years, running event in memory of three relatives

4. Looking to the future, remembering the past

After the fundraising was over, participants talked about experiencing a range of different positive short and longer-term impacts.

Improved social connections and relationships

Taking part in fundraising gave people the opportunity to spend time with other people. Some people undertook fundraising with their family, or existing social and work networks. This gave them a purpose to get together after losing someone, and spend valuable time together.

“So, getting out, and being able to go out for walks, and doing that

together, brought us closer together but also helped us mentally.”

Fundraiser age 30–39 years, walking event in memory of their mother

It also gave families and friends the chance to remember the person they lost together linked to the subtheme of honouring a person’s memory above.

“We sort of turned it into like almost a get together just to like remember our families, and then it’s another excuse for us to see each other because we don’t live in the same place.”

Fundraiser age 40–49 years, running event in memory of three relatives



Other people found that fundraising enabled them to make new social connections with strangers and to talk about the person who had died in a socially acceptable and appropriate way. Something they may have struggled to do without this opportunity and that has a wider positive impact.

“You also like hear other people’s stories which is really lovely. So people would donate and say you know like, “My parents went there,” or you know or, “My nan had been looked after there.” So it’s really nice for kind of people to connect around that.”

Fundraiser age 20–29 years, running event in memory of their grandfather

Even without talking, people took comfort and encouragement from the sense of connection they felt seeing other people participating in the same event for the same charity.

“When you see other people in the same tops [charity branded sports event tops], as well, and knowing that they’re doing the same thing for somebody else, you know, it’s all really good.”

Fundraiser age unknown, running event in memory of their father

Emotional wellbeing

Every person interviewed said that participating in fundraising positively impacted their wellbeing in some way.

“I was feeling down and I was depressed, but I was getting through it much better than having – if I hadn’t have been maybe getting out for a walk every day. I dread to think what sort of position I might have been in, you know.”

Fundraiser age 30–39 years, walking event in memory of their mother

It helped people by giving them an outlet for grief and for other emotions they experienced.

“It gives you an outlet then for your emotions, whether it’s feeling grief, whether it’s anger, whether it’s hurt. It doesn’t matter what it is, it gives you that outlet somehow to feel that you are doing something.”

Fundraiser age 60–69 years, multiple events in memory of their mother and father

Some people described their fundraising experience as one of fun and enjoyment, bringing positive emotions out of a negative experience.

“We’re just getting to the point where we absolutely love just doing stuff [fundraising].”

Fundraiser age 40–49 years, running event in memory of three relatives

Many people thought fundraising was particularly enjoyable and felt good when they were part of a big social event such as a marathon. People described the added element of thousands of people cheering them on, giving them an additional boost

of positive emotions by feeling the support of such a large group of people.

“It’s unreal when you start off, you have all the people cheering.”

Fundraiser age 30–39 years, running event in memory of their uncle

Physical wellbeing

Some participants reported improvements in their physical health, such as fitness and building resilience. This was also linked to improvements in emotional wellbeing.

“In terms of the wellbeing it was obviously beneficial from a physical health point of view but also mental health point of view in terms of I was getting out every day, I was walking every day, building up, you know, my resilience to be able to do the marathon distance.”

Fundraiser age 50–59 years, walking event in memory of their mother

For one participant, taking part in a fitness-related fundraising event sparked a long-term interest in running and their physical health.

“I stopped for a bit. I didn’t do a lot. I think I trained a bit too hard for too many weeks for that one in a short time, so I stopped for a bit. But, yes, funny enough, I’m trying to get back into it now, so I’ve been doing a bit more the last couple of weeks and months, really.”

Fundraiser age 40–49 years, running event in memory of their father

Positive memories

Taking part in fundraising in memory gave people the opportunity to create positive memories after the experience of bereavement. They were able to use participation in fundraising activities to turn a difficult experience into something positive. This links back to the theme of making meaning out of loss. Many people described the sense of fulfilment and pride they had in their fundraising achievements. For some it was the amount of money they raised.

“When you walk away and you think wow look what we’ve raised. Wow, you know it’s such an achievement, a team achievement.”

Fundraiser age 60–69 years, multiple event in memory of their mother and father

For others, the sense of achievement came from successfully completing a difficult or ambitious physical challenge.

“Considering I hadn’t ever run before as well. So, yes, it was quite an achievement in fairness.”

Fundraiser age 40–49 years, running event in memory of their father

For several people, fundraising helped them feel connected to the person they had lost, by the feeling that their friend or relative would have been proud of them as well.

“When I do things now, I think, Oh, I wish dad could see I’ve done this. He’d be well chuffed with this.”

Fundraiser age unknown, running event in memory of their father

Some people talked about how these positive memories would last into the future. By continuing to discuss the fundraising events with their friends and family, and by looking at physical

reminders such as photographs and trophies, they were able to look forward and remember.

“I mean I’m actually sat up in my room now and I have the medal sort of hanging over the calendar which I printed. I had a calendar made which has all these sort of pictures of you know each month has some pictures of Mum in so I could write in all the training that I’d done. [...] I’m literally going to see it every time I kind of wake up.”

Fundraiser age 40–49 years, running event in memory of their mother

Reflections

Summary

We spoke to eighteen people about their experiences of fundraising in memory. Each person's bereavement journey was unique. The findings from this research have shown that fundraising in memory helped people to make meaning after loss in a variety of ways. Most people wanted to take part in fundraising to honour the memory of their family member; to give back to the people that had helped them; and out of a sense of duty and gratitude. Fundraising in memory helped people to strengthen their current social connections with friends and family, and develop new connections with other fundraisers and the wider community around them. This is crucial for reducing loneliness which many people experience after bereavement and enabling people to bring up the subject of grief or mental health, which can be difficult to discuss with others.

All participants reported feeling an improvement in their subjective wellbeing after taking part in fundraising, this included physical and emotional changes over the long and short term. For some, fundraising in memory provided a focus for their attention, or a distraction from grief.

Many participants reported experiencing emotional, practical and or physical challenges while completing fundraising in memory. However, many welcomed these challenges and wanted to take them on as deeply meaningful activities.

Reflections from Dr Yansie Rolston and the Majonzi Fund

Following the research, we were conscious that minoritised communities were under-represented in the study. We consulted with Dr Yansie Rolston from the Ubele Initiative to reflect upon some of the issues surrounding fundraising in memory after bereavement from the perspectives of people from Black and racially diverse communities. The Ubele Initiative is a social enterprise with a mission to contribute to the sustainability of the African Diaspora community.²² Dr Rolston reflected upon work undertaken as part of the Majonzi Fund.²³ Majonzi is Swahili for grief or deep sorrow, and the Majonzi Fund was launched to support culturally appropriate mental health services and Memoria for those who lost loved ones due to COVID-19.²³ These reflections are presented below in the statement from Dr Rolston:

How does choosing to fundraise in memory impact the bereavement journey?

Reflections from Black and racially minoritised communities

Dr Yansie Rolston, August 2024

"These considerations are based on the feedback from immersive grief workshops, and the various grief conversations held with Black communities, Rastafarian, Traditional African spirituality, Muslim,

Latin American communities here in the UK.

For many of those communities the concept of fundraising in memory of a loved one who has passed seemed to be

quite unusual and, in some instances, there is a very deep sense of embarrassment in asking for donations.

Giving for Community Trauma

If, the fundraiser is in response to an incident of community trauma and the funds raised are to be used towards rebuilding and supporting the affected community that has been impacted by a disaster, a fundraising campaign is considered acceptable and there will be an overwhelming community spirit of giving. This collective approach allows for grief to be expressed creatively, increases the capacity for connections and resilience, and buffers the effects of the trauma that extends beyond an individual level.

The Majonzi Fund JustGiving is an example of this. It was set up during the COVID-19 pandemic and raised £97K towards providing bereavement and grief support to members of the Black and racially minoritised communities in the UK. It also provided small grants of £500. towards celebrating and commemorating the lives of those who passed in a way that is meaningful to them.

The process of setting up the fund and sharing the link far and wide was time consuming and exhausting, but it also provided a sense of purpose. On the other hand, it also meant continually having trigger moments from having to relate stories of individual experiences of personal grief and bereavement which at times was wearying. There is also the vicarious grief associated with reading and hearing other people's stories while shortlisting the grant applicants.

Cultural Contexts

There are specific cultural rituals that are based on the notion of supporting and giving during times of bereavement. For example, in many Caribbean communities there will be a wake and a nine nights ritual for an appreciation of the person who has passed and connecting with others.

Friends, family, colleagues, neighbours and people who know the person who has passed, will come together and provide money, food, drinks, entertainment, music and stay well into the night over a period of nine nights while reflecting on the life and times of the person who has passed. People may also give gifts that they think the family will need at that time, but there is no active fundraising taking place.

For people who may choose to have a Christian based funeral service, there will often be a collection taken up during the service which will usually be for the benefit of Church and not for the family of the person who has passed. Many have said that they feel pressured to donate for fear of being judged negatively.

Grief processes are impacted by emotions and memories, and traditional African Spiritual practitioners believe in transitioning. It is believed that the person who has passed, has gone through transformation to a different realm, and even though there may be sadness at the person's passing there is no fundraising memorialisation because it is not seen as the end of their life but that the person is now a valued Ancestor to be communicated with regularly for guidance and support. The memorialisation comes in the form of an Ancestral altar within the house which traditionally consists of a photo of the person who has passed, a candle and incense, as a place to communicate by remembering the revered ancestor daily.

During the various workshops, many participants shared that when they receive fundraising links they are tempted to press the delete and would instead prefer to speak to the family or loved one of the person who has passed to find out if there is an immediate need, so that they can assist with providing something that will be of use. There was also a feeling of mistrust with the online fundraising links."

These reflections from Dr Rolston illustrate the multiple ways and different cultural contexts through which fundraising in memory can be understood. The reflections elaborate on, and extend the findings from the interviews. There were some similarities with the findings from the interviews undertaken as part of the study, such as collective grief and community support; and some differences, such as fundraising in memory being thought of as unusual.

Limitations

This research only sought the views of people who had completed fundraising activities. This means that the experiences of people who started an activity and did not complete it, or signed up for an activity and did not start, are unknown. This could mean the findings are biased towards the positive outcomes, while negative experiences have not been captured. Future research could aim to explore why people drop out of fundraising in memory activities.

The research was also limited by the narrow ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the people who took part. The participants only included people from White communities, who were predominantly White British. As the research was limited by ethnicity, we consulted with the Ubele Initiative to reflect on the findings from the perspective of people from the African diaspora. However, a future research project could explore the thoughts opinions and experiences of people from minoritised ethnic groups with fundraising in memory, and how fundraising in memory initiatives could better serve people from these communities.

Recommendations

Based upon our research finding, we make the following recommendations for fundraising teams and for further research.

Recommendations for fundraising teams

1. Fundraising teams should acknowledge and take into consideration each person's unique circumstances and motivations for taking part in fundraising in memory.

Each person's bereavement journey is unique, and each person had their own individual circumstances and reasons that motivated them to take part and honour their family member or friend. These reasons and circumstances were very important to each person. It is important to keep sight of these individual circumstances and for the fundraising teams to acknowledge them. Some people struggled with fundraising for practical reasons and because of their personal circumstances. Some suggestions for fundraising organisations are: helping people to pause or postpone activities, more frequent check ins, building connections with other people undertaking fundraising.

2. The support fundraising teams provide should be personalised and where possible be from the same person to enable relationships to be formed.

The relationship with the fundraising organisation was really important for most people, and some people commented on how personalised communication helped them feel more connected. This could be especially important when the organisation also provided care for their loved one as it provides a continuity of that care. Personalised communication can also help people feel that their fundraising efforts matter and are making a difference. Some suggestions

for fundraising organisations are: handwritten notes or letters where possible, personalised communication, for example referencing the person they are fundraising in memory of, a consistent named contact person.

3. Fundraising organisations could enhance the acknowledgement provided after fundraising events to ensure people feel appreciated and valued.

Some people wanted more acknowledgement and support after fundraising events. There could be a greater focus on the period after the event. Support, activities and acknowledgements should be tailored to the event, charity and individual, but some suggestions are: annual celebration events, which could be online; more personalised certificates; the opportunity to connect with other fundraisers and become part of a network; the opportunity to mentor new fundraisers or take on other voluntary roles within the charity.

4. Fundraising organisations could enhance people's improved social connections developed through fundraising in memory.

The improved social connections that people experienced from taking part in fundraising was a key part of their experience. This is crucial for reducing loneliness after bereavement. Fundraising organisations could enhance the connections they have made during their fundraising experiences. Organisations could support people in a number of different ways, but some examples are: creating online communities which would facilitate peer support, holding in person events, either nationally or locally, to celebrate people who have completed fundraising in memory, inviting people who have fundraised in memory to join fundraising or volunteering groups.

Recommendations for further research

5. More research is required to examine the impacts of fundraising for people with different experiences of bereavement, not just those related to terminal illness.

Further research could include exploring the impact of different types of fundraising events, fundraising as an individual vs in a group or the impact of fundraising specifically for a charity which you have benefited from.

Research could also explore the different experience of fundraising in memory following an accidental death or suicide, rather than a terminal illness. Research could consider the longer term impacts of fundraising over several years or the reasons people choose not to fundraise in the first place.

6. Future research should explore the thoughts, opinions and experiences of people from diverse ethnic communities with fundraising in memory, and how fundraising organisations could better support people from these communities.

There is a lack of research into the experiences of people from diverse ethnic communities. Future research should explore the thoughts opinions and experiences of people from diverse ethnic and cultural community groups, the impact of fundraising in memory on people from diverse communities, and how fundraising in memory initiatives could better support people from different communities.

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