

# WELCOME TO Grief Matters

## In this month's May newsletter:

- **Welcome Rajal Middleton** – we're excited to introduce our new Chief Executive and share a little about her journey and vision for the Grief Centre
- **Meet Aida** – our team spotlight this month highlights Aida's work and the heart she brings to the loss and grief sector
- **'Lost Soul Mate'** – a moving poem by our wonderful volunteer Lorraine, written from her own experience of deep loss
- **Grief is a process** – reflections on how grief unfolds over time, and why there's no "right" way to do it
- **Explore new resources** – including an NZ Herald article challenging the five stages of grief, and a powerful podcast with Dr Denise Quinlan
- **Thank you to our funders** – we share our recent funders and the generous support they provide, which helps us continue to walk alongside those experiencing loss

As we look ahead, we are pleased to welcome Rajal Middleton as our new Chief Executive. Her leadership marks an important new chapter for the Grief Centre, and we look forward to the knowledge and direction she will bring as we continue our commitment to supporting all people living through loss.

Ngā mihi nui,  
The Grief Centre Team ❤️

*"When your grief feels like a secret, if your yearning for them is  
stuck in your throat.  
Tell me their name. Pull your love from hiding. Let the sun shine  
on their existence.  
The world may not know how much it needs to remember them."  
- Sara Rian*

# Welcoming Rajal Middleton *as Chief Executive Officer of Grief Centre*



We are pleased to announce the appointment of Rajal Middleton as the new Chief Executive Officer of the Grief Centre.

Rajal is a highly respected, award-winning leader with more than 25 years of experience across both commercial and not-for-profit sectors. Known for her ability to lead transformative change and align organizations to their core purpose, Rajal brings strategic insight, proven leadership, and a deep commitment to mental health.

Rajal's connection to the Centre's mission is both personal and professional. After experiencing the loss of five family members within a single year, she brings a unique empathy and authenticity to her leadership—qualities that strongly align with our values.

Rajal's inclusive leadership style, grounded in compassion and cultural awareness, positions her as a powerful advocate for those navigating grief and loss. We look forward to the innovation, growth, and community impact she will lead in this new chapter.

Please join us in welcoming Rajal Middleton as our new CEO. We are confident that under her leadership, the Grief Centre will continue to make significant strides in supporting those who are grieving.

*“Those we love never truly leave us.  
There are things that death cannot touch.”*

*Jack Thorne*



# Team Spotlight - Aida Dehkhoda



“Many people say that everything happens for a reason. For me, that 'reason' was the loss of my dear cousin, who was like a brother to me, to cancer when I was only 14. His dying turned our lives upside down. From that moment, I realised I wanted to become a psychologist – to support others (and myself) through the emotional journey of losing a loved one. Since then, I’ve experienced the loss of many other loved ones to cancer or other illnesses, which only deepened my passion for counselling individuals who are dying or grieving.

After earning my Bachelor’s degree in Clinical Psychology and Master's in Rehabilitation Counselling, I worked with mothers of children with cancer in Iran. In 2014, I moved to New Zealand to pursue a PhD in Psychology/Health Psychology focused on a new approach to dying and grief – death through Assisted Dying, also known as Euthanasia. Immersing myself in the experiences of individuals with terminal illnesses and dementia over the years has given me profound insights into life and death. It has helped me grow into the person I am today and live a life aligned with my values. I find fulfilment in helping others live the life they want and deserve, even if only for a single day.

After completing my PhD, I returned to counselling to pursue my dream of supporting others. My supervisor introduced me to the Grief Centre, and I joined the team in 2023 as a counsellor. I feel privileged to be part of the Grief Centre whānau and cherish this opportunity. I believe that grieving becomes easier if it is shared and understood – it is never too late to show up for your grief.

Beyond counselling, I am deeply passionate about academia. I spend most of my time in my research fellowship roles, continuing to expand my knowledge and share my expertise with others, particularly on topics related to death, dying, and Assisted Dying, which I am especially passionate about.

While being reminded of death can feel liberating, it can also be emotionally and mentally taxing. To stay grounded, I engage in activities like walking along the beach, listening to birdsong, socialising with friends, sitting in public spaces and observing people as they go about their lives — it’s my way of reconnecting with the essence of living. I also enjoy dancing and watching movies and series as a way to distract myself and give my mind a break when I need it, and I embrace this without guilt.”





# Lost Soul Mate

To you who have lost your Soul Mate  
I too have lost my Soul Mate, and  
Even though you've lost yours  
I cannot know just how you feel  
But I know it compares to nothing else.

So consumed in grief  
We cannot eat, we cannot sleep  
Our bodies struggle with  
Overwhelming emotions of  
Sadness, helplessness, yearning,  
pain, disbelief, guilt, regrets, loss of self  
Each waking morning  
We are reminded of the loneliness and emptiness  
Of the new day ahead  
And it's the last thing we remember  
Before sleep finally comes  
To take us away from the pain of our loss  
How will we cope without our Soul Mate.

As though in a nightmare  
Grief is the rollercoaster we can't get off  
Many things come into play with grief  
For some, even a past trauma  
Will show its ugly face, and  
Become mixed up with this latest loss  
The sudden realization of how a parent felt  
When they lost their Soul Mate  
Will strike like a knife in the heart.

Nothing feels the same  
The landscape has changed  
The chemistry we had with our Soul Mate  
Has been severed never to return  
Life feels like being on another planet  
Shared with aliens and strange things  
How will we cope without our Soul Mate.

Our hearts will skip a beat when  
We think we've seen our Soul Mate  
Only to have reality  
Kick us in the face  
Just to remind us  
It's not really them.

As if our grief isn't enough to bear  
We hear empty cliches  
As a way for others  
To deal with us in our loss  
Some words we hear will even hurt  
'You will meet someone else'  
'The world is your oyster'  
We have just lost our world  
We were happy the way things were  
Now we are vulnerable and exposed  
And our world is a lonely and scary place  
How will we cope without our Soul Mate.

Every day is an effort  
To keep our grief in a safe place  
Wrapping ourselves in a bubble  
To protect us from the outside world  
Our drop in tolerance levels  
And heightened sensitivity  
Will cause others to ask  
What is wrong with us  
Very few will understand how we feel  
In our grief for our lost Soul Mate.

Suddenly time seems to stand still  
The weekends never had enough hours  
Now those days are long and empty  
And as time so slowly moves on  
Our Soul Mate starts to feel  
Further away from us  
Will they become like the holiday  
That seemed like it never happened  
Once we returned to everyday life.

We ask, what now  
Is this all there is  
Will we, can we  
Ever be happy again  
When the joy we knew  
Our reason for living  
Has gone forever.

*- Lorraine Bennett (Grief Centre Volunteer)*



# Grief is a Process

Its purpose is to help us to gradually adjust our lives to life after our difficult change or loss. It doesn't have any set pattern, rules, or timetable – and it can't be rushed. It will take the time it needs to take for you. There's no one 'right' way to grieve. We're all different so we grieve differently. It's a personal, individual experience, and as unique to you as your fingerprint is.



## What our clients say

*"Blown away that this service exists. Really brilliant and I feel lucky to have it"*

*Feedback received in April from a Bereavement Support Client*



## Important dates

### Community Support

- Every Wednesday: **Free Grief Group** 10.30am-12pm weekly drop-in group at 97 Birkenhead Avenue
- 26<sup>th</sup> May 10am: **Monthly walking group, Birkenhead** (Check our Facebook page for updates)

### Professional development webinars

- 27 May 1pm: **End of Life Doulas** - Complementing healthcare, community and family support of the dying

# Grief Matters

## NZ HERALD ARTICLE: WHY IT'S TIME TO RETHINK GRIEF

Still clinging to the five stages of grief? It's time to let go. This article unpacks why the classic model doesn't reflect the real, messy, human experience of loss — and what a more compassionate, realistic approach looks like.

[Read the article here.](#)



## PODCAST: THE LITTLE THINGS – WHY WE NEED TO CHANGE THE WAY WE THINK ABOUT GRIEF WITH DR DENISE QUINLAN

Grief touches all of us — whether it's the loss of a loved one, a friend, or even a pet. No matter how prepared we think we are, loss can still feel overwhelming. This week, Francesca and Louise speak with Dr Denise Quinlan, director of the New Zealand Institute of Wellbeing and Resilience and co-founder of Coping with Loss, about practical ways to cope with grief in our own way.

[Listen to the episode here.](#)



# Thank you to our recent funders

*A huge thank you to:*

**Pub  
Charity**  
Limited



For  
supporting  
our Clinical  
Managers  
wages



  
**Grief  
Centre**



Thanks to  
Bluesky's support,  
10,000 resources  
are now ready to  
reach those who  
need them most.



*'I really  
appreciate your  
brochure - it has  
given me a nudge  
to look after  
myself'*

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

If you'd like to support the Grief Centre and make a meaningful impact in someone's life, there are a few ways to contribute:

- ♥ Click [here](#) to make a one-off or regular donation via our website.
- ♥ Click [here](#) to become a sponsorship partner.
- ♥ Click [here](#) to leave a gift in your will.

We appreciate any donation to support those going through loss and grief.

Thank you for making a difference!

*Thank you to all our wonderful volunteers, funding partners and supporters who provide the Grief Centre with funding and other resources to ensure we can support New Zealand communities living through loss.*



## Contact and Alternative Support Numbers

### Counselling, Support Groups & General Enquiries

Phone: 09 418 1457  
Freephone: 0800 331 333  
Email: [admin@griefcentre.org.nz](mailto:admin@griefcentre.org.nz)

Physical Address:  
97 Birkenhead Avenue  
Birkenhead Auckland 0626

Postal Address:  
PO Box 34548  
Birkenhead Auckland 0746

Charities Registration Number CC38713

### Grief Centre is not a crisis service.

Other assistance and support available includes:

Lifeline (24/7 free helpline) 0800 LIFELINE (5433 5463)  
Text to talk 1737 (free phone counselling)  
Youthline 0800 376 633  
Suicide Crisis Helpline 0508 828865

If you have serious concerns about a person's immediate safety (or your own) please call: 111

Te Whatu Ora's Urgent Response Team (numbers vary around New Zealand, in Auckland it is 0800 800 717)

