

# Providing support to families with missing loved ones



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The staff at the Greystone Bereavement Centre, (L-R) Provincial Bereavement Services coordinator Dwayne Yasinowski, Executive Director Stephanie Kohlruss, Intake coordinator Connie Borsa, and office manager Michelle

Johnson. BRYAN SCHLOSSER / REGINA LEADER-POST

Not knowing if a missing loved one is alive or dead can send family members on an emotional rollercoaster that takes them from hope to hopelessness.

Frequently, families are anxious, confused, have memory loss and can't sleep or eat, said Dwayne Yasinowski, provincial bereavement services co-ordinator with Greystone Bereavement Centre.

"It's very important to let them know that the emotions that they feel are normal feelings and not run from those feelings and also to understand that they need to try hard to get to the point where they are living in today as well," Yasinowski said.

“Lots of times, the families are so involved, and understandably, in trying to find their loved one that they forget about the things going on right around them.”

A missing member can trigger internal conflict within families.

“Maybe some of the family members want to move forward and start to accept the fact that their loved one is dead instead of missing — some don’t accept that,” Yasinowski said. “They don’t want to believe that, so there are internal quarrels.”

Families also face financial consequences.

“People can lose their jobs because they’re always searching,” Yasinowski said. “You can have families lose their homes because they’ve remortgaged it. You can have divorces because of internal conflict, and if you have a family with some younger children who are still at home and a child has gone missing ... sometimes all of the focus is on the missing child.”

To help families cope, Greystone Bereavement Centre has set up a new missing persons support group.

“If we had five or six people prepared to attend, we’d start the group up,” Yasinowski said. “We’d have no more than 10 or 12 because you want to give everybody the time to speak.”

Because of privacy laws, the centre can’t access lists of the families of missing persons to get their contact information, so it must rely on referrals or people directly contacting them.

Anyone interested in attending the support group can call intake co-ordinator Connie Borsa at 306-523-2781.

Yasinowski anticipates the 90-minute sessions likely will be held during evenings. However, that will depend on participants’ availability.

Working with families with missing members is different from helping people grieve a death because there is no closure, he said.

For about two years, the centre has provided one-to-one counselling for those with missing persons in Regina, Saskatoon and Prince Albert. Arrangements are under way to counsel a Swift Current family and another in Broadview.

“I don’t know if it was when the federal government did those pre-inquiry meetings or people are a little bit more aware of us and starting to refer a little more, but we’ve really started to see a pickup in the counselling here in the past two months,” Yasinowski said.

Of those families that have received counselling from Greystone, more than 50 per cent are indigenous people. There is no charge for counselling because the Ministry of Justice has been picking up the cost since 2013.

Recently, the centre received a federal grant to work with Saskatchewan families potentially re-traumatized after the pre-inquiry meetings into missing and murdered indigenous women.

“If an indigenous family comes to us, we would provide therapeutic general counselling, but if the family indicates they have traditional values and would like to work with elders, we’re trying to partner with some organizations that can provide that as well,” Yasinowski said.

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