



**HUGG**

SUPPORT AFTER SUICIDE

**2017 – 2024:**

**Our first seven years of social impact**

Our vision is an Ireland where those bereaved by suicide find support, hope and are free from stigma.





## Background

Fiona Tuomey founded our organisation following the devastating death by suicide of her 11-year old daughter Milly in 2016. Experiencing a deep need to speak to people who truly understood what she was going through, Fiona searched for a support group that was led by people who had lived experience of suicide – but none existed. To fill this gap, she coordinated the first Healing Untold Grief Group (HUGG) in 2017. The demand for more groups, and other unmet needs, quickly became clear. In 2018, HUGG was established as a company limited by guarantee with charitable status <sup>1</sup>.

“The impact of suicide is devastating. Everyone deserves accurate, timely information and signposting to appropriate supports to help navigate this unique grief.”

**Fiona Tuomey, Founder and  
Chief Executive Officer of HUGG**

## Our why

Each year in Ireland, more than 500 people take their own lives <sup>2</sup>. Each suicide has a profound and lasting effect on the families, friends, colleagues and communities of those who have died. For every one person who dies by suicide, it has been calculated that around 135 people are affected by the death <sup>3</sup>. This means that between 60,000 and 70,000 individuals are affected by suicide in Ireland every year. Indeed, two-thirds of the population knows someone who died by suicide, and 13% have lost someone by suicide who was very close to them <sup>4</sup>.

**Suicide-bereaved people are at high risk** of severe mental ill-health, suicidal ideation and self-harm, including the harmful use of alcohol and other substances. Amongst other negative consequences, they may experience perceived stigma, social isolation, family breakdown and employment loss <sup>5 6</sup>.

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## Our solution

HUGG is the only organisation specifically founded to offer **postvention**<sup>7</sup>. This form of suicide prevention refers to activities that take place after a suicide has occurred and reduce the heightened risk of suicide-bereaved people taking their own lives. HUGG therefore truly acts as a lifeline.

Most of our staff and volunteers have been bereaved by suicide themselves and can provide that unique understanding to anyone seeking help. Together with those who use our services, we **co-create** supports that work for people who have been bereaved by suicide.

HUGG believes in **post-traumatic growth**; meaning that with compassion, understanding and appropriate support, people bereaved by suicide can grow around their grief and focus on resilience, positive mental health and wellbeing.

## What we think...



Our grief shrinks over time

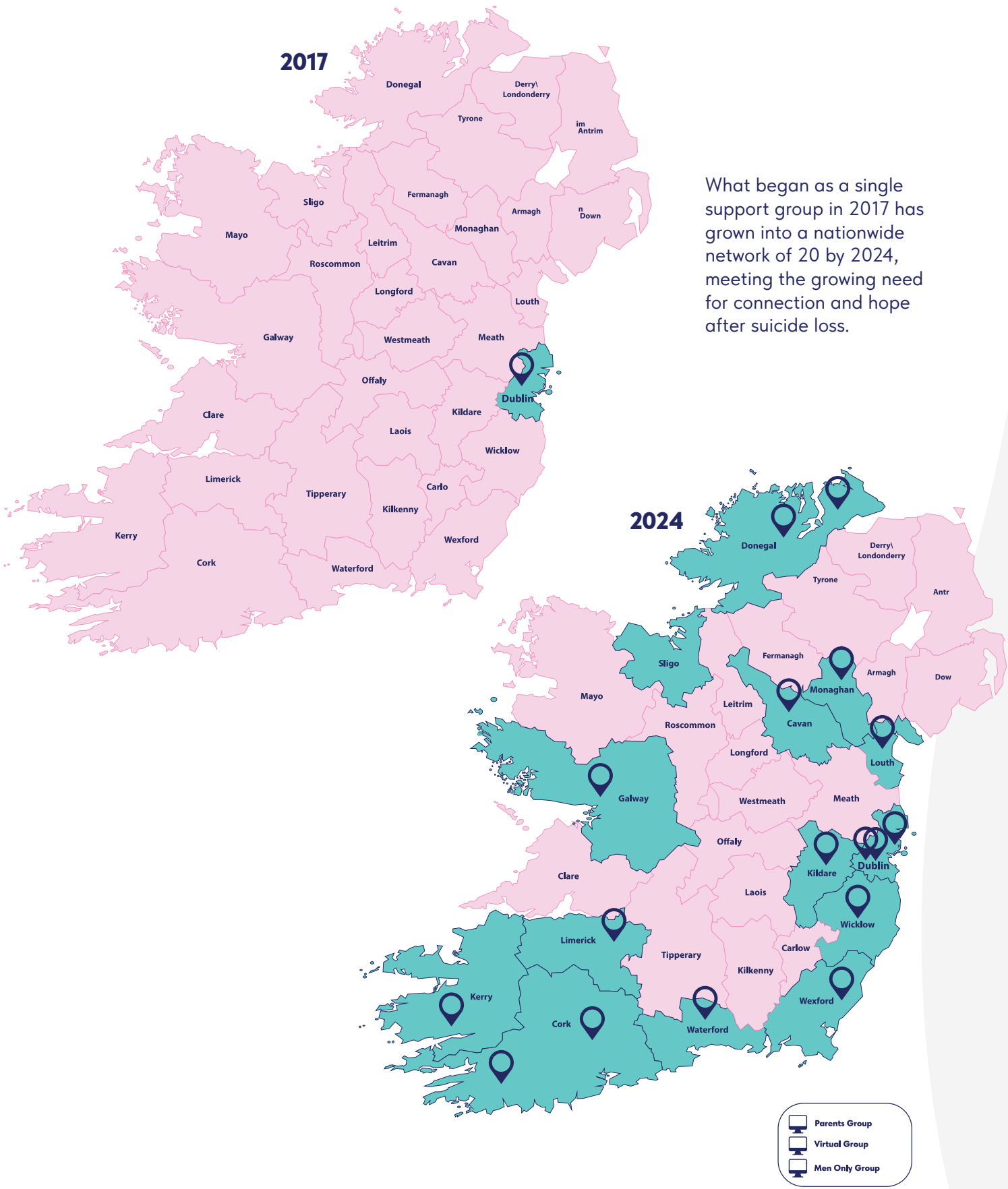
## What we know...



Our grief stays the same, but we grow around it

Source: Tonkin's Model 1996<sup>8</sup>

# HUGG group locations



# What we do



## Peer support groups

We run in-person, online and hybrid suicide bereavement support groups for adults led by trained volunteers with lived experience of suicide loss. These provide a safe, non-judgemental space to connect with others who have been bereaved by suicide. Groups have grown steadily and in the year 2024, **1,539** people attended them.



## Telephone support

The need for a telephone support offering became evident during the running of peer support groups. For many of those getting in touch with HUGG, it is the first time they have ever spoken to someone about their feelings following their loss. In 2024 alone, we responded to **1,798** requests for support.



## Online support

We provide a wealth of information on grief after suicide on our website and via our social media channels. These include downloadable resources, signposts to additional supports and stories of hope. In 2024, our website had more than **22,000** visitors.



## Events

We curate regular in-person, online and hybrid public events. These include information sessions, training sessions, fundraisers and our annual national suicide remembrance event *Say Their Name*.



## Collaboration

We collaborate with other individuals and organisations who can help us to achieve our goals. This includes working with the media, research community and others.



## Influencing

Finally, we are the lived voice for those bereaved by suicide. This work includes lobbying decision-makers and representation on relevant committees.

## HUGG delivers positive outcomes for many




## Those bereaved by suicide

The main beneficiaries of our work are those **people who have lost a loved one to suicide**. Through their interactions with us, they are supported both practically and emotionally. Our most recent survey of service users revealed that 96% would suggest taking part in our support groups to anyone bereaved by suicide.

"No judgment present, plenty of time to express myself, if I wished to do so, no pressure to participate in conversation if I decided not to."

"It honestly meant a lot to talk to someone about my daughter."





“HUGG groups are an absolutely brilliant thing to have available. I felt completely alienated after I lost my best mate to suicide, so to be around people who can relate and help me understand that what I am going through is normal and that there is light at the end of the tunnel is beautiful.”







## Their wider circles

We also have many indirect beneficiaries, not least the **wider circles of people who died by suicide**. They are often comforted knowing that vulnerable people in their community are receiving dedicated supports during their time of need. They also appreciate advice on how to help those who have lost their loved one.

“I wanted to say thank you for getting back to my partner so quickly and for referring him for further support.”

“Facilitating the support group has allowed me to use my experience in a positive way and make meaning of the tragedy I experienced. I would highly recommend volunteering with HUGG for anyone that’s a little further along their journey of grief and feel they want to give back.”

## Volunteers

Our **volunteers** experience post-traumatic growth. They transform their own lives after tragedy while also helping others through their grief.

## The general public

At a wider remove, we raise awareness amongst the **general public** so that people gain a better understanding of suicide loss. In this way, the silence around the issue is broken and stigma is reduced.

“Since coming into contact with HUGG, I have learned so much more about suicide loss than I ever did before.”

## Donors and fundraisers

Many of HUGG's **donors and fundraisers** support HUGG in memory of a loved one lost to suicide. Over half of the monies raised at community level are donated in memoriam. Active remembrance of this kind is important to them in processing their grief.


## Other professionals

There are many **other professionals** who benefit from our work. These include teachers, social workers, therapists, undertakers, people working in other bereavement charities, and so on. They are able to refer people to us as well as receiving referrals from us. Together we learn from each other and our practice improves.

"I refer parents to this excellent service every week and I know it has been an invaluable support to so many as they try to navigate their own wellbeing needs whilst also supporting grieving children. It gives me a lot of comfort to know you are there to provide such solid support."

Gina Cantillon, Project Leader, Barnardos

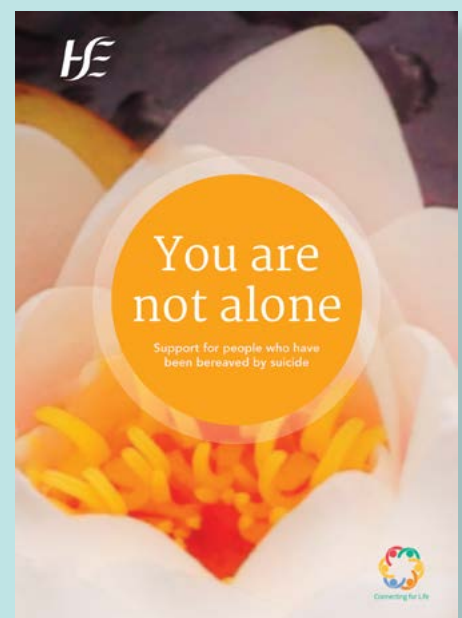




“We are so grateful to HUGG for the support they have given to family members these past few tough years. We hope HUGG can keep doing what it does for others in a similar situation and that the money raised can help in some way.”

## Researchers

Our work with **researchers** also yields mutual benefits. For instance, we identify under-researched topics, commission research, help with sourcing research subjects and disseminate research findings. We then use the growing body of research evidence to inform and underpin the rest of our work. Notable examples include our contributions to *Afterwords* <sup>6</sup>, the children's resource *Safe Harbour* <sup>9</sup>, the adults' resource *You Are Not Alone* <sup>10</sup>, and research reports on suicide rates <sup>11</sup>, bereavement <sup>12</sup>, support groups <sup>13 14 15</sup> and post-traumatic growth <sup>16</sup>.





“The research we have undertaken in collaboration with HUGG has helped to generate new information about who is impacted by suicide and where the gaps in supports lie. In particular, HUGG have been instrumental in recruiting participants for our research and ensuring that our outputs are accessible and relevant for multiple audiences. This co-production is fundamental to developing research which has direct impact on policy and services to improve how we support people bereaved by suicide.”

Dr Eve Griffin, CEO, National Suicide Research Foundation

## The State

Finally, we aid **the State** by educating lawmakers and policymakers about suicide postvention and related topics, as well as helping to address public policy goals around mental health. Additionally, we inform statutory service providers about ways in which they can better support people affected by suicide loss.

“As we work together to reduce suicide, through the implementation of *Connecting for Life*, HUGG has emerged as an essential partner in suicide prevention and postvention, providing authentic and impactful peer-led suicide bereavement services, as well as providing lived and living experience and expertise to a range of national suicide prevention policy initiatives. Since its establishment, HUGG has had a transformative impact on suicide reduction in Ireland, and I am confident that its new Strategy will strengthen this impact into the future.”

Prof. Philip Dodd, HSE Deputy Chief Medical Officer

“The HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention is very proud to support the work of HUGG, which has had an immeasurable impact on the lives of so many people and families in Ireland, who have sadly been bereaved by suicide.”

John Meehan, Assistant National Director - Head of National Office for Suicide Prevention

Even in grief, there is space for hope.



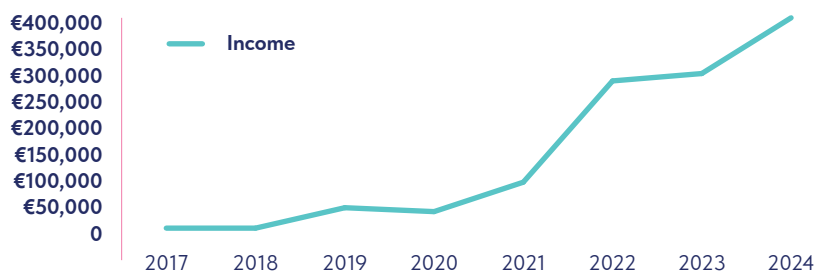
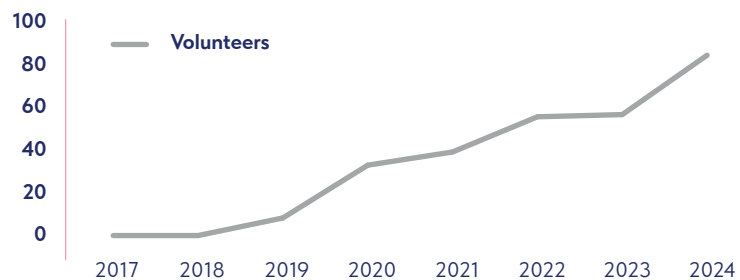
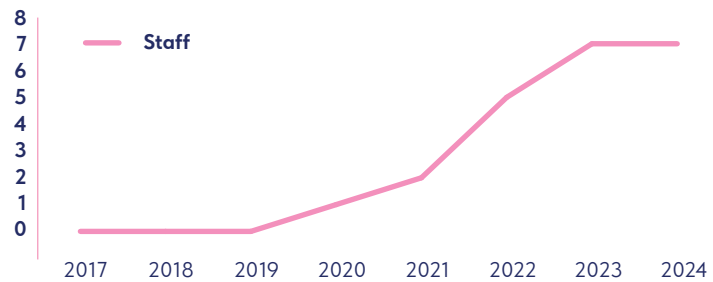


## Ultimate social impact

Taken together and over time, the outcomes described above will lead to the ultimate impact we are striving for. This is encapsulated in our vision: an Ireland where those bereaved by suicide find support, hope and are free from stigma.

## The resources that make it all happen

HUGG's greatest asset is the experience, skills and commitment of its **people**. Regardless of whether their roles are paid or voluntary, all have the required training to do their work effectively. Our volunteers facilitate groups, help at events, speak about suicide bereavement on various platforms, offer operational support, or act as board members, advisers and advocates.



We are also extremely grateful to the individuals and organisations who provide us with essential **funding** to do our work. Community fundraisers in particular have generously given their time and energy to organise events, take on physical challenges and otherwise engage the will of family and friends to raise much-needed funds. Statutory funding represents the next largest portion of HUGG's income. In 2022, we signed a service level agreement with the HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention, under *Connecting for Life: Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide*<sup>17</sup>, which includes the provision of bereavement support services around Ireland. Trusts, foundations and corporate partnerships comprise the rest of HUGG's funding.

We have further benefited from wonderful **in-kind supports** including venues for meetings from Dalata Hotel Group, pro bono radio advertising from Bauer Media Group and ICT support from Tech Soup.

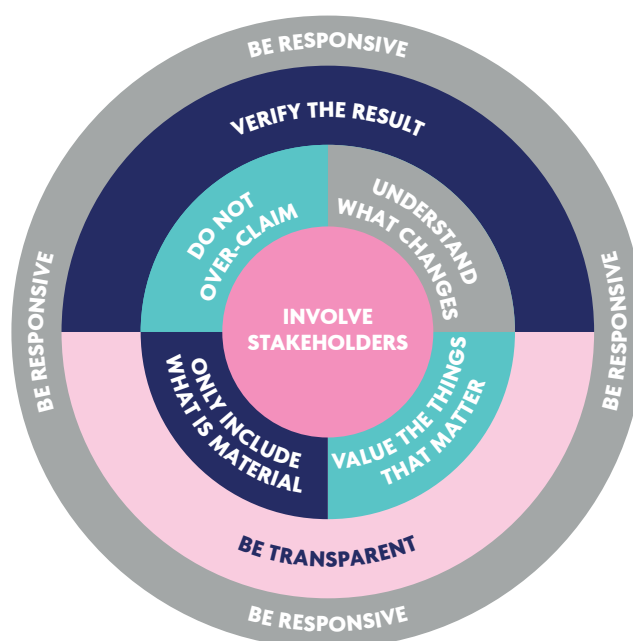
As a fully remote organisation, HUGG has eliminated the overhead costs associated with traditional 'bricks and mortar' non-profits, thereby offering donors and funders excellent value-for-money.



## Looking to the future

The need for our services is as big as ever. We will implement our *2025-2029 Strategic Plan* driven by a singular vision: to connect people to hope after suicide. The plan represents an ambitious roadmap for the next five years, focusing on strengthening and expanding our support services, advancing research and amplifying the voices of those with lived experience of suicide loss.

We are also excited to begin embedding a **social value approach** in our work, using Social Value International's eight principles<sup>18</sup>. This will involve not only articulating how we generate impact for different groups of people, but what value they place on this and how that relates to the level of resources invested. We know of no other organisation anywhere in the world that has taken this approach to assessing the value of suicide prevention and postvention.





A photograph of a man and a woman walking away from the camera on a dirt path through a dense forest. The path is covered in fallen leaves and is bordered by a simple wooden railing on the right. Sunlight filters through the trees, creating a dappled light effect on the ground and foliage. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

# We invite you to join us on the journey.

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## Support

If you have been bereaved by suicide and would like information on support please contact us.

01 513 4048

[support@HUGG.ie](mailto:support@HUGG.ie)

[www.HUGG.ie](http://www.HUGG.ie)

For general enquiries, email  
[info@HUGG.ie](mailto:info@HUGG.ie)



## Partner with us to bring hope to those bereaved by suicide

To learn how you can support HUGG,  
contact Mary Anne Stokes  
Donor Development & Partnerships Manager  
[maryanne@HUGG.ie](mailto:maryanne@HUGG.ie) 083 166 2869



**HUGG**  
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