

scotty's
THE MILITARY BEREAVEMENT CHARITY



The role of extracurricular activities in supporting bereaved military children

Introduction

Research has indicated that participation in extra-curricular activities supports social mobility. Research from the [Social Mobility Commission](#) found links between participation in extra-curricular activities and educational achievement, school attendance, intentions to remain in school for further and higher education, the development of soft skills (which helps with employability) and confidence and wellbeing ([Social Mobility Commission, 2019](#)). In 2024, a report by the Education Policy Institute found associations between extracurricular activities and improved education and employment outcomes ([Robinson, 2024](#)).

In 2017, a trial published by the [Education Endowment Foundation](#) found that extracurricular activities and field trips can be associated with children making an additional two months progress in school.

Activities which may support school engagement are particularly important for bereaved children. A cohort study found that childhood bereavement is associated with lower aspirations at age 16, lower rates of employment for males by age 30 and lower rates of employment and qualifications for women by age 30 ([Parsons, 2011](#)).

For bereaved children there is an additional benefit to participating in extracurricular activities beyond those listed above – extracurricular activities may provide a person to talk to, and a community of support. Research from the [University of Cambridge](#) noted that ‘one of the most significant factors that can help mediate the negative effects caused by childhood bereavement is the existence of strong social networks, which give the bereaved someone to talk to about the loss’ ([2019](#)). Extracurricular activities can often be an opportunity to create friendships with their peers, but as the research goes on to note, ‘students show a high level of trust in staff who are engaged in extracurricular clubs and that these often were the most likely adults they would approach with sensitive topics ([2019](#)).

However, an analysis of the 2004 Mental Health of Children and Young People in Great Britain study, a nationally representative sample of 5- to 16-year-olds, found that children who had experienced the death of a parent or sibling were the least likely to participate in any clubs in and outside of school ([Fauth et al., 2009](#)).

Scotty’s, the military bereavement charity, offers the children and young people it supports, access to an annual grant (the Scotty Allowance) which can be used towards the cost of

extracurricular activities. An analysis published in 2025 indicated that 47% of the children and young people (354/753) had utilised the funding, and only 35% accessing it in multiple years ([Scotty's, 2025](#)). Given the benefits of extracurricular participation for all children but in particular bereaved children, the report called for further investigation into bereaved military children's engagement with extracurricular activities.

About the report

This report draws on qualitative data collected via surveys in early 2026 (n=177) distributed to families who are members of the charity. Children and young people (CYP) could complete the survey recording their own experiences (n=74), or parents and carers (P&C) could complete the survey on behalf of their children (n=103).

Between the 103 parents and carers completing the survey they were reporting on behalf of 180 children. At the time of the survey the parents and carers had 106 children who were aged under 13 years, 51 children aged 14-18 years and 23 children aged 19-24 years. The table (Table 1) below shows the distribution of child ages by survey source (CYP and P&C).

Table 1: Age representation of surveys

Age groups of children	Surveys completed by CYP on their own behalf	Children's ages from surveys completed by P&C	Totals
Under 13yrs	22	106	128
14-18 years	18	51	69
19-24 years	34	23	57
Total by survey type	74	180	254

Over 250 children and young people's (n=254) experiences with extracurricular activities were recorded through the surveys. Responses were analysed by variables including age and SEND status. Thematic analysis was used for open answers.

This report, drawing on the findings from the survey responses, explores how bereavement impacts participation in extracurricular activities amongst Service children. It examines participation rates alongside barriers to participation that can arise through, or be amplified by, bereavement, and also the benefits of participation for bereaved children. Finally, it makes recommendations based on the lived experience captured through the surveys, on how to remove barriers, and increase access to extracurricular activities for bereaved military families.

Rates of participation of bereaved military children in extracurricular activities

The findings suggest that bereaved military children are less likely to attend extracurricular activities than their peers. As illustrated in the table below, 64% of bereaved military children identified as having regularly or often having attended extracurricular activities in the past twelve months (Table 2). By contrast, a study by the Sutton Trust in 2014 found that 76% of children in the UK had attended extracurricular activities at least regularly in the past twelve months ([Sutton Trust, 2014](#)). Extracurricular participation has long been associated with socio-economic status, and the Trust's research noted that the families from the highest socio-economic groups participated at a rate of 84%, with the lowest groups at 69% (Sutton Trust, 2014). Participation in extracurricular activities by bereaved military children was slightly lower than in the general population's lowest socio-economic groups.

Table 2: Participation in extracurricular activities by bereaved military children in the last year

	None	Rarely	Regularly (1/wk)	Often (>1/wk)
All ages %	15%	21%	19%	45%

In 2021, the Centre for Social Justice published a report in response to the pandemic, which noted that 71% of parents reported at least one or more hours of extracurricular participation per week ([CSJ, 2021](#)). The current levels of participation of bereaved military children (64%) are below the national rate following the pandemic (71%).

The lower rate of participation of bereaved military children, aligned with findings from Fauth et al., that children who had experienced the death of a parent or sibling (general population, not military) were the least likely to attend extracurricular activities in or out of school (Fauth et al., 2009). Later sections of this report will explore some of the barriers to participation identified by bereaved military families, to better understand why bereaved military children are underrepresented in extracurricular activities.

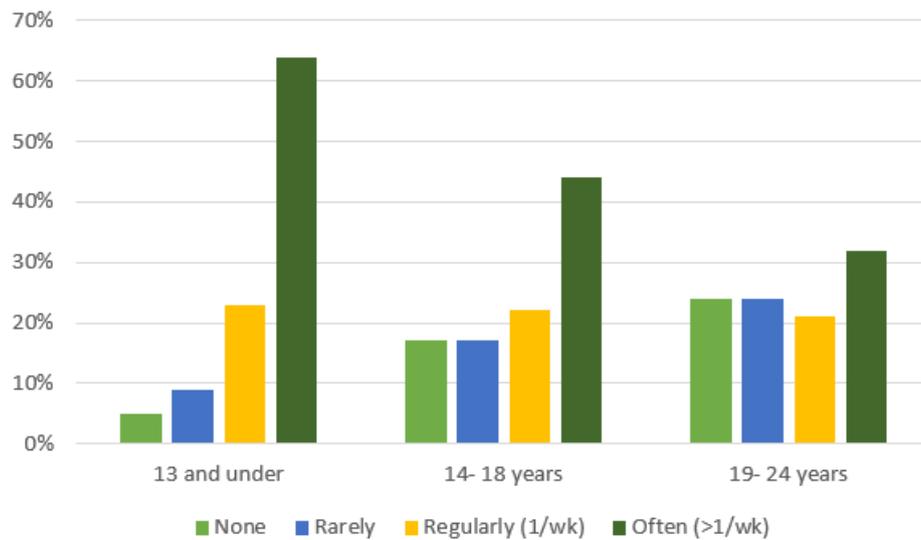
Age

The survey findings indicate that there is an inverse correlation between the age of the bereaved military child or young person and the likelihood of them engaging in extracurricular activities (Figure 1).

Around one in seven (14%) of children aged 13 years and under had never or rarely participated in extracurricular activities within the preceding twelve months. Just over a third (34%) of young people aged 14 to 18 years, and nearly half (48%) of older young people (aged 19 to 24 years) had never or rarely participated in extracurricular activities within the last year.

Conversely, as illustrated in the figure below, the younger cohort (aged 13 and under) were twice as likely to have often participated in extracurricular activities in the previous year, than the oldest (aged 19- 24 years) (Figure 1). Amongst children aged 13 years and under 64% reported engaging with extracurricular activities often (more than once a week) within the last year. For the middle cohort aged 14-18 years this dropped to 44%, and for the oldest cohort (aged 19-24 years this dropped further to 32%) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Child or young person’s age and the frequency of participation in extracurricular activities in the previous twelve months



There are significant differences in lifestyle by age, with growing responsibilities potentially impacting finances and introducing time constraints as children age.

SEND

There was also an association between participation in extracurricular activities and whether the child identified as having special educational needs or disabilities (SEND). As the table below illustrates, 47% of children with SEND had rarely or never participated in extracurricular activities in the previous year, compared to 27% of children who did not identify as having SEND needs (Table 3).

Table 3: Bereaved military children’s participation in extracurricular activities in the previous year, by SEND.

	None	Rarely	Regularly (1/wk)	Often (>1/wk)
Has SEND	18%	29%	8%	45%
No SEND	12%	15%	27%	45%

When children (or their parents) were asked whether they had participated in extracurricular activities at any point in their childhood, children with SEND needs were nearly twice as likely to report never or rarely having attended extracurricular activities than children without SEND needs. As illustrated in the table below, nearly a third of bereaved military children with SEND (31%) had never participated in extracurricular activities compared to 17% of their peers without SEND.

Table 4: Bereaved military children’s participation in extracurricular activities in their childhood to date, by SEND.

	None	Rarely	Regularly (1/wk)	Often (>1/wk)
Has SEND	5%	26%	27%	42%
No SEND	6%	11%	31%	52%

This aligned with findings from the Education Policy Institute which found that amongst the general population students with SEND were 23% less likely to participate in sports based extracurricular activities and 17% less likely to participate in create or interest based extracurricular activities (Robinson, 2024).

Activities

For bereaved military children who do participate in extracurricular activities, they engage in a very wide range of activities. Swimming was the most often reported, and from anecdotal data this was driven partially from parent’s concern that their children should be safe around water.

“His Dad wanted him to be confident and be able to swim well so wanted to make sure we continued”

-Parent/carers

“It allowed [my sons] to become water-confident so when we went [away] I would feel comfortable on their ability, allowing them to go in the sea to play and use the pool”

-Parent/carers

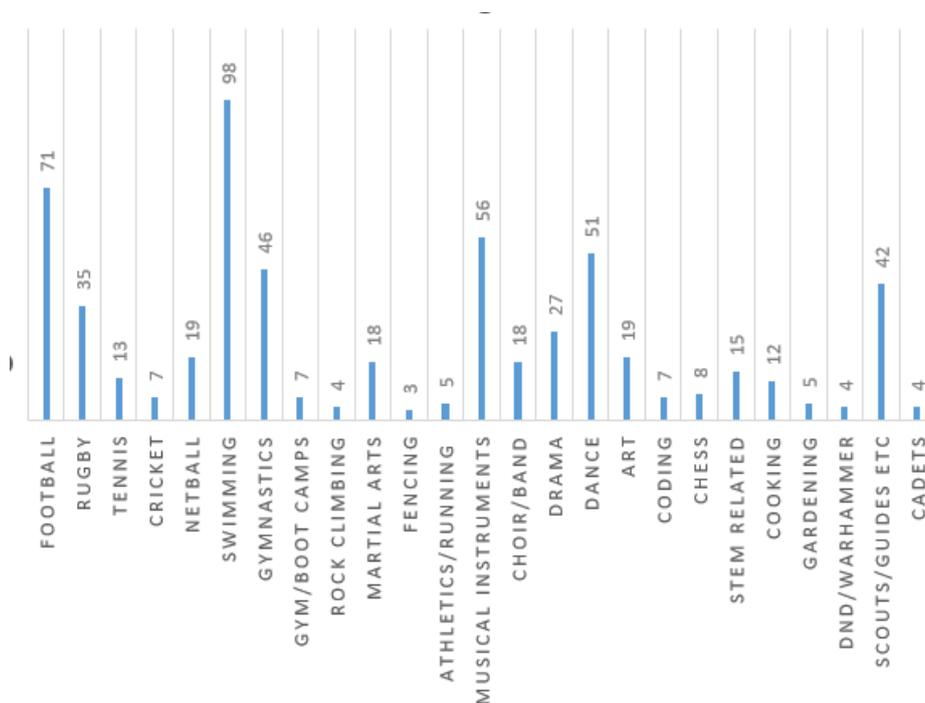
“[My daughter] was very young when she lost her father and the first place we used the Scotty’s Allowance was towards Swimming Lessons. This was a lovely way to remember

[her dad] as he was a lover of all things water based, swimming, sailing, kayaking and canoeing. As I lack confidence in the water, I wanted her to have lessons to ensure she learnt how to be safe but also enjoy being in the water.”

-Parent/carer

Football, learning a musical instrument, dance and gymnastics were also in the top five more frequently reported activities. The figure below illustrates the range of activities bereaved military children participated in (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Popularity of extracurricular activities by type



Other sports or fitness related activities listed by families included horse-riding, hockey, basketball, darts, trampolining, bowls, skiing, handball, golf, badminton, yoga, windsurfing, parkour and multi-skills. Other creative expression activities included ice-skating and creative writing, and other interest driven activities included volunteering, Model UN, Forest School, fishing and 3D Design.

Many families were accessing activities outside of school-run clubs. Amongst bereaved military families, 44% reported that their extracurricular activities were not associated with their child’s school. Some saw this as an advantage providing an opportunity for children to meet children from other schools in their area, creating a larger peer and support network. This was also a chance for children who perhaps were not as good ‘at school’ to shine and build confidence.

“So important for friends outside of school. It provided activities that are enjoyable for my children (when as a parent you don’t always have the energy), teaches the importance of teamwork and having a network of people in and out of school. We also recently relocated and it has been important for us all to make a new social network. Keeps the mind and body fit and active a good outlet of positive and not so positive emotions.”

-Parent/carer

“Participating in sports have helped all of my children in many ways, most importantly it has helped them socialise with other children outside of school, something which they would otherwise choose not to do due to the pressure of unstructured social time.”

-Parent/carer

“It helped me build friendships outside of my own school and broaden my social circle. I gained confidence and social interactions.”

-Child/young person

“Helped to build confidence and to learn how to interact with other kids outside of school environment. [My child] was very shy at school due to bullying so apprehensive to join in through fear of rejection”

-Parent/carer

Amongst bereaved military families, 46% reported that their extracurricular activities were provided by a mix of school-led and external providers. One in ten families said that their school did not provide any of the extracurricular activities they had attended.

Benefits of extracurricular activities for bereaved military children

Many families who participated in extracurricular activities felt that the activities had a particular benefit for a bereaved child over and above the benefits of extracurricular activities for all children, or the general population. As noted in the introduction, there are many benefits for the general population including associations with improved educational and employment

outcomes and the development of soft skills which have been explored by organisations including the Social Mobility Commission, Education Policy Institute and the Education Endowment Foundation. Their findings would of course, likely hold true for bereaved military children as they do for the general population. However, for bereaved children there may be additional benefits, such as helping a child manage their grief and rebuild after a death, and those are explored here.

Over half (52%) of families responding to the survey noted the benefit of participating in extracurricular activities that was specific for their grief.

Community

Over a third of children (35%) who had additionally benefited due to their bereavement, reported that it was due to the role extracurricular activities played in building a community for them, and creating connections with peers and new friendships. As noted in the introduction, social networks, community, connection and communication is a significant protective factor for bereaved children. Extracurricular activities facilitate social interactions in a ‘fun’ setting away from the pressure of the classroom and introduce children to peers they not have otherwise met.

“Thinking about her football team, they are like extended family who look out for her especially around times she’s struggling with bereavement.”

-Parent/carer

“Following [the] death, they were supported by the team and the network of families around the team, they came to the funeral and felt the loss and therefore empathised - they were in an environment where all understood the situation and no need to explain over and again”

-Parent/carer

Moreover, it was not only the children who benefited from building their sense of community and connection; parents also reported that their child’s extracurricular activities had in fact helped to reduce their own sense of isolation along with their child’s.

“As a parent, participating in extracurricular activities has been very beneficial for my mental health and helps ground me during challenging periods. For my child, it has built confidence, supported meeting and forming new friendships, and encouraged learning new skills. Being part of an activity also gives a strong sense of belonging and feeling part of a “tribe,” which has been incredibly positive for overall wellbeing.”

-Parent/carer

Whilst the majority of responses focused on the other children or 'friends' that extracurricular participation gave to the bereaved child, a sizeable minority also noted the value of the adults in that new community. For some parents, an important member of that community was a trusted adult helping to fill "an obvious gap" left by the death of the parent.

"[My son] had a coach that had a huge influence on him. He has struggled feeling that he has missed out on a dad at times and a male supporter made a huge impact on him."

-Parent/carer

Routine

The next most commonly cited benefit relating to bereavement, was the role extracurricular activities played in creating a routine. Creating a sense of normalcy after a death can be very important. A routine can also provide a much-needed distraction following a death, 29% of families noted that extracurricular activities had helped the child by providing a routine and temporary distraction.

"The routine of having it really helps. E.g. swimming on a Saturday morning, it gets us up and out the house achieving something. Weekends are hard and I've found it helpful to have routine in place to cling to."

-Parent/carer

"I think having the regular clubs and the friendships has really helped my children ... that routine is so important and knowing that for that one block of time you can be a kid and enjoy activities"

-Parent/carer

"I like to be busy when I'm not at school, it helps me to be busy and not miss my dad"

-Child/young person

"Going to netball club was a good way to get my mind off my dad and just have some fun with my friends during the hard time"

-Child/young person

Mental health and processing grief

Extracurricular activities also have a therapeutic role in the lives of bereaved military children. Nearly a quarter of families (24%) said that participating in extracurricular activities had been valuable to the child or young person's mental health. Extracurricular activities created an outlet or channel for negative emotions such as anger but also gave children a form to express their emotions, including fostering joy.

“Dance allowed her to express herself even when she felt low and emotional, and she used the classes and routines as a way of beginning the process of working through her feelings.”

-Parent/carer

“Sport literally got my kids through the worst time of their lives, it gave them a positive to focus their energy on, a reason to keep fighting and friends to help them along the way.”

-Parent/carer

“I honestly believe that if it hadn't been for her dance school she wouldn't have coped as well.”

Parent/carer

“When I was doing art, it helped me express myself and find enjoyment after feeling a little lost”

-Child/young person

Extracurricular providers played a key role in creating an environment that was supportive for a grieving child.

“[My daughter] was worried about something happening to me while she was away. She often, as a younger student approached staff to check that I had been in touch that day. The staff and volunteers were so supportive and allowed her access to me as and when she felt overwhelmed by fear of my own death. Her father died so suddenly and unexpectedly that these feelings were so intense.”

-Parent/carer

Connection with parent

For nearly one in four children (24%) extracurricular activities became a way of connecting with the parent who died. Children opted for clubs or activities that their late parent had enjoyed. Extracurricular activity became a way of sharing a hobby together, albeit in poignantly different timelines. Children reported imagining their parent's pride and enjoyment at goals scored and successes achieved.

“I enjoy doing clubs because I know my dad would be proud of me especially in football
- I score goals”

-Child/young person

“Music was very important to me as it was a large part of my father's life. My bereavement made me want to make him proud and so I tried really hard to be the best I could be eventually becoming head of orchestra at my college and completing grade 8 flute!”

-Child/young person

“Cadets has been really good for [my son], it's a connection to his dad.”

-Parent/carer

Confidence

Bereavement can at times have a negative impact on a child's self-esteem and confidence. The world can seem much more unstable when a child experiences a parent who suddenly disappears from their world. This can create fears around losing others, particularly the other parent. Feelings of 'why did this happen to me' can create self-esteem issues, as can guilt or shame about natural responses to grief, from feeling guilty for having fun again, or shame that can arise through stigmatised notions around particular causes of death such as those bereaved by suicide. For bereaved children building confidence, independence and resilience can be extremely valuable. Amongst families reporting benefits of extracurricular activities, 18% noted the positive impact it had on confidence and independence.

“I was bullied in primary school. I tried [Brazilian Jiu Jitsu] and felt I found myself again. It made my self-confidence grow, it helped with my emotions, I got fit and found something I could focus on which I love so much. I have won lots of titles which I am so proud of.”

-Child/young person

“Dance classes tend to have end of year shows. Taking part has helped me put myself out there and to go for it. Having to perform at my best in front of an audience has given me strength and more confidence.”

-Child/young person

“I gained confidence that I could do things again.”

-Child/young person

“The children were low after losing their father, achieving in clubs, being accepted has helped their sense of achievement massively and built their confidence too”

-Parent/carer

Barriers to extracurricular activities for bereaved military children

Given the benefits of extracurricular activities to both the general population (Social Mobility Commission, 2019), and in particular, for bereaved children (as demonstrated in the section above), it is important to understand the barriers to participation. As noted earlier bereaved children from the civilian population are also less likely than their non bereaved peers to participate in extracurricular activities (Fauth et al., 2009). For bereaved military families it was clear that their bereavement was itself a significant barrier to participation. For example, the financial pressures from being a single income household following the death of the other parent, the logistical pressures (how can a sole parent drive one child to football and at the same time drive the other child across town to dance?), but also emotional. Grief can take a toll on self-esteem, confidence, and sociability – all of which can make facing walking into a new club even more daunting. It appears that the thing that perhaps makes extracurricular activities the most needed, bereavement, is also the thing that can prevent children from taking part.

Cost

The most cited barrier to extracurricular participation is the cost of activities, with more than one in three families (39%) saying they could not afford to do the extracurricular activities they were interested in. In addition to the current cost of living crisis affecting much of the population, bereaved families may also be adjusting to changes in household income due to the death. In many military families the serving person is the main breadwinner as it can be hard to maintain or prioritise the civilian partner or spouse’s career around deployments and moving between bases. For many bereaved military families, they have lost the main source of income

and are needing to survive on the wages of a career that may have been previously pushed aside. Paying for extracurricular activities can become challenging.

“After our bereavement my financial situation changed significantly so he had to give up [his extracurricular activities].”

-Parent/carer

“My daughter's judo coach has stopped charging her monthly subs. This is a lone coach with a big heart giving something huge back. The football team increased the boys' subs as their dad was no longer the club photographer so they didn't qualify for a reduced rate anymore.”

-Parent/carer

“As a single parent I would not have been able to afford the equipment and the subscription fees for both children without assistance.”

-Parent/carer

Children themselves are aware of the burden of costs, 45% of children aged 13 and under said that high costs were a key barrier for their family.

Logistical challenges

Becoming a sole parent family has repercussions beyond finances. Duties which once may have been spread between two parents, may now fall entirely on the surviving parent. The parent may now need to increase their own working hours, as the now sole breadwinner, but also manage the household and child rearing duties on their own. Indeed, one in four families (24%) reported that it was time constraints that prevented children from participating in extracurricular activities at the level they wished, rising to one in three amongst children aged 14-18 years where higher levels of homework once GCSE years are underway or increased social time with peers may restrict time even further.

Parents emphasised that at times, bereavement had increased pressure on their time. In their responses their exhaustion was palpable. Many bereaved military families do not have extended family living close by. This can be another unintended consequence of military life – the regular moves following a partner between bases creates a highly supportive network on and around base, but when a bereaved family leaves base in the years following a death, the family can find themselves alone, cut off from their previous military network, but far from family.

“I haven’t been able to take my youngest daughter to any clubs unfortunately I just can’t afford it and also I work and just can’t get home on time to do them :(and it would be a huge rush even if I did manage to make it back in time... plus I’m just so tired”

-Parent/carer

“I’m absolutely exhausted having twins with different activities. I’m out the house 5 nights out of 7 on top of working and running the house my late husband shared the workload of this. We have no family locally to help”

-Parent/carer

“I’m feeling a bit more tired after my dad died and sometimes don’t really want to go to clubs. Also, my mum is more tired too so sometimes can’t take me. Also, I’m slightly less feeling like being sociable so talking to people is a bit more difficult.”

-Child/young person

“Transport as a single parent with 2 children... I can’t always get both children to both clubs”

-Parent/carer

Where parents died from a terminal illness, the barrier to extracurricular activity sometimes began before the death, with time and logistical challenges compounded by additional caregiving responsibilities towards the ill partner.

“Activities only started after bereavement; we couldn’t commit to anything when my husband was alive due to his poor mental health and not knowing when we would need to be at the hospital with him.”

-Parent/carer

A reminder of the absence

Earlier we saw that nearly one in four children (24%) has found that their extracurricular activity was a way of connecting with their parent who died, often by taking part in activity their parent had enjoyed. Amongst the children who found that their bereavement was a barrier to attending, over a third (35%) found that their activity was an unwanted or painful reminder that their parent

had died. Seeing the other parents cheering their children on from the sidelines, underscored their loss. For some children this made them feel different and more alone. In some cases, children felt this both as a benefit and a barrier; feeling sadness and isolation because of the parent not on the sidelines, but also happy they were at least remembering their parent.

“My son found it confusing there as so many “daddies” on the sideline and not many mummy’s”

-Parent/carer

“I tried to start cricket, but it was too hard for me emotionally as it was my dad’s best sport.”

-Child/young person

“My son struggled with seeing other Dads and felt like he was different for not having his dad there.”

-Parent/carer

Socialising

Whilst many children reported that socialising and building a supportive community was a key benefit of participating in extracurricular activities, with 35% of families noting this in the ‘Benefits’ section above, amongst children who felt that bereavement was a barrier to attending, 22% reported that following the bereavement socialising had become difficult. Parents and children spoke of becoming ‘withdrawn’ after the death.

“At first after his dad died he would not go anywhere or join in anything even at school. As we are a small village everyone knows about his dad and children can be cruel.”

-Parent/carer

Being too shy or nervous to attend extracurricular activities was most likely to be cited as a barrier for the older cohort, with 26% of young people aged 19-24 years saying this was the reason they did not attend. It was not just young people who struggled with socialising after the death, some parents also found it challenging.

“For my children as they were 1 and 3 when we lost their dad it has been easier to integrate in activities. For myself however I’ve always felt excluded from normal life especially socially. Have always felt a bit on the outside people don’t really want to get involved in conversation about spouses dying so kept a lot back of myself especially in the beginning which I think made me look distant and unapproachable”

-Parent/carer

SEND

Nearly one in ten (9%) of children aged 13 or under said their SEND needs were the reason they had not participated in the extracurricular activities they had wished to. Many parents noted that extracurricular providers or “groups weren’t understanding of [SEND] needs” and that “clubs [...]struggle to accommodate SEND”. The lack of inclusion for some bereaved children with SEND meant that already vulnerable children became more isolated.

“A mix of anxiety, dyspraxia makes my son feel he is no good at sports, ADHD means he loses interest quickly”

-Parent/carer

“Due to her behavioural challenges, she no longer dances, or plays hockey”

-Parent/carer

“My son has been told he can’t attend some settings due to his additional needs.”

-Parent/carer

“My son had to stop due to his additional needs and the clubs not being able to support these. It’s made him even more isolated.”

-Parent/carer

In some cases, as behavioural challenges worsened following the bereavement, the child’s former extracurricular providers could no longer cope. However, a minority of families with children with SEND needs shared positive examples of extracurricular providers being proactively inclusive. Sometimes successfully but other times less so.

“[My son] has suffered with emotional regulation issues and selective mutism. This may have been a trauma response. The trials of football matches have tested this repeatedly over the years, but the coaches, teammates and players parents have been forgiving, supportive and celebrated his progress over the years.”

-Parent/carer

“The dance school she attended made so many allowances for her and supported her so much. I was utterly heart broken when they had to take the decision to deny her access anymore due to her unravelling behaviour. They had persevered for around 18 months desperately trying to defuse her bomb like behaviour and ultimately, she became too volatile.”

-Parent/carer

Stopping activities following a death

Reading through the responses it was stark to see the number of children who stopped extracurricular activities because of the death. Nearly one in ten children who had participated in extracurricular activities at any point in their childhood, had stopped in the aftermath of the death. Some children reported being too sad to continue, others talked about the difficulties of socialising.

“My son couldn’t go back to Karate as it was something he went to with his dad, and he said it didn’t feel right anymore without him”

-Parent/carer

“[My daughter] use to take dance classes before her dad died and he often used to take her and pick her up. She did stop for a couple of years as she felt at the time that she had to be happy to dance and because she wasn’t feeling happy, she didn’t want to go anymore.”

-Parent/carer

Whilst some children found their way back to extracurricular activities (and the benefits they can bring) after a number of years, others did not return.

“My eldest in particular dropped everything after his dad died, partly because covid hit straight after. He has really benefitted in joining both the tennis club and our martial arts class again, both in confidence and motivation levels. It is so lovely to see him happy and enjoying life again. And my youngest has joined the triathlon club, a sport which his dad particularly enjoyed and participated in, which makes him feel closer to him.”

-Parent/carer

The Scotty Allowance

Scotty's, the military bereavement charity, seeks to address the inequities that arise for children due to their bereavement. The Scotty Allowance, an annual allowance of £150 per child, that families can use towards extracurricular activities, aims to reduce the financial burden on bereaved military families and encourage families to engage in extracurricular activities. Although the below-national-average uptake of extracurricular activities indicated by this report (64%) goes some way to explaining why the uptake of the allowance is not as high as the charity would like it to be (47% of members had accessed the allowance), it was important to understand what the barriers are to using the allowance for families.

The most common reason for families not using the allowance, or not using it regularly, could be addressed by marketing; 38% of families had 'forgotten' or 'not known' about the allowance or had misconceptions about how the allowance worked or what it could be used for. Nearly one in five (19%) families reported that they did not need the allowance, and this was primarily driven by children not having the 'time' to do extracurricular activities, or having 'stopped' extracurricular activities, and for a small number of families it was because they had access to extracurricular activities that were free of charge. Some families (12%) felt guilty about accessing their allowance as they were concerned that they should leave the money for those 'more in need'. For one in ten (9%) families, they were too overwhelmed by life in general and their bereavement, to have the capacity for forms. In responses they were self-critical, berating themselves as 'too disorganised' and too busy.

Within the charity, a short-term goal could be to raise the percentage of their members accessing the grant to be closer to the percentage accessing extracurricular activities (aiming to rise from 47% accessing the grant to perhaps 55%). The long-term goal, however, would be for the charity to help increase the overall proportion of bereaved military children accessing extracurricular activities. This may mean working with families to promote the benefits of extracurricular activities for bereaved children but also working with providers to ensure clubs are accessible and supportive environments for bereaved families.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Following a bereavement, extracurricular activities can play a valuable role in helping a child rebuild. It can create a community of support, allowing the child to build friendships and confidence. It can be an outlet for emotions, helping children to process their grief. It can provide a much-needed distraction and sense of routine in a time of chaos and uncertainty. For some it provides an opportunity to connect with the parent who died, through a shared hobby.

However, bereavement can also create a barrier for children to attend extracurricular activities. Bereavement puts families under increased financial pressure and increased pressure on time. Bereavement can leave children and parents exhausted, overwhelmed, and nervous of social situations. Children with SEND needs may have escalations in behavioural challenges due to their trauma or grief. And for some children activities become an unwanted reminder that their parent is not there.

Everyone experiences grief differently, so it is perhaps not surprising that some families may find activities helpful while some may find them harmful. Amongst those who found bereavement was a barrier, there were many that reported that over time they were able to rejoin activities and then benefited.

It is important that where they can, barriers are removed for bereaved military families. This includes:

Support with meeting the financial burden of extracurricular activities. The Scotty Allowance helps, and the charity can do more to encourage families to use the allowance, but schools and providers can also do more. Offering bereaved families reduced rates and offering a fixed period of free lessons immediately after the death were suggested by families. Reduced rates for bulk (per term) booking, whilst good intentioned, does not take into account that grieving children may be 'up and down', and so policies which allow for less consistent attendance at reduced rates might also help.

Encourage bereaved families to attend. Especially those who may be new to an area and most in need of a peer network. Schools, health providers and other organisations supporting bereaved military families should encourage, but not pressure, families to explore extracurricular activities.

Facilitate carpooling or other parent buddy systems. Sole parents, especially those who are new to an area may not have other parent friends who can help them drive children to and from events. Extracurricular activity providers should consider setting up a parents' WhatsApp group and encouraging parents who are able to, to offer carpooling. Providers could also consider a 'buddy' system, where existing members (both children and parents) can volunteer to buddy up with a new, potentially nervous family.

Ensure that extracurricular activities are accessible. Providers should explicitly consider the needs of bereaved children and young people with SEND. Ensure that staff or volunteers have been trained in creating a supportive and sensitive environment for vulnerable children. Scotty's has free online training that can help. Be aware of, and plan for, times that may be difficult for a bereaved child, such as when parents are involved. It can also be helpful to know key dates when the child might struggle, their parent's birthday or anniversary of death, for example. Also be alert to how other children attending the club are responding - most children will be supportive and kind, but some may bully a child because their parent died.

With a coordinated response from the school, providers and other agencies involved in supporting bereaved military children, more children could access and benefit from activities, helping them to thrive. Perhaps most crucially, that begins with compassion and looking at the world from the perspective of the bereaved child and parent.

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