

Funeral Directors

ASSOCIATION OF NZ

21 September 2023

Survey reinforces importance of a funeral for mental health

The Funeral Directors Association of New Zealand is reminding New Zealanders of the importance of a meaningful farewell for managing their mental health as part of Mental Health Awareness Week.

It comes after a recent survey of grief counsellors, conducted by the Grief Centre, shows that not having some kind of meaningful farewell has an overwhelmingly negative impact on the grief journey.

Funeral Directors Association of New Zealand Chief Executive, Gillian Boyes says her members have always known their families can better manage their way through the early stages of grief when they have an opportunity to say a proper farewell.

“The rituals associated with a funeral; the viewing of a person, choosing and carrying a casket that represented them, lighting candles, singing songs and remembering someone with tributes and stories are all important steps for a family in those early days,” says Ms Boyes.

“A funeral doesn’t have to be a staid traditional affair. Our members can create unique experiences that fit with what a family wants and needs. We know recognising a person, in whatever way works for a family, can have a positive impact on the mental health of family and friends.”

Katrina King, General Manager of the Grief Centre, says, “Our counsellors often see that when a life is not farewelled and celebrated appropriately, however that might look, it negatively impacts the grief journey and can add another layer of loss or complexity.

“Mourning is the external expression of grief and sharing that with others is a very therapeutic process”, says Ms King.

Ms Boyes notes that while the survey results confirm their anecdotal knowledge, cost constraints are forcing families to choose different ways of celebrating a life.

“However, there are a number of costs you can’t avoid like burial or cremation costs and for New Zealand’s most vulnerable, the Government support to help with those fixed costs is woefully inadequate.

“We know the Work and Income New Zealand funeral grant at \$2445.37 covers less than a third of the cost of a modest funeral with a cremation.

“It leaves families with little option but to make choices like having to have an unattended cremation. We believe it’s short-term thinking by the Government that only increases the likelihood these families will rely on Government support for mental health instead down the track.”

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The Funeral Directors Association of New Zealand represents funeral directing companies that undertake the majority of funerals in New Zealand. They are a group of caring professionals who are committed to ensuring that the families they serve receive high-quality funeral service. For more information, visit our website: www.funeraldirectors.co.nz